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Charlotte organizations create solution to talent gap through apprenticeship program

Charlotte, N.C. – With national buzz surrounding apprenticeships as a way to prepare students and career-seekers for a 21st century workforce, Charlotte Works, the City of Charlotte's Mayor's Youth Employment Program (MYEP), MeckEd and ResCare Workforce Services partnered with Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) to recruit and train participants for its diesel auto-mechanics apprenticeship. This initiative extends the pre-apprenticeship program created in 2015.

"Apprenticeships produce skilled career-seekers and help close the skills gap that often prevents young adults from gaining employment in high-demand occupations," says Jeremy Wilson, youth program specialist at Charlotte Works. "Through this collaboration, we want apprentices to walk away with skills that will allow them to be self-sufficient in their career field."

Eligible participants are co-enrolled in MYEP and Charlotte Works' NextGen youth and young adult programs managed by MeckEd and ResCare Workforce Services. They must also be registered for the CATS pre-apprenticeship before graduating high school. Three teens will be part of the inaugural cohort.

The program represents a three- to four-year participant commitment.
- The pre-apprenticeship (Level 1) is completed over two summers – or 2,000 hours – including classroom training and hands-on experience, while earning $11.50 per hour subsidized by Charlotte Works. Participants have completed the career readiness training hosted by MYEP, while MeckEd and ResCare provide case management.
- Participants graduate to the apprenticeship (Level 2) to complete an additional 4,000 hours as a part-time CATS employee. Charlotte Works has allocated approximately $6,400 per apprentice to fund salaries for the initial 16 weeks before CATS steps in for the remaining 2,000 hours.
- At Level 3, the apprentices complete the requirements for a journeyman, earning an associate's degree in Diesel and Heavy Equipment Technology and full-time employment with CATS.

Recently, legislation shifted control of the state's apprenticeship program to the community college system from the department of commerce. This move highlights a variety of postsecondary options besides the traditional college pathway, where cost also plays a factor for young adults who may be shut out. As part of the diesel auto-mechanics apprenticeship, participants' tuition is waived to attend relevant courses at Central Piedmont Community College.

Graduates are stepping into a transportation and logistics industry that is experiencing high growth. According to JobsEQ labor market data, the demand for diesel mechanics is expected to grow by two percent annually, or 52 people per year. Approximately 1,300 diesel mechanics are employed in Mecklenburg County, and with 54.3 percent of workers aged 45 and over, the apprenticeship program may be the solution to the industry's aging workforce.

"My intentions are to set my company up for the future, so I want to get these young men and women prepared to take over," explains Reggie Arrington, CATS' assistant general manager of bus operations. "We mix them with some of the experienced mechanics, and it helps them understand whether this is a career for them or not. If they're willing to put in the work, then we're willing to teach them the rest."

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Charlotte Works is a nonprofit organization that serves as the workforce development board for Mecklenburg County that closes the gap between what employers want and the skills workers have. Charlotte Works convenes workforce, economic development, educational and industry partners to align the workforce system by strengthening partnerships, guiding policy and promoting career pathways. Visit www.charlotteworks.com for more information.

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