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Central Alberta Collegiate Institute highlights building stronger skilled trades workforce in Alberta

January 24, 2025 – A powerful partnership that is helping to build Alberta’s future skilled trades workforce, the Central Alberta Collegiate Institute (CACI), is providing practical learning that brings together K-12 and post-secondary learning with on-the-job opportunities to central Alberta middle and high school students. At a gathering at Red Deer Polytechnic (RDP) today, CACI partners provided an information session and update to a group of educational partners, industry representatives and government officials.

The Central Alberta Collegiate Institute focuses on providing skilled trades dual credit learning opportunities for middle school and high school students. 190 high school students participated in programming in 2023/2024, with almost 350 learners engaged in programs, so far, this year. Programming currently includes skilled trades exploration and pre-employment training within Heavy Equipment Technician, Welding, Industrial Mechanic and Automotive Services Technician programs for central Alberta students enrolled in grades 8 through 12.

“This new Collegiate is allowing RDP to build capacity with local K-12 school divisions, Olds College of Agriculture & Technology and CAREERS to enhance dual credit programming in the region, creating pathways to post-secondary education and rewarding careers for central Alberta youth,” comments Stuart Cullum, President of RDP.

“The CACI partners have a long history of working collaboratively together to strengthen career readiness of youth focused on careers in the skilled trades,” says Jackie Taylor, Executive Director, Central Alberta Collegiate Institute. “This event provides us with the opportunity to strengthen the understanding of CACI for our region’s industry and local governments, and together successfully support central Alberta’s future workforce.”

Today’s information-sharing event also included a robust panel discussion comprised of educators, industry representatives and students who have gained valuable knowledge and hands-on experiences through the Central Alberta Collegiate Institute.

“We are thrilled to have our industry partners with us to explore the Collegiate Institute programming and discover ways they can make a meaningful impact while continuing to support local youth. Our aim is to better equip students for employment opportunities across the region, and through collaboration, we are turning this goal into a reality,” remarks Tessa Jones, Regional Manager, Central Region, CAREERS.

Sophia Vilcsak exemplifies one of CACI’s student success stories. She participated last year in the Pre-Employment Industrial Mechanic program offered by the Central Alberta Collegiate Institute.

“My interest in working with equipment started at an early age, as a good way to spend time with my Dad and brothers. I learned about the CAREERS internship program when I was in high school [at Lacombe Composite High School]. And I really enjoyed my experiences at an internship with NOVA Chemicals,” says Sophia Vilcsak.

After that summer internship, Sophia enrolled in the Pre-Employment Industrial Mechanic program through CACI offered at Red Deer Polytechnic. “I gained a lot of helpful skills in my program through great hands-on projects, and I’m excited for what my future career will be.” Sophia currently works at Collicutt Energy Services.

Attendees also participated in a tour of the facilities at Red Deer Polytechnic, that will be modernized as part of the CACI partnership - which will expand RDP’s capacity in serving central Alberta K-12 students in dual credit and “try a trade” programming.

Central Alberta Collegiate Institute is a successful collaboration of four partnering school divisions (Red Deer Public Schools, Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division, Wolf Creek Public Schools and Chinook’s Edge School Division), two post-secondary institutions (Olds College of Agriculture & Technology and Red Deer Polytechnic) and CAREERS , a not-for-profit organization that collaborates with schools to connect youth with employers, providing valuable paid internship opportunities.

Through CACI, partners collaborate to develop multiple career readiness pathways for students with a greater focus on a three to four year student career preparation journey. The Central Alberta Collegiate Institute provides exploration, skill development and career coaching that successfully transitions students directly into skilled trades careers.

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