

A boost for skilled trades education

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The builders of today are building for the builders of tomorrow.

A \$21-million expansion to Mohawk College's Stoney Creek campus is nearing completion, and will help to open a bottleneck for much-needed local skilled tradespeople in construction, advanced manufacturing, automotive and other trades by dramatically increasing the number of students and apprentices entering the local workforce.

"We're losing some manufacturing jobs in our community, but they're generally the less-skilled jobs that we're losing," said Piero Cherubini, associate dean of the school of engineering technology. "The advanced skilled positions and trades, there's still a demand for those. That's what we're trying to meet."

The Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Research, Resources and Training Institute, or STARRT -- formerly known as the Saltfleet campus -- is saturated with tradespeople these days, some learning while others build and renovate the learning spaces all around them in a kind of living classroom.

In fact, many of the tradespeople working to build and upgrade the classrooms and workshops are graduates of the same apprenticeship and training programs that will take place inside them.

Because of delays caused by permit problems and labour disruptions, the project -- originally set to be finished this past September -- is months behind schedule and is now likely to be complete in April or May.

Meanwhile in some trades, such as plumbing and other construction trades, Mohawk has a backlog of as many as 200 would-be apprentices lined up.

"We're in desperate need of that space. We can't wait to get in there," Cherubini said. "We talk a lot about trade and skill shortages. For our community and our economic sustainability, this is vitally important."

The delay has forced the school to accommodate simultaneous construction and education, with some students having started the school year off site. Meanwhile, the campus cafeteria has been out of commission since September, when it became a temporary home to administration and faculty offices.

Once the work is complete, the school will be able to begin clearing its backlog of applicants, ramping up with about 1,000 new apprenticeships in addition to the 3,000 completed at

STARRT every year, and adding about 300 -- or 75 per cent -- more post-secondary student positions.

Those apprentices and students will learn in a modern environment designed to be flexible to meet changing demands in the marketplace and changing technology in the workplace. In the current expansion, Mohawk is adding nearly 50,000 square feet to STARRT's current footprint of 172,000 square feet.

The upgrade to the campus -- on Barton Street near Millen Road -- will add major wings to the east and west.

The west wing additions include large machine shops, outfitted with computer-controlled machines used in advanced automation and manufacturing. There will be an energy lab for education in renewable energy.

In the east wing, there will be a modern theatre with retractable seating for school tours and presentations, plus corporate training facilities and new classrooms.

On the roof, there will be wind turbines to be used both as a teaching tool and to reduce external power use.

Later, possibly within the year, Mohawk is planning to build another extension -- to expand its shop space for truck and bus repair.