

INTRODUCTION

In October 2022, the North Carolina Home Builders joined the North Carolina Forestry Association (NCFA) and other trade associations to celebrate the launch of Be Pro Be Proud NC, an initiative to generate student, parent, and educator interest in technical professions. Be Pro Be Proud NC uses two custom-built exhibition trailers equipped with virtual reality technology to give middle and high school students hands-on experience with skilled professions within the construction, manufacturing, transportation, and utility industries (Fig.1).



Figure. 1. Be Pro Be Proud NC trailer at an event in Charlotte, NC.

GENERAL FEATURES

This effort began in 2016 in direct response to pronouncements across business sectors: the workforce shortage is real, it is significant, and it is intensifying. At a time when employee responsibilities, requisite skill sets, and income opportunities are on the rise, student interest remains low. This lack of interest is due in large part to misinformation about realistic short- and long-term opportunities within these sectors.

The goal of Be Pro Be Proud is to change how individuals of all ages think about existing job opportunities within these sectors and engage them in becoming part of the solution. This model is being replicated across the United States. Be Pro Be Proud is actively engaged in Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina and preparing to launch efforts in New Mexico and Tennessee in 2023. Through hands-on simulator experiences delivered to the students where they live and learn, Be Pro Be Proud places them directly into real-world environments and provides the opportunity for them to imagine themselves in these roles (Fig. 2). While engaged in simulated experiences, students also learn how to access valuable training resources and where to pursue high-value career options.



Figure. 2. Andrew Parker, Executive Director of Be Pro Be Proud, trains a middle school student on the immersive experience.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

The Be Pro Be Proud Mobile Workshop has made more than 1,100 tour stops reaching 185,000 visitors to date – the great majority being teachers and students. More than 60,000 people have “Joined the Movement” and want more information about training and job opportunities in the promoted fields. Be Pro Be Proud directs these individuals to partner associations, companies, and post-secondary education centers so they can learn how to pursue success. The opportunities in technical fields are significant, lucrative, and essential. Those who recognize and pursue these opportunities will be America’s next generation of fortune creators.

Be Pro Be Proud has been credited with increased high school graduation rates, increased post-secondary enrollments, increased applicant interest, and in-classroom participation and motivation.

APPLICATION AND COST

Be Pro Be Proud is free to students in K-12 classes across the state of NC through a public-private partnership with the NC Department of Labor and the NC General Assembly, which has appropriated \$6.5 million to date. To book a stop at any NC school, [click here](#).

ABOUT THE CO-HOSTS

North Carolina Forestry Association

The [North Carolina Forestry Association](#) is a private, non-profit partnership of approximately 4,000 forest managers, landowners, mill operators, loggers, furniture manufacturers, educators, and others concerned about the long-term health and productivity of the state's forest resources and the industries they support. Mission Statement - The NCFA Ensures Healthy, Productive, and Sustainable Forests.



Be Pro Be Proud

Be Pro Be Proud is designed to create and generate student, parent and educator interest in technical professions within the construction, forestry, manufacturing, transportation, and utility industries by presenting them as high-tech, high-wage career paths of first choice. For more information, check out www.beprobeproudnc.org.

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