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Evergreen Public Schools unveils Skilled Trades Center

Facility expands Career and Technical Education programs, focuses on residential construction

By [Griffin Reilly](#), Columbian staff writer
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A crowd listens to Evergreen student Leslie Guel speak on Tuesday at the grand opening of the Skilled Trades Center at Evergreen High School. (Taylor Balkom/The Columbian) [Photo Gallery](#)

Though the school year ends in just a few weeks, a new opportunity opened its doors for students in Evergreen Public Schools on Tuesday.

Dozens of school officials, local dignitaries and students joined in celebration for the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the district's new Skilled Trades Center at Evergreen High School. The facility, located between Evergreen and Cascade Middle School, will expand the district's Career and Technical Education programs, with a focus on residential construction.

Douglas Greene, the project's primary benefactor, didn't hold back when he outlined what he feels is possible for students who choose to pursue trades.



“To students here today: This is a career you may not have looked at,” said Greene, whose name was also unveiled on a plaque hanging in the new building. “But there’s 800,000 to 1 million unfilled and needed construction jobs across this country.”

The plea was met with excitement and pride among the students in attendance Tuesday, who cheered in support of their teachers and spoke firsthand about how their classes in the district's existing construction programs had benefited them.

Douglas Greene, the primary benefactor for Evergreen Public Schools' new Skilled Trades Center, gives remarks Tuesday at Evergreen High School. The facility was funded with a public-private partnership between Greene and EPS. (Taylor Balkom/The Columbian)

“As students, we’re often plagued with the question, ‘When will I use this in real life?’ ” asked Savva Sosnovskiy, a freshman who took a moment to address the crowd Tuesday among school and community leaders. “(Trades programs) offer a promising, debt-free, rewarding path after high school.”

A ‘new mission’ for Greene

The Skilled Trades Center isn't the first major local investment for Greene, and it's unlikely to be the last: he's already purchased another property in Ridgefield for another similar facility and hopes to do the same throughout Southwest Washington. The total amount Greene contributed to the project wasn't available Tuesday.

The passion comes from his own background as an entrepreneur and inventor accustomed to working with his hands.

“I used to make prototypes for things, and students would come to me and ask, ‘How did you make that?’ Well, I don't know any other way than how to do it myself. I've always done this,” said Greene, who also serves as the [vice chair for the Legacy Health Board of Trustees](#).

A self-proclaimed researcher and extensive document-writer, Greene said he feels a shift two decades ago to phase out or eliminate shop programs in favor of encouraging students to pursue four-year college degrees has contributed to today's workforce shortage in construction.

Though college is still a crucial and beneficial opportunity for many, he said, it's important to recognize that vast swaths of students in Clark County today aren't going to college. That population, too, has only increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“So if those students aren’t going to college, what are they doing? What are we teaching if not hands-on skills?” Greene asked.



People walk around outside the Skilled Trades Center on Tuesday at Evergreen High School. (Taylor Balkom/The Columbian)

People watch as Evergreen students unveil a commemorative plaque Tuesday during the grand opening of the Skilled Trades Center at Evergreen High School. (Taylor Balkom/The Columbian)





Local impact

Thinking big, Greene implored students to recognize that new facilities like Evergreen's will ultimately play a huge role in alleviating the country's need for new residential homes and for completing a massive overhaul of the nation's infrastructure as passed in a \$1 trillion bill last year.

A major piece of that infrastructure bill will take place right here in the Pacific Northwest: the impending Interstate 5 Bridge Replacement Project. Though students learning at Evergreen's Skilled Trade Centers won't walk into a job in welding or steelwork upon graduation, an awareness of various careers in the trades could certainly boost the local workforce needed for the project, Greene and other leaders said Tuesday.

As the program gets going in the next few years, Evergreen hopes to see its students help building mini-homes to be bought here in Clark County. The Vancouver Housing Authority confirmed Tuesday that it is in the early stages of talks with the district about eventually buying homes constructed by students at Evergreen. For Evergreen board director Rob Perkins, who directly speaks with local legislators about increasing funding for trades programs, the new building is a "dream come true."

"We will need a local workforce (for future infrastructure and construction projects), and a hopeful workforce. That's all we talk about. When we keep graduation possibilities flexible, it imparts hope on our students."



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To listen to Douglas' 10 min. presentation, click on Attachment