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News Record Photo/Tim Goessman

Napoloeon Michel Messali, from left, Leonard Motes and Travis Thomas lower the floor on NPC's rig 16 after reassembling the wellhead south of Gillette. Northern Production has worked with Gillette College to apply for a grant that would expand its workforce training to include paying for students to get the oil field safety training the Occupational Safety and Health Administration requires.

Grant would expand college workforce training to oil field

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Gillette College plans to apply for a \$490,000 grant to pay for about 700 students to get oil field safety training required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

The Wyoming Department of Workforce Services distributes the grant and requires letters of support from local businesses that would benefit. The college has four letters in hand, said Jim Stratton, director of the college's Industry Safety Training Institute.

It is waiting on letters from two more companies that have expressed their support for the program, then the college will submit its application to the state, he said.

"These companies have also committed to giving preferential hiring to people who have gone through this program, as well as looking at things in terms of a higher starting wage, so they have gone out on a limb," Stratton said.

This would be the college's first grant for oil field training, he said.

"We're taking, probably somebody that has never been in the oil field before and introducing them to the oil and gas industry and giving them a leg up on the hazards that they will see," Stratton said.

It has had Department of Labor grants in the past for Mine Safety and Health Administration training and

refreshers. Last year, it trained 4,722 miners, including 1,063 who got new miner training.

As it stands, oil field businesses generally cover the cost of the training themselves. With the grant, they will have a pool of trained and certified workers to choose from, or a training program to send potential hires to.

"The companies that have committed to this program, they will be a referral for us, and other agencies will refer people as well," Stratton said. "A lot of these companies have also committed to this type of training. They've been putting people in our training here and paying for that out of pocket as well."

Many of the students will be referred by businesses when they go to apply for a job, but enrollment in the program will be open, he said.

It will be a four-day, 32-hour course at no cost to students or businesses. The \$490,000 from the state would pay for at least 700 students to take the course.

To qualify for the grant, the college also had to get support from the local economic development group, and the Campbell County Economic Development Corp. has signed on, CEO Phil Christopherson said.

They are helping coordinate between the college, businesses and workforce services, he said. The local workforce services center also has given its support to the grant, as is required.

Recent pre-hire grant awards

The funding for Pre-Hire that is available each year varies based on legislative appropriation and demand, according to Rob Black, a grants manager for the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services. Recent grants have gone to train archaeology students, computer code programmers, welders, truck drivers, oil rig floorhands, refining process technicians and ski resort employees, Black said.

* **2012:** \$895,278 was awarded and 488 employees were trained.

* **2013:** \$511,022 was awarded and 1,276 employees were trained.

* **2014:** \$873,269.72 was awarded to 10 entities. employees trained is not available yet.

* **2015 so far:** \$428,217 has been awarded in five grants.

All years are fiscal years, which start July 1. Fiscal year 2012 ran from July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012, for example.