BC3 uses federal grants to develop drill workers

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BUTLER TWP — Butler County Community College will use two federal Department of Labor grants to ramp up training for the Marcellus Shale natural gas work force.

Both grants run for the next three years.

BC3 will receive $553,044 for work force development training, part of a grant announced in September for Pennsylvania’s 14 community colleges. The $20 million federal grant is coordinated by the Community College of Philadelphia.

“That grant is going to expand into welding programs we are putting together,” said Steve Catt, executive director, BC3 Work force Development.

In addition, the money will be used to pay instructors and a project manager, and for career counseling, placement and support.

“We worked with all the other community colleges, who identified their niches,” said Francie Spigelmyer, vice president for academic affairs who partners with Catt. “Energy technology, specifically Marcellus Shale, rose to the top here.”

The grant complements the work of ShaleNet, a three-year $5 million effort coordinated by Westmoreland County Community College, to train laborers and other employees for the Marcellus Shale industry.

ShaleNet is funding BC3’s first roustabout, or laborer, training class that runs Feb. 6-24. The class is expected to be held monthly after that, Catt said.

Seventeen applicants will be offered a tuition-free, three-week roustabout training course. “They’re stackable,” said Spigelmyer. “Someone can get roustabout training, welding and an OSHA (safety) certificate at BC3.”

BC3 also has entered into a partnership with Petroskills, an oil and gas industry trainer, to offer courses, certificates and degree programs there.

“I know Marcellus Shale is controversial, but there are people who want to go into it and I hope we can provide that training,” said Spigelmyer.