



*Advancing Construction Careers*



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### **New Orlando Training Center to Open Doors for New Careers in Construction** *Partners Provide Funds to Make Program Free to Students*

**September 23, 2021, Orlando, FL** – The Home Builders Institute ([HBI](#)) today announced the official opening of its new Orlando-based facility for training people for jobs in construction. The [BuildStrong Academy of Orlando](#) will train and place area students who want to pursue careers in the skilled trades for the building industry. Funded by [The Home Depot Foundation](#), along with other private, public, and nonprofit sector partners, the program will be free to trainees.

Officials expect the training center to serve approximately 500 new trainees by year-end 2022. The BuildStrong Academy of Orlando's training program guides participants through a step-by-step process designed to take them from beginners, with little-to-no trade skills, to tradespeople who are sought after by employers. Instructors will use HBI's industry-recognized curriculum, which is one of only three pre-apprenticeship programs recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor.

For more than 50 years, HBI has conducted programs across the U.S. training approximately 10,000 students each year through a variety of specialized programs. Officials of the Washington, DC-based nonprofit organization said they are taking a new approach in Orlando by managing a facility that instructs students in several construction trades under one roof.

"As openings in construction jobs increase and people are rethinking their careers, the times demand that we take an inventive approach to creating the skilled workers so badly needed in the building industry," said Ed Brady, HBI president and CEO, at a grand opening ceremony here. "Students at the BuildStrong Academy of Orlando will be exposed to the full spectrum of their opportunities in the construction trades."

The effort comes at a critical time. Every month this year, the construction industry has been short approximately 300,000 to 400,000 skilled workers, based on National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data. Yet only a small percentage of young adults are pursuing careers in construction, Brady said.

“This is the opportunity for new recruits to the industry to get in on the entry level, and receive hands-on training and placement into well-paid jobs,” he said.

“We’re excited to launch this academy program in Orlando and bring career opportunities to the area, in partnership with HBI,” said Shannon Gerber, executive director of The Home Depot Foundation. “This program helps further our goal of supporting the next generation of tradespeople while diversifying the industry.”

In addition to The Home Depot Foundation, the BuildStrong Academy of Orlando is funded by the [Charles Koch Institute](#); [West Fraser](#), a diversified wood products company based in Vancouver, Canada, and; [CareerSource Central Florida](#), the State of Florida’s workforce development agency.

“The Academy will provide incredible training opportunities to develop skills, build careers, and create value in the construction industry,” said Benjamin Colas, program officer at the Charles Koch Institute. “We’re thrilled to support this proven model and excited for all to come.”

“Many of those in this pandemic-driven economy workplace have been displaced or are reassessing what they will do for a living,” said Ross Commerford, director of marketing and product development at West Fraser. “The Academy is for someone who might want a career as a skilled tradesperson in construction.”

“Central Florida is experiencing an economic boom in development projects and with that comes new jobs and the need for skilled talent,” said Pam Nabors, CEO and president of CareerSource Central Florida. “The Academy will be a springboard for ultimately thousands of young people who will be trained and placed in good jobs.”

In advance of today’s grand opening, the center trained its first class of students who graduated earlier this month. In June, they began a two-week, orientation session called the “residential introductory series.” Once completed, they were able to progress to four weeks of skills training that resulted in an industry-recognized certification as a pre-apprentice. If they choose, the students could then enter a six-week-long program to be trained in carpentry skills.

“Orlando’s new BuildStrong Academy opens up the world of great jobs and careers in construction to anyone who wants to work hard and be part of an extraordinary industry,” said Chuck Fowke, NAHB chairman, and a custom home builder from Tampa, FL, who spoke at today’s event.

For more information on the BuildStrong Academy of Orlando, and how to enroll, visit [OrlandoAcademy.hbi.org](http://OrlandoAcademy.hbi.org) or email: [Orlando.Academy@hbi.org](mailto:Orlando.Academy@hbi.org)

### **About Home Builders Institute (HBI)**

HBI trains skilled workers for the building industry. Through pre-apprenticeship and advanced training, certification programs, assistance in obtaining apprenticeships, and job placement services, HBI provides graduates with the skills and experience they need to build a career and change their lives. For more information, visit [www.hbi.org](http://www.hbi.org).

### **About The Home Depot Foundation**

[The Home Depot Foundation](http://TheHomeDepotFoundation.org) works to improve the homes and lives of U.S. veterans, train skilled tradespeople to fill the labor gap and support communities impacted by natural disasters. Since 2011, the Foundation has invested more than \$375 million in veteran causes and improved more than 50,000 veteran homes and facilities. The Foundation has pledged to invest half of a billion dollars in veteran causes by 2025 and \$50 million in training the next generation of skilled tradespeople through the Path to Pro program. To learn more about The Home Depot Foundation visit [HomeDepotFoundation.org](http://HomeDepotFoundation.org) and follow us on [Twitter](#) @HomeDepotFound and on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) @HomeDepotFoundation.

### **About Charles Koch Institute**

The Charles Koch Institute inspires and invests in social entrepreneurs developing solutions to America's most pressing problems. [Read more](#) about our support for social entrepreneurs committed to education.

### **About West Fraser**

West Fraser is a diversified wood products company with more than 60 facilities in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe. From responsibly sourced and sustainably managed forest resources, the Company produces lumber, engineered wood products (OSB, LVL, MDF, plywood, and particleboard), pulp, newsprint, wood chips, other residuals and renewable energy. West Fraser's products are used in home construction, repair and remodeling, industrial applications, papers, tissue, and box materials. West Fraser shares trade on the Toronto Stock Exchange and New York Stock Exchange under the symbol "WFG". For more information, please visit [www.westfraser.com](http://www.westfraser.com).

### **About CareerSource Central Florida**

CareerSource Central Florida (CSCF) is Florida's second largest regional workforce board that is state and federally funded with an annual operating budget of approximately \$46.2 million. CSCF provides comprehensive services to connect career seekers and local businesses at no cost. Services include screening and hiring talent; employee training and education; paid internships and no cost skills training and education programs. In fiscal year 2020-2021, CSCF has served more than 54,000 career seekers and 2,700 businesses. The organization has placed more than 6,300 individuals in jobs and helped advance skills for more than 5,100 career seekers across Orange, Osceola, Seminole, Lake and Sumter Counties. For more information, visit [www.CareerSourceCentralFlorida.com](http://www.CareerSourceCentralFlorida.com).