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## Marcellus Shale: Workers finding a future in gas drilling

# New industry opening doors for some

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PLEASANT GAP — This time last year, Eric Klinger, 19, made his living delivering pizzas. His friend, Matt Bartholomew, 20, worked in a factory that manufactured pharmaceutical products.



CDT/Christopher Weddle

Eric Klinger checks the oil level on an excavator during his Heavy Equipment Operations class at the Central Pennsylvania Institute of Science and Technology on Wednesday, January 12, 2011. CDT/Christopher Weddle

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Now, after a six-month course, they work for Halliburton, driving trucks, hauling supplies and doing some manual labor at natural gas drilling sites. They both started at salaries of between \$45,000 and \$55,00 a year — higher than the wages of most Pennsylvanians, according to U.S. census data.

“Nothing wrong with that,” Klinger said with a laugh.

Added Bartholomew: “The company that we’re in with, they’re saying 30 to 40 years they’ll be here. So it should be a reliable job.”

Klinger and Bartholomew are two of the thousands of workers hoping to make careers out of Marcellus Shale gas drilling. More than 70 percent of the people working at Marcellus Shale drilling sites come from out of state, according to a November report by Tracy Brundage, managing director of Workforce Development and Continuing Education at Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport.

Educators such as Larry Michael at Penn College and Todd Taylor at Central Pennsylvania Institute of Science and Technology are working to change that.

They've adjusted their curriculums and added new courses, trying to provide the training that people will need to get jobs related directly and indirectly to gas drilling.

"This is something we're really jumping into," said Taylor, director of secondary education at CPI. "They're long-term jobs, well-paying jobs, family sustaining jobs. Hopefully, (they'll) replace a lot of the jobs that have been lost in the manufacturing area."

### **Filling a void**

It takes more than 150 types of jobs to drill one well, according to a June 2009 study by Penn College.

Some of those jobs require years of education and experience. For instance, the study says 4 percent of Marcellus Shale jobs are for lawyers, 3 percent are for engineers and 3 percent are for geologists.

"What Penn College did was take a look at that and say 'Out of that 150, which ones do we already have in place?'" said Michael, executive director of work force and economic development at Penn College. "In some cases, we had all of the expertise and labs. In some cases, and I'll use welding, probably 90-95 percent of it was here. We just needed to add a piece of equipment or add a particular certification for instructors. And then there's other occupations and areas where we had zero."

While 70 percent of workers directly involved with drilling come from out of state, Michael said that many Pennsylvania residents have been able to find jobs that are indirectly related, such as truck driving. Penn College is conducting a study, to be released in the spring, on how much of the total work force is local.

Jim Colton is. He's been an instructor in the welding program at Penn College for the past five years, and now he spends his summers and weekends working for the gas industry.

Since the Marcellus Shale boom started, his students have focused on learning how to weld downhill, instead of uphill.

"It's a fast weld. You can ... fill a pipe out really quick and move on," said Colton. "The 520 — the local union here — they went through a major challenge ... trying to get enough of their guys that can downhill weld."

Penn College has added several training courses that aren't part of its bachelor or associate degree programs.

Almost half of the 150 jobs needed to drill a well — such as heavy equipment operator, truck driver and general laborer — don't require two- or four-year degrees.

At Penn College, students can take a three-week training course and become certified

“roustabouts” — laborers who work near drilling sites. They often work 14 days in a row and then have seven days off. They start out making between \$15 and \$20 an hour.

Almost all of the students in that program come from Pennsylvania, but there are exceptions.

“I had two graduates in one of the three-week courses that we did, they were from Las Vegas,” said Penn College instructor John Harper. “They had lost their jobs. ... And they heard about this and came in here. They went to work the day they graduated,”

In 2010, the Marcellus Shale Workforce Resource Center opened at Penn College in partnership with Penn State Cooperative Extension. More than 1,000 students have completed classes in the program.

Jerry Ogden, 41, moved back to north-central Pennsylvania last year to be near family. A former securities trader for investment banks, he signed up for Penn College’s roustabout training program.

Now he’s working for a gas drilling company, but not as a laborer.

He meets with landowners and tries to convince them to let the gas companies run pipe across their land. Each day, he drives about 100 to 150 miles, across Bradford, Sullivan and Tioga counties.

He likes the job, although he’s not sure how long it’ll last.

“I don’t have any exact date. I don’t know that anybody really does,” he said. “I don’t think that my position will exist forever. I certainly ... don’t think it’s anything that’s going away in six months or anything. “Penn College is now focusing on creating courses to prepare students for life after the drilling phase — a smaller number of workers will be needed as long as the wells continue to produce gas, which can last about 30 years.

“What we had to put in place here rather quickly was in the drilling phase ... that’s where the volume of workers are needed,” Michael said. “Where we’re primarily going to be focusing over the next year is ... we need techs here in the field to be able to maintain the wells.”

## **Gearing up**

Taylor has been working for three years to establish an emerging energy and infrastructure lab at CPI, where students can prepare for jobs related to natural gas, solar and wind energy.

In the past, he’s successfully introduced dental assistant and heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems programs to the career and technical center.

But Marcellus Shale has unique challenges.

“It is more difficult in an emerging industry,” he said.

There’s the equipment the school needs to purchase, an investment of at least \$500,000. Finding teachers is more difficult, too, because when an industry is new — and booming — relatively few people who have the necessary experience and knowledge are looking to move into teaching.

The emerging energy and infrastructure lab is scheduled to start accepting students in the fall. CPI, like Penn College, is also working on offering classes for emergency responders who

may have to handle explosions or other accidents at drilling sites.

In the meantime, CPI graduates are still benefiting from the Marcellus Shale natural gas industry.

Dwight Bolin, 51, enrolled in a CPI trucking program in October 2008, after he got laid off from his job as a salesman for a company that installed floor coverings.

Bolin, a Lock Haven resident, finished the course in January 2009, but had trouble finding a job. He took work with a charter bus company, taking passengers from the Carolinas to New England. He got paid \$8 an hour.

In October 2009, he moved to a company that hauled propane. Then, in April, he started working for a trucking company that transports water tanks to natural gas drilling sites. When he took that job, there were 10 other drivers working for the company. Now he's one of 30.

He hauls aluminum tanks containing 5,880 gallons of water on most trips. He works six 10-hour days in a row, then has two days off. He rarely has to stay out of town, away from his wife and two youngest daughters. The pay is double what he made driving the charter bus, and there's plenty of overtime offered.

Between April and December, Bolin made nearly \$50,000.

"My wife and I both work. ... We're almost back to our high water mark of what we have made in the past. We're not quite there," said Bolin. "If I had got to put in 12 months, we'd probably be pretty close to the old days."

### **Opportunities ahead**

Klinger and Bartholomew were classmates at Jersey Shore Area High School when they noticed the area changing. More people they knew started taking jobs related to the gas industry. More of the trucks they saw on the road were hauling water and other material for drilling.

"It was starting to hit. ... And then when I got out of high school, it just started booming big," said Klinger.

They enrolled in a heavy equipment operations class at CPI in August, at a cost of nearly \$10,000 each. They learned how to operate machines that weigh more than a dozen tons, dig trenches and excavate sites. They also obtained trucking licenses.

Their last class was during the third week of January, but they landed jobs before that. They met with recruiters at a job fair in Williamsport on a Friday and had interviews that Saturday.

The recruiters asked: "Are you willing to work long hours and be away from home for any period of time? Are you willing to relocate?" Bartholomew said. "Can you lift 60 pounds more than once a day?"

They answered yes to all three questions, and others. They were offered jobs that same day.

"I was surprised how quick and easy it was. I wasn't expecting that," said Klinger. "As soon as we told them what we went to school for and we were in school, they were like, 'Oh really?'"

For now, they expect to be working across Pennsylvania, wherever the wells are. When they turn 21, they'll be allowed to drive trucks in other states.

"I'm ready. I just want to see what everything's like. I want to go to the Southern states," Klinger said. "Texas is where I want to go. Or Alabama or Tennessee."

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**NEXT SUNDAY:** The Centre Daily Times' annual look at the state of the local economy this year focuses on the growing natural gas drilling industry. We look at what that growth could mean for businesses, workers, residents and the environment, and what could happen to slow or speed that growth.

You'll also find our annual list of the top 40 employers in Centre County, and will see how gas drilling, the recession and other factors have shifted companies' rankings in the past year.



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