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New College Degree Program Opens Doors to Careers in the Utility Sector

PSE&G Teams with Passaic County Community College
to Help Stem Impending Energy Industry Workforce Shortage

(PATERSON) North Jersey residents now have a unique opportunity to pursue careers in the gas delivery and electric generation and distribution industries, thanks to a new partnership between Passaic County Community College (PCCC) and PSE&G. The school’s new utility technology degree is designed to help create a pool of technically skilled and educated workers to fill critical entry-level positions at a time when the utility industry is facing a looming skilled workforce shortage.

The 2–year program combines classroom training with hands-on technical apprentice level training. Students work toward earning an Associate Degree in Applied Sciences, and qualified graduates are offered positions at PSE&G.

“This program is proving to be an important pipeline of new and diverse talent to our company,” said Ralph LaRossa, PSE&G’s vice president for electric delivery. “Some 20 percent of our employees will likely retire over the next couple of years and we’ll need qualified people to fill their shoes. This program will help supply them.”

“What’s more,” he said, “it is providing New Jerseyans with access to jobs they might not otherwise have, giving them an opportunity to train side-by-side with some of the best –to see whether a career in the energy industry is right for them.”

Students in the utility degree program take their general education courses and some of the technical classes in classrooms at Passaic County Community College. The more hands-on courses specific to the utility industry will be held at PSE&G’s training center in Edison. Students will be required to join the appropriate labor union -- either OPEIU, Local 855 or IBEW -- and to complete two paid summer internships.

Rutgers University’s John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development has recognized PSE&G’s energy utility degree as one that works, a model workforce development program for other businesses and industries in New Jersey to use to recruit diverse candidates into entry-level positions.

"Part of our mission at PCCC is to help strengthen Passaic County’s economy," said Dr. Steven M. Rose, president of PCCC. "We are pleased to join PSE&G in offering this new and unique career opportunity to our community."
It is estimated that approximately half of the utility workers employed today, or about 300,000 workers, will retire in the next 15 years, according to a 2005 study by the Utility Business Education Coalition. A separate report, issued in 2005 by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University, analyzed the responses of 39 utility companies that took part in a workforce survey and found that first-line supervisors and managers are expected to be a top hiring need through 2010.

PSE&G began its utility degree program at Mercer County Community College in 2002 and expanded in the last few years to Essex County College, Middlesex County College and Thomas Edison State College. PSE&G has hired 38 students since the program’s start and another 84 are currently pursuing degrees at the schools.

“We hope our program will serve as a model for other New Jersey businesses interested in expanding their applicant pool by partnering directly with our state’s high schools and community colleges,” LaRossa said.

Public Service Electric and Gas Company (PSE&G) is New Jersey’s oldest and largest regulated gas and electric delivery utility, serving nearly three-quarters of the state’s population. PSE&G is the winner of the ReliabilityOne National Achievement Award for superior electric system reliability. PSE&G is a subsidiary of Public Service Enterprise Group Incorporated (PSEG) (NYSE:PEG), a diversified energy company (www.pseg.com).

Passaic County Community College (PCCC), located in downtown Paterson and in Wanaque, offers degree and certificate programs in over 40 different subject areas. Affordable tuition and convenient scheduling make PCCC the college of choice for Passaic County area residents.

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