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First Joint Cohort of SRS Operator Apprentices Graduates from Aiken Tech Program

Over 100 apprentices across three contractors

AIKEN, S.C. (August 24, 2023) – The first joint cohort of Savannah River Site (SRS) Production Operator Apprentices recently graduated from Aiken Technical College’s Nuclear Fundamentals Program, marking the first time three SRS contractors jointly held the program.

The Production Operator Apprentice program started as a partnership with managing and operating contractor, Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS), Aiken Technical College (Aiken Tech), Apprenticeship Carolina™ (AC), and the Lower Savannah Council of Governments. The eight-month program simultaneously allows for students to complete their classroom work and on-the-job training by allowing them to spend two days a week in the classroom and two days a week on Site. At the end of the program, participants will have earned a certificate in nuclear fundamentals.

“The apprenticeship program is a great model showing the impact of linking education and industry,” said Aiken Tech President Forest E. Mahan, Ph.D. “Participants can earn a college credential, receive on-the-job training, network, and be mentored throughout the program. It is a formula that prepares our students for success and continued career advancement for years to come.”

For this round of operator apprentices, SRNS joined with Savannah River Mission Completion (SRMC), the liquid waste contractor at SRS, and the Savannah River National Laboratory (SRNL) to offer over 100 openings for the program. Apprentices learned the basic qualifications of a production operator, including conduct of operations principles, radiation worker training and qualification, and how to perform shift rounds. Those who successfully completed the program were hired and put to work in areas across SRS.

A ceremony was held August 17, 2023, to honor the over 100 graduates of the program. The program featured opening remarks from representatives of Aiken Tech and each of the three SRS contractors involved. Special guest speakers included Department of Energy-Savannah River Deputy Manager Edwin DeShong and South Carolina Representative Bart Blackwell, along with three graduating participants.

SRNS Production Operator Apprentice Terrence Tillman was one of the three students to speak. “This is going to change my lifestyle, I will have more time to do things with my family,” he said. “Knowing what the job entails and what its purpose is, I feel like I’m helping the country and the community.”

SRMC received the largest class of operators in its history with 51 new hires set out to fill key roles in various SRS liquid waste facilities. Forty-six of the graduates will go to work for SRNS and five were hired by SRNL.

“We are thrilled to have our newly trained class of operators, the largest in our recent hiring history, join Savannah River Mission Completion full time,” said Dr. Dave Olson, SRMC President and Program Manager. “Production operators play a key role in the safe and efficient operations of our nuclear facilities and will be a tremendous asset as we continue our mission to safely reduce the risk to the community and the environment of radioactive liquid waste stored at SRS.”

SRNS is also welcoming its largest production operator apprentice cohort to date.

“At this moment, the eyes of the country truly are on the Savannah River Site as we continue to execute our vital national security and cleanup missions,” said SRNS President and CEO Dennis Carr. “Outside of the contributions that our apprentices will inevitably make in making the world safer, they can be also proud of the large impact their work at SRS will have in the community.”

“SRNS currently has 22 apprenticeship programs,” said Booboo Roberts, Program Manager for Apprenticeship and Pipeline Training. “It’s an honor to be a part of helping our company prepare for the future and to help our students reach a better quality of life.”

The Production Operator Apprenticeship Program is part of Apprenticeship Carolina™ (AC). AC is a division of the South Carolina Technical College System and leads South Carolina in registered apprenticeship programs that help businesses and communities thrive economically. With the guidance of AC as well as the Lower Savannah Council of Governments, the operator apprenticeship program has been registered both with the state and nationally.



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