

Drilling classes draw all kinds of prospects

By CASEY JUNKINS
For Shale Play

Preparing The Way

NEW MARTINSVILLE — Iraq War veteran Greg Starkey hopes the training he received during West Virginia Northern Community College's second natural gas rig class helps him land an industry job.

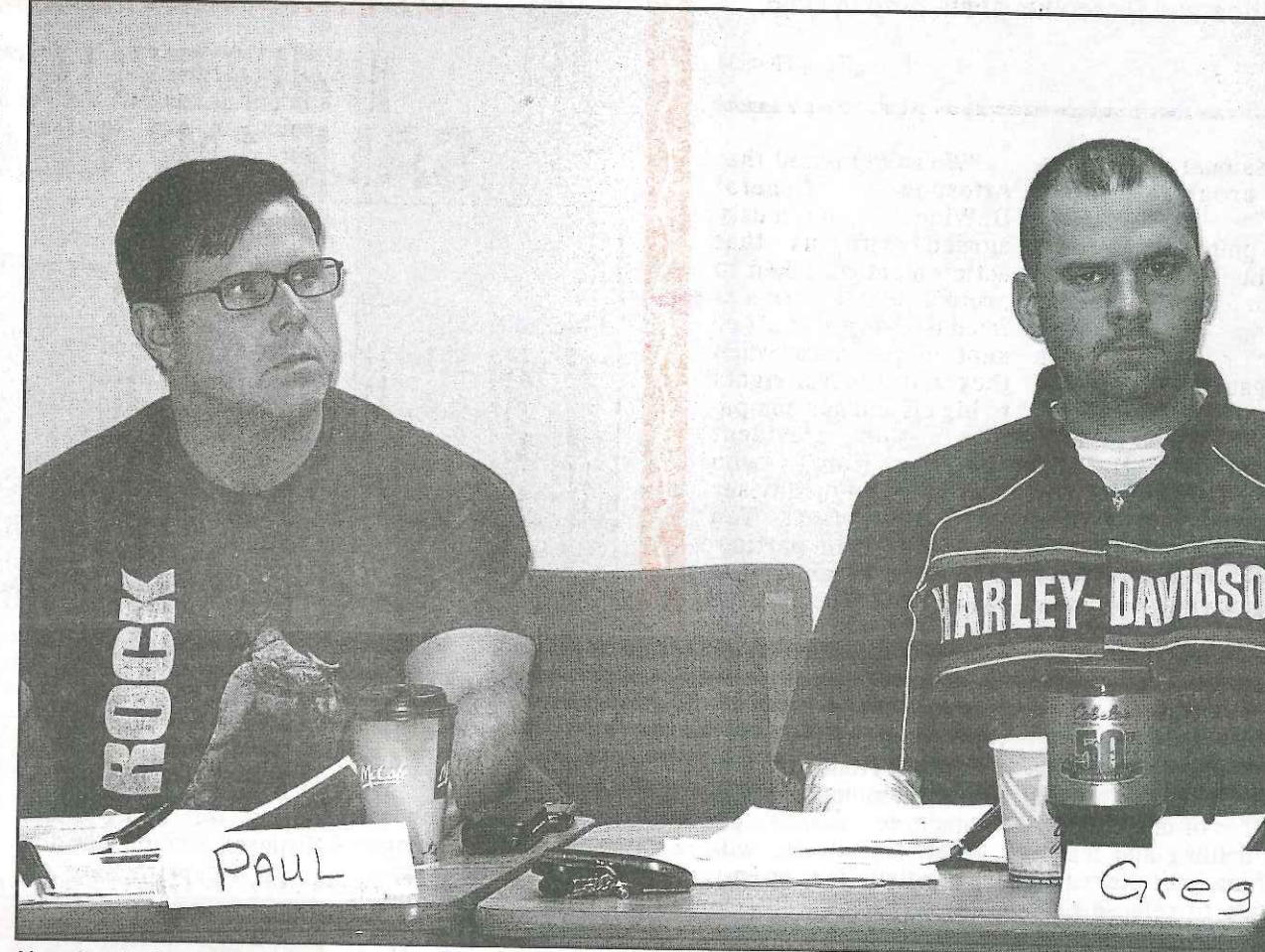
Fellow unemployed veteran Paul Cox spent about three hours on the road each day recently traveling from his New Cumberland residence to the college's New Martinsville campus to complete the training program, as he also hopes to break into the gas and oil drilling business.

The veterans joined 23 other students of various educational and cultural backgrounds for the free class recently. All the students hope to gain employment with natural gas and oil companies. Topics covered during the class included general safety, first aid, CPR, some basic knowledge of the actual drilling process and career opportunities in the field.

"I'm just asking for an opening, trying to get my foot in the door. This class should help me do that," said Starkey, 30, of Sistersville. "This whole industry is definitely a positive for the job situation around here."

Starkey said he holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Fairmont State University, while 46-year-old Cox said he holds the same degree from West Liberty University.

"This is the best thing



New Cumberland resident Paul Cox, left, and Sistersville resident Greg Starkey listen during West Virginia Northern Community College's second natural gas rig training class at the New Martinsville campus. (Casey Junkins)

to hit this Ohio Valley. This is going to be the boom area," Cox said.

Wayne Vanderhoof, an instructor at Pierpont Community and Technical College in Fairmont, made the trip to New Martinsville to teach the Thursday session. He said those completing the course would receive an International Association of Drilling Contractors rig pass that allows them to gain entry-level employment at a drilling site. Every

student enrolled in the course also submitted a drug test result.

"The students seem very interested," Vanderhoof said, noting he would give a safety examination late in the day. "They must score 80 out of 100 to pass."

Debbie Bennett, an office administrator for the college who helped with the class, said the students toured a Chesapeake Energy well site in Ohio County on Wednesday.

"They picked us up in Wheeling. They took us to Canonsburg (Pa.) for a question-and-answer session where they addressed a lot of questions the students had," she said.

"Chesapeake is top-notch," said Cox. "Everything about this has been great."

Stacey Brodak, senior director of corporate development for Chesapeake, said the training program helps familiarize students with safety

requirements and "helps socialize them to the environment of the 'oil-field' culture," which is unlike the traditional industrial environments found in the Ohio Valley.

"While passing the class does not guarantee a position, it can help place inexperienced candidates in a favorable light when seeking employment," she said.

Brodak said Chesapeake is assisting other training programs at Eastern Gateway Com-

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munity College in Steubenville. She said the most important element drilling companies are looking for in employees is the willingness to work and learn.

"Individuals who have been exposed to working in the elements, working with different types of machinery and working untraditional schedules usually work well in this industry," she added. "It's important to not focus solely on the rig for job creation; jobs in this field are more plentiful in service positions than they are on the rig."

New Martinsville Campus Dean Larry Tackett said at least one-third of the students who took the December class are now working in the oil and natural gas industry. He said the school is already working to set up its next rig hand class, as well as classes to teach local workers how to weld for the gas companies.

"We are looking at a site in Paden City where we may be able to teach the welding," said Tackett. "We should know when the next rig hand class will be by the end of this month."