

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE



Luckson Regest, left, and John Hurhula take a few last-minute directions on mixing cement from instructor Edward Klimowich at Key West High School's construction-trades lab Tuesday.

ROB O'NEAL/
 Key West
 Citizen

KWHS students learn various crafts in new construction-trade lab

By TOM WALKER
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Gone are the days when shop class meant making bird houses and fashioning crude foot stools destined to end up in the back of a closet.

Now, Key West High School students enrolled in a building-trades course can gain valuable hands-on experience in the wide spectrum of career opportunities in the construction industry by using the recently installed Construction Zone.

The Construction Zone is a series of training modules developed by Questech, a Michigan-based company that engineers

educational products.

"These modules will give our kids a taste of a lot of different trades," said teacher Ed Klimowich, better known around the campus as "Mr. K."

Klimowich said the construction-trade lab was introduced this year as a new vocational program to enhance the basic skills needed to obtain post-graduation jobs in construction.

"Once they complete the course, the students will have a solid background of some good, basic information," he said.

Klimowich said his students

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work in pairs at each of the 16 different stations – including cabinetmaking, plumbing, dry-wall, cement masonry, electricity, tile setting – to undertake a specialized curriculum requiring 10 days to complete.

"At the end of the 10 days, they rotate to a completely new and different trade," he said.

Eddie Stress, a freshman, was busy in one of the modules trying to tackle a task he is confident will help elevate him into the world of architecture.

"I think these things are pretty good," he said, as he flipped through the pages of his lesson plan. "These skills will come in handy when I'm an architect."

George Emanoil, president of Questech, was at the high school Tuesday.

"We're trying to promote the students' understanding of different crafts," he said.

Emanoil was hosting a contingent of school officials from Houston who chose to observe the Key West lab and a similar one at Marathon High School with the intent of instituting a similar curriculum in the fifth largest school district in the nation.

"We're looking for a better way to teach the construction trade," said Ronald Johnson, executive director of career and technical education for the Houston Independent School District.

"Construction is booming in the Houston area and we have a tremendous need for workers in the industry at many different levels."

But Johnson agreed that not all of the 211,000 students in the 285 schools in his district will go on into the construction trade business.

"Maybe not," he said. "But they'll surely have some life skills they can use around the house."