

HOLYOKE

HCC awarded \$832K to boost clean energy workforce

Holyoke Community College has been awarded an \$832,000 grant to help train workers for clean energy sector jobs.

The two-year grant, announced earlier this month, was part of an overall \$3.4 million allocation from the Healey-Driscoll administration to three higher education institutions for climate-related workforce training initiatives.

HCC was the only institution in western Massachusetts to receive funding. Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology and Roxbury Community College, both in Boston, also received grant awards of \$1.3 million each.

"This is a great opportunity for the region," said Kermit Dunkelberg, HCC assistant vice president of adult education and workforce development. "The state is putting a lot of investment into the clean energy sector, for a lot of reasons. To their credit, the Healey administration is very



A jeep charges up at one of the EV charging stations on the Holyoke Community College campus. (SUBMITTED)

interested in getting some activity going in the western part of the state."

Overall, the grants will lead to green industry specific training for an estimated 400 individuals, 150 of them through HCC.

Dunkelberg said HCC and its community and industry partners will spend the next few months developing train-

ing programs in five areas: EV (electric vehicle) charging station installation; energy auditing; solar installation; green industry supervision and management; and green careers job readiness.

"You're starting to see electric vehicle charging stations more commonly now, but there is still a need to build a lot more of them, and there need

to be people trained to do it," Dunkelberg said. "And then, car companies will be able to sell more electric vehicles. All these things are connected."

For instance, he said, auto dealer Gary Rome wrote a letter in support of the grant.

Dunkelberg said there are businesses looking to get into the emerging EV station market, but it's difficult to start operations without enough trained employees.

"It's a chicken and egg problem," he said. "We're going to be training people while these companies are trying to get their businesses going."

Electricians, he said, are critical in this emerging industry.

"In the clean energy sector, one of the biggest choke points, if not the biggest choke point, is the availability of enough training electricians to do the work," he said. "To work as an EV charging station installer or a solar installer, you don't have to be

a licensed electrician, but you have to have some experience as an electrician."

HCC's partners in the grant include Holyoke Gas & Electric, Springfield Works, and the Coalition for Equitable Economy (CEE), an organization that supports businesses owned by persons of color. Holyoke Community College is a federally recognized Hispanic-Serving Institution, which was one of the eligibility requirements for the grant.

"We'll be doing some small business development with the coalition with the goal of creating more opportunities for people of color," he said.

Dunkelberg said he expects training to begin in early 2025 if not sooner.

"HCC does a lot of work in the healthcare space," Dunkelberg said. "This grant will enable us to provide opportunities in a totally different sector. There's a lot to learn here and new relationships to establish — quite a bit of groundwork to be done."