



Tennessee College of Applied Technology Knoxville adds apprenticeship option to its Heavy Equipment Operator training program

Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT) Knoxville has added an apprenticeship option to its Heavy Equipment Operator training to further address the workforce needs of business and industry and create a valuable new career training option for East Tennesseans.

The college launched Heavy Equipment Operator (HEO) training in 2022 as one of its workforce development courses and recently added the apprenticeship component after working with business and industry partners across the region who expressed a need. Apprenticeships are offered in partnerships with specific businesses and enable students/employees to earn while they learn.

TCAT Knoxville President Kelli Chaney and Strategic Impact Coordinator Sally Porter collaborated with Apprenticeship TN to develop apprenticeship options at the college. Apprenticeship TN is a statewide initiative of seven state agencies to help facilitate new apprenticeship opportunities for employers and their employees. It works directly with employers, associations, organizations and communities to develop new apprenticeship programs.

For example, TCAT Knoxville worked with the Tennessee Road Builders Association (TRBA) to create the association's apprenticeship pathway, Porter said. "We worked with the association to design the course and to frontload it with safety training and the basics first," she said.

At a recent industry meeting in Franklin, TRBA Executive Vice President Kent Starwalt said, "This apprenticeship pathway is a crucial step in building a skilled workforce that will drive our industry forward."

To participate in the TRBA Apprenticeship Training Pathway, students must be employed by an employer who is a member of the association, such as Harrison Construction in Knoxville.

Harrison Construction Estimating Manager Matthew Justice said the company sent candidates through the HEO training and then hired them. Justice, who is also on TRBA's Workforce Committee, said the college's training simulators help students become familiar with equipment without needing a five-acre field. "They're learning the fundamentals of operating equipment on the simulators, understanding the motions and the feel of the equipment," he said.

Porter emphasized the importance of flexibility in the training schedule because students train on Cat® Simulators systems. "We wanted to design the calendar model so that if the student is laid off or the weather is bad, they can use that time to train on the simulators," she said.

TCAT Knoxville has also partnered with the Tennessee Office of Reentry to provide HEO apprenticeship training opportunities for individuals reintegrating into society after they have been involved with the justice system.

Porter said 49 students are enrolled in or have completed the HEO apprenticeship training.

Prospective students don't have to be employed by partnering companies to enroll in Heavy Equipment Operator training; only those who are in the apprenticeship component do. The next HEO class runs from March 24 to May 30.

Other than Heavy Equipment Operator training, TCAT Knoxville also has another active apprenticeship with Cherokee Millwright, delivering NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research) Core, NCCER Pipefitting, NCCER Welding, and NCCER Millwright training. NCCER helps craft training programs in which students can earn industry-recognized credentials.

For more information about programs, financial aid, admissions, and contacts, visit the [TCAT Knoxville website](https://tcatknoxville.edu) at <https://tcatknoxville.edu>. For information on workforce courses, email workforce@tcatknoxville.edu.



February is Career & Technical Education Month