Hancock signs training deal with oil industry

PROGRAM WILL BEGIN AT LOMPOC CAMPUS JAN. 21

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Although the new Public Safety Training Complex at Hancock College’s Lompoc campus is still a week away from its official opening, the facility got a major boost at a small ceremony Monday afternoon.

In a move that had been in the works for the better part of a year, the college’s leaders officially inked a deal with the Petroleum Education Council (PEC) that will ensure that members of the oil industry send their employees to Lompoc to train.

“This is a great day,” Hancock President Kevin Walthers said shortly before signing the agreement alongside PEC President Wes Carr.

Under the terms of the partnership, Hancock will offer a series of safety orientation and training programs to employees and contractors in the oil industry. The programs align with other specialized training that will be offered at the complex, which will officially open its doors to first responder trainees at the start of the spring semester Jan. 21.

Carr, who traveled to Monday’s ceremony from PEC headquarters in southern Louisiana, said he was excited to finally have the agreement in place.

“I commend everyone for this relationship and I’m super excited about it. I think we’re gonna take it to the sky,” he said, before quickly correcting himself.

“Actually, the sky’s not the limit. We’re gonna go past that.”

The main purpose of the PEC, which is in its 21st year, is to streamline the safety training for oil industry workers. Before the universal training was in place, employers had to train each employee on their own dime and then hope the employee stuck around. If not, they’d have to train a new person. There was also confusion back then with different job sites using different methodology.

“When you talk the same language ... it drives safety home,” Carr said. “And there’s not a lot of leeway for confusion when you’re talking about safety. Ultimately, (our goal) is to get everybody home safely and not send any mixed messages.”

The agreement is expected to bring in about 2,500 to 3,000 trainees annually. The length of the training depends on the specific program, but they typically vary from two days to 10 days. The training is expected to begin next month.

Previously, all training had been done in southern Louisiana and in the Gulf of Mexico. But now, Lompoc will host all Western training, including those employees from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada and California.

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The timing of the agreement also closely coincides with the formation of the new Far Western Chapter of the National Service, Transmission, Exploration and Production (STEP) Network, an industry-driven organization that will be hosted at the Hancock Lompoc campus. The organization will bring industry representatives together with government regulators to consult on future and current policy and attempt to reduce work-related injuries within the oil and gas industries.

Among the several Hancock, oil industry and local civic leaders who were in attendance at Monday’s signing was Lompoc Mayor John Linn, who voiced his support for the new PSTC as well as the agreement with the PEC.

“This will provide an opportunity for people to come to the Central Coast and experience how nice it is here and stay for a while — and leave their money and go home and tell their friends,” he said, drawing laughter. “So we appreciate that. But it’ll also be a great opportunity for local men and women to come into the oil industry, be trained and have a job somewhere with value going out.

“The city of Lompoc is 100 percent behind this facility,” he added, “and we’ll do whatever it takes to help you be successful.”