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Water Works: High-profile diving firms seek marine tech grads to aid Katrina relief efforts

By: Ariel Cohen

Issue date: 3/15/06 Section: News

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Hurricane Katrina wreaked her devastation not only on the land but also under the Gulf Coast's endless bodies of water. From supports for oil rigs and bridges to overturned boats and barges - it's property devastation no one can see.

That's where City College's marine diving technology program comes into play.

"It's the busiest time I've seen since I got in to the industry," said Dan Vasey, assistant professor in the award-winning program. "That has to do with the hurricanes."

The quick arrival and departure of several devastating storms left marine diving companies searching for qualified personnel. Vasey said he has seen at least a 30-percent increase in wages and several new entry benefits because companies are desperate for employees.

The City College Marine Diving Technology program, founded in 1968, remains the only 2-year college diving program in the country. It's also the oldest associate degree program in the nation.

"We have a lot of recruiters coming in," Vasey said. "(We're) the highest quality training that allows a person to go out and get a fantastic career."

Tom Missig is a representative from Phoenix International, a global freight-forwarding company with offices in Maryland, Louisiana, Texas and West Virginia. He came to City College last fall to recruit.

"The need for qualified personnel is at an all-time high," Missig told The Channels. "We need every specific type of employee. I've been in the industry for over 32 years, and have never seen anything like it before."

Missig added that he was impressed with the program here.



Media Credit: Ian Vorster

Student Clarissa Baez prepares to practice her technique in an underwater welding class in the marine diving technology tank.

Poll

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- Media
- Health Technologies/Nursing
- Government/ Public Sector
- Sports/Athletic
- Education
- Business
- None-I can't afford to work without pay.

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"The help from the instructors in giving me the time to speak was extremely beneficial," he said.

Current and former students said the program sets divers up for a solid career in the future. Compared with other private programs, the City College's associate degree comes at a fraction of the cost.

John Gauthier, a second-semester student, said that students come from all over the country specifically with the intention to join the program.

"You get a real well-rounded education," Gauthier said. "I don't really want to be a scuba diving instructor. I'm looking to go in to the oil patch industry in the Gulf of Mexico."









Gauthier is already working for DiveCon, a local commercial diving company.

Patrick Wilson, also a second-semester student, moved from Georgia to Santa Barbara to study diving technology.

After two semesters in the program, students become certified divers and after two more receive their associate's degree.

"We have excellent students who do a very good job," Vasey said.

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