

## CONSTRUCTION CAREERS IN THE MAKING



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Nānākuli High students Kasey Self-Gomes, left, and Bobby Edgell make a tool tray at the Sheet Metal International Association booth at the construction expo, with help from Alvin Ordenez, right.

# Expo leaves impression

Some students' eyes are opened to the possibilities

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Bobby Edgell, a 15-year-old junior at Nānākuli High School, showed off a sheet metal tool box that he made with his own hands yesterday and wondered out loud whether it will define his future.

He, and about 1,000 other O'ahu high school students traveled by bus yesterday to the first Construction Career Expo at the Neal Blaisdell Center, which was designed to encourage construction careers and help fill an expected 7,350 new construction jobs in the years

**"I wasn't even thinking about construction — until I came here."**

BOBBY EDGELL |  
Nānākuli High School junior

ahead.

For Bobby, and untold others, it was a day that could end up shaping the direction of his life.

After high school, Bobby said, "I just figured I'd get a job. I wasn't even thinking about construction — until I came here."

Many of the students — even those with family members in the construction industry — toured the booths set up by trade associations and construction unions and said they

never realized there were so many different kinds of construction jobs, some of which pay as much as \$33 per hour for journeymen.

The students saw drywall finishers working on stilts, carpenters building a 4-foot-by-6-foot house and masons who showed teenagers how to properly smooth out concrete.

Some of the students who plan on going to college and on to white-collar jobs said the expo piqued their interest but probably won't alter their career plans.

But for those who aren't sure which way to turn after high school, the construction expo could offer a newfound direction.

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# Expo

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“What we have today is an opportunity to change your life,” Rep. Neil Abercrombie, D-Hawai‘i, told the students.

Lisa Uyematsu, who teaches a “workplace readiness” class at Castle High School, brought 13 of her students and said the expo clearly got their attention.

“College is not made for many of them,” Uyematsu said. “Most of them were already interested in construction. The rest said they’re now more interested because they found out how much money they could make. That’s an important aspect.”

The goal was not to sign up new apprentices, organizers and exhibitors said.

“We just want to educate them on the opportunities that are out there,” said Denis Mactagone, director of training for the Hawai‘i Carpenters Union.

Like other trade unions, the carpenters have found that about half of their apprentice candidates cannot pass the drug screen or the eighth-grade level math requirement.

Lt. Gov. James “Duke” Aiona, the former head of Hawai‘i’s successful Drug Court program, told the students that they need to stay alcohol- and drug-free to ensure both a safe workplace and their livelihoods.

“These are jobs that will last not just one year or two years,” Aiona said. “They’re jobs that will last a lifetime.”

The expo was open to everyone, and attracted people such as 40-year-old Henry Pelekai, a



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Castle High teacher Lisa Uyematsu, right, attempts to cut a piece of ceramic tile with a nipper while her students, Thomas Cormack and Gen Kalahiki, check out a ceramic tile display at the expo.

commercial fisherman and Leeward Community College student from Nānākuli.

Pelekai worked as a heavy equipment operator during Hawai‘i’s last construction boom in the 1980s, “till it got slow,” he said.

He came to yesterday’s expo out of curiosity, just to see if the industry still might have a place for him.

“I hear it’s starting to pick up again,” Pelekai said.

For some of the high school students, the construction expo presented a problem of sorts.

Gen Kalahiki’s father, Jesse Collins, is a union electrician. Af-

ter cutting pieces of tile into a mosaic at yesterday’s expo, Kalahiki — an 18-year-old Castle senior — said she wasn’t certain what kind of construction job to pursue.

“I like this,” Kalahiki said, running her hand over the smooth tiles that formed a petroglyph turtle. “Or masonry. Either that or da kine, carpentry.”

Kasey Self-Gomes, a 15-year-old sophomore from Nānākuli High School, traveled to the Blaisdell with his agriculture class.

Kasey likes working with his hands and was thinking about signing up with the carpenters

union after he leaves school.

But after sheet metal workers showed him how to bend and pop rivet together a tool box in just 15 minutes, Kasey suddenly found a new passion.

“This is much more interesting,” he said. “I really like working with metal.”

Whichever direction he goes, Kasey plans to put his souvenir from yesterday to practical use.

Kasey planned to go home and store his old construction tools in his new metal tool box.

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