Thomas Brex, working to mount photovoltaic cells on the roof of a construction project in Eugene, is one of many people in Lane County working a job created by the need to be more energy efficient. The focus on renewable energy has created at least 50 new Lane County positions in the past five years.

**GREEN GOES MAINSTREAM**

Demand for workers schooled in renewable energy is booming in Lane County — and it’s spreading.
Green: Young students flock to energy classes

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green buildings, and an expert who coordinates building systems to maximize natural use, such as making sure the lights dim and the fans drop to lower speeds when they aren’t needed.

- Coburg-based Cascade Sierra Solutions has grown to a dozen employees in Lane County, up from just one worker 1 ½ years ago.

- Willamette River Company, which bought out Ebbage, is trying to keep up with everything,” CEO Sharon Banks said.

The state’s new initiative retrofits tractors-trailer rigs to reduce fuel use and comply with tightening clean air requirements.

Renewed renewable interest

The spike in demand for skilled energy workers has brought Roger Ebbage, coordinator of Lane Community College’s energy management programs for 16 years, his liveliest year ever.

The once-beleaguered program that was shut down in 1997 from the school’s general fund is producing graduates now who are in high demand.

“It’s an exciting, vibrant green-collar job area,” Ebbage said. “I haven’t seen this before. It’s mainstream. It’s front page news.

The Wall Street Times last week cited Ebbage’s program as one of the promising green-collar national initiatives nationally.

Ebbage is having a hard time keeping his 50 students in the classroom because — like Brev — they’re hired before they finish their studies.

His students were once mostly middle-age millennials retraining after a layoff, but now the program is attracting students in their 20s.

“Them, renewable, that’s very sexy,” Ebbage said.

His students soon find themselves earning $45,000 to $45,000 annually, Ebbage said.

“I’m 60 and I can feel like I’m ready to retire, but boy, you’re going to have to drag me out of this chair,” he said.

“Now it’s my time to retire,” he said.

Filling the gap

A just-completed “gap analysis” examining the work force needs of Oregon’s clean energy companies with the state’s capacity to produce them found “an economic opportunity of massive proportions,” according to a draft.

The study, due out in two weeks, is called “An Analysis of Clean Energy Workforce Needs and Programs in Oregon.”

Oregon is third in the nation for growth in wind-power installations, mostly along the blustery north border of the state.

Companies looking there will need 600 wind turbine technicians during the next three years and will have to import them from out of state, according to the study.

The Columbia Gorge Community College kicked into gear and created a one-year turbine technician program — though it’s only producing 34 technicians a year.

The need for turbine and energy efficiency analysts — such as those from Ebbage’s program — is also predicted to soar.

Eugene is way ahead in this area. Today, Eugene

“it’s an exciting, vibrant green-collar job area. We haven’t seen this before,”

ROGER EBBAGE, COORDINATOR OF LANE COMMUNITY COLLEGE’S ENERGY MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Water & Electric Board employs 18 such experts who have conducted energy audits and made significant changes to buildings throughout the state, said Mathew Northway, who oversees W&EB’s energy management department.

“Electric utilities expect a major demand from cities to the north. Washington voters passed an initiative (1-047) that requires the state’s electrical utilities to pursue “all low-cost energy conservation and efficiency measures” they can with their customers and within their communities.

Since passage, utilities in Washington have started to hire away each other’s energy analysts, making a spiraling pay scale, Northway said.

Ebbage’s students will be even more attractive.

In the end, education may be the bottleneck that limits this growth, said Joshua Skow, principle with the Eugene-based consulting firm Good Company (which is also growing).

“If we decided to go whole hog right now (with all existing technologies), the barrier would not be money; the barrier would be the manufacturing equipment capacity,” he said. “The barrier would actually be human capital. The knowledge would be there to deploy these things.”

Fanning the spark

Kulogoski is among the politicians promising a green future.

Oregon spends $10 billion a year on energy, Hayes said. And 85 percent of that leaves the state.

“Utilities keep the cash at home, she said.

“In many ways, it’s not just the salvation of our environment but of our economy,” she said.

The state paid Hayes’ organization $49,000 to examine the clean energy sector’s needs for employees.

Next, she’ll get an additional $75,000 to help craft bills for the 2009 legislature meant to spur growth of green-collar jobs in the state.

Proponents of green economic growth typically favor using government regulations and incentives to force market demand.

Last June, for instance, Oregon joined 27 other states that recently provided 50 percent of their retail sales of electricity from clean, renewable sources of energy by 2025.

A national group called the Blue-Green Alliance figures that if a similar requirement were adopted nationally — 20 percent of their power from renewables by 2020 — as many as 820,000 new jobs would be created.

Some would be good jobs. Skow said.

“Those will be paid very, very well because they’re going to help resolve issues of genuine scale,” he said. “Oregon’s a strong value proposition for that sort of employment.”