

Apprentices Completion Ceremony

Kings Bay apprentices take a day off to graduate — then back to work

Altamaha Tech students have been apprenticing at facility.

KINGSLAND — "The Star-Spangled Banner" was a substitute for the graduation standard "Pomp and Circumstance" Tuesday when 36 workers celebrated the completion of their apprenticeships at Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base's Trident Refit Facility.

And while most college graduates are looking for jobs in a poor labor market, all the apprentices already have a job.

"Tomorrow, we've got to be back there," said Chance Moore of Kingsland after the ceremony at Altamaha Technical College's Camden Campus.

Back there is the Trident Refit Facility on the base where the apprentices have worked since beginning the program two years ago. Their classroom work was at Altamaha Tech.

It was a short ceremony, only half an hour, but Altamaha Technical College President Lorette M. Hoover said it's actually a completion ceremony and the apprentices are welcome to return and go through a graduation observance with other two-year students in July.

'We're growing'

Tim Wolfe, who administers the program, said there were 14 apprentices in the program when he took over six years ago. There are 210 at the facility now and 50 came into the program this year, 35 of whom are already on the job and with the remaining 15 set to start work in July, he said.

"We're growing and we're going to continue growing in the years to come," he said.

Wolfe told the apprentices, who will soon be journeymen, he takes pride in each of them.

Capt. Richard Verbeke, commanding officer of the facility, said he hopes they all feel satisfaction in the work.

Their job performance will set the standards for Trident Refit Facility, which enjoys a good reputation for quality work, he said.

For Pamela Williams, it is her second job at Kings Bay. She retired from the Navy as a hull technician first class and stayed in the area.

"I found it an honor to become an apprentice even after the naval career," she said.

Effective partners

Altamaha Tech leases space at the College of Coastal Georgia's Camden Center and now provides the technical education that Coastal Georgia handed off to it after the state Board of Regents converted Coastal Georgia to a four-year baccalaureate institution.

The partnership with Trident Refit Facility has been a good fit for Altamaha Technical College, Hoover said.

When Altamaha Tech took over the program a couple of years ago, it had no faculty or employees and redesigned the program, Hoover said.

There is a great demand for the apprenticeships, she said. About 1,200 applied two years ago and 500 this year, she said.

"It's a great job, a great career," she said.

Altamaha Tech also plans to build its own 56,000-square-foot facility on 30 acres of donated land between Exits 7 and 8 off Interstate 95, Hoover said.

Just as it is, though, the college has been recognized as a military-friendly school, she said.

TERRY DICKSON/The Times-Union-Capt. Richard Verbeke, commanding officer of the Trident Refit Facility at Kings Bay, addresses the 36 apprentices who completed their education at Altamaha Tech.