



Students getting hands-on heavy equipment skills

By Alex Paul

Communications Officer

ALBANY — Most teenagers are happy to get behind the steering wheel of their family's min-van, but 11 students from the Juvenile Department, Jackson St. Youth Services and Albany Options School are getting hands-on training operating heavy equipment — from giant excavators to bull dozers.

Baker Technical Institute rolled in a large self-contained classroom on wheels filled with heavy equipment simulators, identical controls used to steer, dig, lift and push mounds of dirt and rock.

Instructor David Frazey said that after the young people get several hours of simulator time, they will demonstrate their new skills on machines that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Frazey said students learn how to operate a grader, small wheel loader, excavator and dozer.

Sixteen-year-old Elijah was one of the students learning to operate a dozer on a recent afternoon.

"It's pretty cool," he said. "I'm learning a lot and I think I'd like to become an operator."

Linn County Juvenile Director Torri Lynn said the project was set up by Oak Creek Principal Joy Koenig through the Multnomah Education Service District. "If the kids had to pay for this on their own, it would cost about \$6,000 each," Lynn said.

Lynn said a similar program was held last year with six students. It was put together on short notice. Having more time to develop the program this year has allowed it to double in the number of students.

Lynn said there are 10 boys and one girl, ages 16 to 19 participating in the two-week program.

Much like an airplane simulator, each of the four heavy equipment simulators in the portable classroom is extremely life-like. The units similar Caterpillar equipment, but the joystick controls can be set up for either Caterpillar or John Deere operations.

The simulators include both front and rear computer screens and make noises and vibrate much like their real-life counterparts.

When a student turns a key to start an engine, there is a roar from a simulated exhaust and the RPMs rev up on the dash tachometer.



When a student moves a dozer blade left or right, he can feel the vibration of the move and hear the huge metal blade clank into place.

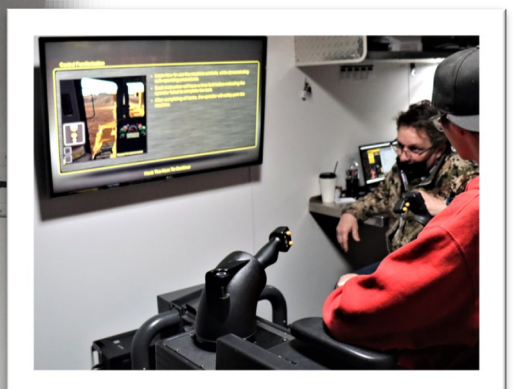
If the students are successful, they will receive a certificate of completion that is good for a lifetime. They can use that certificate when they apply for a job. Frazer said the job market for heavy equipment operators is "unbelievable" and the pay scale is high, starting at more than \$20 per hour.

"What I see in most classes is the students are scared at first and then they settle in and get the hang of it," Frazer said. "It's amazing when they get on the real machines how quickly what they learned here comes to them. They learn things in two weeks that might take them six months in the field."

And, Frazer said, the simulators are based on current technology, 2017 and newer.

"We're booked for the next two years," Frazey said of the program's popularity.

Based in Baker City and Prineville, Baker Technical Institute offers education and training for careers in agricultural sciences, building trades, natural resources/environmental sciences, engineering, health services, welding,



Heavy equipment simulators provide life-like sounds from the roar of a diesel engine to back-up warning signals and even vibrate so operators get an almost real learning opportunity. After a week of work on the simulators, students at the Linn Benton Detention Center will spend a week operating real machinery.



heavy equipment operation, truck driving, and manufacturing.

"We believe that career and technical education is one of the most important things we can give our students," said Three Lakes Principal Joy Koenig. "We are always looking for opportunities and access to preparing students for workforce ready jobs."

Koenig said the heavy equipment training is an area where students can experience almost instantaneous success upon graduation.

"The skills they learn with heavy equipment training intersect with so many jobs," Koenig said.

Koenig said students who complete the heavy equipment training can easily operate an on-site tractor used in the school's gardening program.

"BTI also provides our students with great information about 'soft' skills associated with jobs such as showing up on time, proper appearance and a good attitude and perseverance," Koenig said.