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Spanish-English course aims to improve communication in construction industry

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Waukesha — Responding to a surge of monolingual Latino immigrants in the work force, a new Spanish-English learning program is building a bridge over the language barriers of construction work. The 12-hour, three-week basic language learning course is the result of a partnership among La Casa de Esperanza, the Metropolitan **Builders** Association and Waukesha County Technical College to teach those in the construction industry to communicate with Spanish- or English-only speaking co-workers.

"Latinos are sweeping the nation in construction jobs," said Hortensia Washington, director of operations at La Casa de Esperanza and instructor for the new language course. "This is about us respecting everyone no matter how limited their English is and cutting out the middle person."

She said the program, named after Waukesha County **builder** Bryce Styza, aims to teach supervisors, workers and contractors basic Spanish and English terms and phrases used in construction work to improve safety and work efficiency in the field.

A group of 18 English-speaking **builders** completed the first session last month.

"Many times you go to a job site, and you don't know if everything you are trying to communicate is going through," said Dave Montguire, a **builder** for **James Craig Builders** in Waukesha and participant in the first session.

Montguire and his co-worker Troy Heil, also a **builder** with **James Craig** and participant of the program, said they were pleased with the results of the program, but it was important to continue to practice what they learned.

They have discussed going on to take more advanced Spanish-language courses at Waukesha County Technical College, they said.

Styza said the construction work force is likely to continue receiving Spanish-only speakers. He said he foresees Latinos advancing into supervisory positions.

"This just makes logical sense," he said of the program he launched.

Washington said the program will encourage individuals with limited education to continue their education at the high school and college levels. Waukesha County Technical College is working with the program to help those interested in continuing their education to do so, she said.

Program participants receive three credits toward their Certified Construction Professional certificate, which the Metropolitan **Builders** Association issues after specified coursework is completed, said Annie Nommensen, event education manager for the association.

The course costs \$150 for the entire session of three four-hour classes over three weeks.

The start and structure of the next session, which has a waiting list, have not been established, but

program organizers hope to expand into more specific sessions based on language, position and type of work participants, she said. The second session is likely to include Spanish-only speakers.

Popularity already is growing around the program, she said.

"There's definitely a buzz," Nommensen said.

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