

Advanced Wind Technician Program opens new career opportunities for rural students



February 11, 2020. Oklahoma has vast energy resources, and opportunities are growing to support the clean power industry.

High Plains Technology Center (HPTC) started its wind tech program 12 years ago, with an eye toward training workers for all of Oklahoma's energy careers. "A lot has changed since then," says Taylor Burnett, Asst. Superintendent of the school. "The program started out small, but wind is booming now."

Burnett says the Advanced Wind Technician Certification Program at High Plains typically enrolls between 12-14 students in a course, with two 20-week courses occurring each year.

"When these students receive their certifications, they're able to go and work on wind turbines anywhere in the world, as long as they have their passports. Ideally though, I want all of our students to find jobs locally and be a part of the booming renewable energy economy here in Oklahoma," Burnett stated.

The impact of HPTC's wind tech program is far-reaching. The program is creating a robust talent pool that attracts multi-national corporations to Oklahoma for development. Because of this, the wind industry is already the number one taxpayer in 12 counties and 48 school districts, and that number is growing.

Additionally, the wind tech program literally changes lives for rural students in Oklahoma, and beyond. Bryant Shepherd, an 18-year-old student from Woodward, Okla. heard about the program at a high school career fair. "The job stability of wind is what drew me to the program at High Plains. I can't count on oil and gas to put food on the table consistently, so I decided to become a wind tech," Shepherd said. "I hope to eventually work my way up to becoming a Site Lead."

Another wind tech student at HPTC heard about the program from her father. Bonnie Holloway is a 24-year-old student who decided to follow in her dad's footsteps. "My dad has been a wind tech for 15 years. We're from New Mexico, but my parents moved to Oklahoma for his work, and I decided to follow them. I was working in healthcare before and sitting behind a desk all day is not for me," Holloway said. "The numbers also make a lot of sense."

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, wind technicians are rated among the fastest growing jobs in America, and they're being equipped and trained right here in our state. According to High Plains, the average tuition cost for the program is about \$6,000. When the average salaries are calculated in, the return on a student's investment in the program is approximately 850 percent. This kind of opportunity doesn't always come along for students who are not planning to attend a traditional 2-year or 4-year college.

Oklahoma's energy landscape is flexible and dynamic. We are blessed to have 'booms' from multiple industries in one state. As today's wind technicians evolve with ever-changing technological advances, battery storage and transmission needs, our state looks forward to a promising future in leading the Nation in clean energy development.

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About Oklahoma Power Alliance

The Oklahoma Power Alliance is the industry trade association representing members of the Oklahoma clean energy industry, project developers and investors, landowners, manufacturers and suppliers, counties and school districts, and the more than 9,000 employees working in Oklahoma in the renewables industry.

Oklahoma Power Alliance represents its members in Oklahoma's policy forums, seeking to encourage and support the production of electricity through the use of our state's vast renewable energy resources. As part of an "all of the above" solution, wind energy, solar power and battery storage are securing our energy independence. Learn more at OKPowerAlliance.org.

About Mark Yates

Mark Yates serves as the Vice President of the Advanced Power Alliance and Oklahoma Power Alliance, representing members of the Oklahoma clean energy industry; project developers and investors; landowners; manufacturers and suppliers; counties and school districts; and the employees working in 26 counties throughout Oklahoma.

Additionally, the Advanced Power Alliance promotes the development of energy resources as clean, reliable, and affordable sources of power. The Alliance is the advanced power industry's voice within the fourteen states of the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) and Southwest Power Pool (SPP) systems: Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming.

Mark engages in Oklahoma's policy forums to encourage the growth of Oklahoma's energy resources with continued diversification of the power generation portfolio into wind, solar, battery storage. He also represents its members in Oklahoma's policy forums, seeking to encourage and support the production of electricity through the use of renewables.

Mark was previously with Oklahoma Farm Bureau where he served as Vice President of Field Operations. Mark worked closely with the membership of Farm Bureau to engage in the legislative process. He worked to educate members and the public about important legislative issues that impacted the agricultural industry. In his time with Farm Bureau he traveled the state and served as the liaison to the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber and Tulsa Regional Chamber.

Prior to his time at Farm Bureau, Mark was an educator in Oklahoma Public Schools for eleven years. He spent time as a teacher and coach at Plainview, Edmond North, and Mustang High Schools. Along with his teaching experience Mark also served as the Federal Programs Director for Plainview Public Schools in Ardmore. With his unique background, Mark understands the vital role the clean energy industry plays in rural economies, but also the impact it has for schools in Oklahoma.

Mark is a graduate of East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma where he holds a Bachelors in History and Masters in Secondary Administration. Mark lives in Edmond with his wife Stacy and daughter Londyn where they are very active in the community and their church.

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About High Plains Technology Center

Learn more about the program at: <https://hptc.edu/business-and-industry/wind-energy-training>