

High school kids see jobs of the future in bridges and roundabouts

By Jeff Hicks, Record staff

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WATERLOO REGION — When Jason Martin looks at a roundabout, he sees jobs.

“Tons of jobs,” said Martin, foreperson of the local Steed and Evans crew now building a roundabout at Kossuth Road and Fountain Street in north Cambridge.

Future jobs for young people now in high school, like the busload of St. David and Resurrection students who toured the roundabout site and had a look at work on the bridge being built across the Grand River down an extension of Kossuth.

“There’s lots of money to be made in the industry,” said the 29-year-old Martin, who started as a labourer 10 years ago.

“Lots of hours. Infrastructure is never going to go away.”

Roundabouts, including the two that will anchor each side of the bridge from Kitchener to Cambridge, seem to be here to stay, too. They bring more jobs than you might think.

First the sewer crews come in, Martin explains. That’s 15 workers on site.

Next comes the excavation crew. Another 10 pairs of hands.

Then the concrete crew. After that, the asphalt crew.

“And a very dying breed, too,” said Martin. “A lot of our good guys, baby boomers, are retiring.”

So that presents opportunities in the trades for youth looking to get their hands dirty.

“I wasn’t really interested in the road work but the carpentry under the bridge really interested me,” said 16-year-old Resurrection student Liam Gibbs, who started his own little business building a deck and a fence last summer.

“That was cool.”

Gibbs liked the wood form built up the sides of the bridge to pour the concrete into. Next semester, Gibbs will enter the homebuilding program at St. Mary’s. Until then, he’s taking construction courses at Rez in



Learning trades. Kevin Watson (from left), 16, Mike Gordner, 17, Connor Plein, 17, and several others listen to foreperson Jason Martin at a roundabout construction site on Tuesday as area high school students visit a number of sites to learn about jobs in the trades. Peter Lee/Record staff Source: Record staff

Kitchener.

Jordan Hiuser, a 16-year-old student at St. David in Waterloo, figured he'd prefer to work on a bridge, as opposed to a roundabout. But road work wouldn't be all that bad.

"It'd be nice to get road work, too," he said. "I love the outside."

And he'd love to have the skills in a trade to stay employed as an adult.

"It's one of those things you can always rely on and fall back on, if you're good with that kind of stuff," Hiuser said. "They always need new people."

Martin, whose late father Gerald worked for Steed and Evans, says the construction industry must find a way to attract a new generation of workers.

"There's not much interest in this," he said. "The young kids are more computer-orientated. But there's lots of money to be made in this industry."

The student tour was organized by the Ontario Civil Construction Careers Institute, a non-profit group promoting careers in heavy construction to youth across Ontario.

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