

## Building Alaska's Future: Delta Youth Civil Construction Grads Ready to Work



Photo by Kaylene Johnson

Above: Students and instructors from the 2007 Civil Construction Academy. Top Right: Representative John Harris congratulates an academy graduate. Bottom Right: Equipment at work in Delta Industrial's gravel pit during the academy.

By Kaylene Johnson

A parade of heavy equipment recently rumbled to a stop in military-like formation under sunny skies in Delta Junction. Youth from Fairbanks to Glennallen emerged from the cabs of loaders, dozers, blades and backhoes as students took a break from their training to meet with dignitaries from around the state. Visitors had come to see for themselves the success of the second annual Delta Youth Civil Construction Academy, an innovative training program sponsored by Alaska Works Partnership and Partners for Progress in Delta Junction.

This summer's Academy trained 10 students, ages 17-24, offering hands-on experience in operating the kind of heavy equipment that would help to build a gas pipeline. Meanwhile mining, military construction, and plans for expansion of the Alaska Railroad in the area has created a rising demand for skilled workers in the construction trades.

"Students experience here what they'll find on the jobsite," said Gary Hall, coordinator of the Delta Career Advancement Center where the training took place. "I run this program like a job site. These guys know how to conduct themselves."

The Delta Career Advancement Center is centrally located within the Interior to serve the region in helping meet state workforce demand. More than 500 students have attended the wide range of courses offered at the Center since 2003.

A Denali Commission Youth Grant helped fund the Delta Youth Civil Construction Academy which took place June 4-22. Delta Industrial Services supported the Academy by renting the machinery and providing a gravel pit in which students could operate the equipment. Alaska Operating Engineers/Employers Training Trust provided instructors and helped develop the curriculum.

Rusty Smith, 24, a Ft. Greeley soldier, is already a war-seasoned veteran who served a tour in Afghanistan before coming to Alaska. He is look-

ing forward to life as a civilian and received time off from his current job as a weapons operator to attend the Academy.

"I've had great training in the military, but this is better than any training I've ever done," Smith said. "We totally look up to our instructors Russ [Penrod] and Ken [Assyd]."

Classmate Dmitriy Gayvoronskiy, 20, had attended construction trade classes before graduating from Delta High School. After three weeks of Academy training he's now enthusiastic about a career as an operator.

"The training was awesome," Gayvoronskiy said. "I didn't know anything about this equipment and now we can operate it efficiently."

Representative John Harris, Speaker of the House, congratulated students on their graduation from the program.

"If we're going to have a large project like the gas pipeline, we want as many Alaskans as possible trained and ready for those jobs," Harris said. He sees Governor Palin's support for vocational education as crucial in developing Alaska's workforce. "We're running out of skilled professional

trades people."

Partners for Progress in Delta is a consortium comprised of Delta Greely School District, University of Alaska Tanana Valley Campus, Delta Mining Training Center, the Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and Alaska

Works Partnership.

"The Delta Youth Civil Construction Academy provides a premier opportunity for youth to explore an interest in heavy equipment, giving them a real life experience under the tutelage of master instructors," said Randy Cheap, Field Representative for Alaska Works Partnership. "These Alaskans will be building our future."