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SIAST shows off mobile training lab

Pam Cradock

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Cold drizzle greeted visitors to the SIAST Mobile Training Lab on Thursday afternoon, as it opened its doors to interested industry people and onlookers. Despite the rain, however, SIAST representatives beamed as they eagerly showed off the \$1.6-million facility, which will allow them to train students in remote northern communities.

"This beautiful mobile training unit has the ability to provide workforce training where and when it is needed," SIAST president and CEO Bob McCullough told the crowd of more than 50 people in Saskatoon.

"(It's) a great innovation that has great potential." SIAST's Kelsey campus was the last stop on a provincewide tour for the tractor-trailer unit.

As a sneak peek, organizers had opened the unit up to its full capacity of 1,100 square feet, so students and staff could take a look.

Then, it will be packed up again and moved to Cigar Lake for its inaugural northern class.

Denis Caron, SIAST's dean of industrial training, said Cameco and Areva are both sponsors of this first step of the project, which will help them find and train employees for their mines.

Students in Cigar Lake will be trained in Level 1 and Level 2 industrial mechanics, he said.

"This will be employment opportunities for the students, so they'll be working and learning at the same time," said Caron.

Each posting will be different, and tailor-made for the community, said Caron.

He said students could be trained as industrial mechanics, electricians, machinists, welders, plumbers, pipefitters and steamfitters.

"The instructors are looking forward to it, (and) the students are," Caron said.

Caron said the mobility of the unit allows for an increased access to postsecondary education.

"For the northern and aboriginal communities, they're closer to the support systems, they're closer to home, costs are down," he said.

Equipped with air conditioning and heating, Caron said it's equipped to operate 11 months of the year.

"There's a generator that can operate for over 20 weeks without any electrical hookups," he said.

There's also a satellite, which will be hooked up to a classroom in Saskatoon, Caron said.

Instructors will commute back and forth to help with the hands-on training and teach regular classes to about 48 students a year.

McCullough said he believes the new facility can fill a need.

"(It's important) particularly at a time when the industry is suffering from a long-term skilled labour shortage," he said.

Caron said the industry at large is very interested. "(We're getting) very positive feedback," he said.

He also thinks the training lab will be a good marketing tool.

"It'll be good for recruiting other students into a different career, perhaps into industrial trades that they may not have explored before," he said.

"Part of a marketing strategy as well, is to get younger people more exposed to trades and different occupations." Jorge Herrera, a welding student in the third week of his program, had come to take a look at the facility.

"It's pretty nice for a moveable building," he said.

Herrera said all the essential tools were included, though the facility was a little small for the big stuff.

"You can do most stuff, you can't go all out, but they have all the stuff so you can start learning, so you can get the basics." pcradock@sp.canwest.com

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