



Guy Quenneville/NNSL photos

The 12 students taking the new diamond driller helper program come from a variety of NWT communities, from Fort Resolution to Tuktoyaktuk. Back row, from left: Kristopher Robert, Douglas Vaneltsi, Bradley Voudrach, Herman Abel and Alan Mandeville; middle row: Gary J. Jerome, Cliff Tsetta, Darren Rabesca and Kevin Fatt; and, front row: Rodney Norn, Ashley Buckley and Freddie Collins.

A first time for everything

Program partners train exploration drillers; men to gain experience at Thor Lake

by Guy Quenneville
Northern News Services
Somba K'e/Yellowknife

Mineral exploration company Avalon Ventures, in partnership with the NWT Mine Training Society and Deton/Cho Development Cor-

poration, is breaking ground with a new training program devoted to exploration drilling.

"It's the first program where a junior exploration company is the lead industry partner," said Bill Mercer, vice

president of exploration for Avalon, which is developing a rare earth deposit at Thor Lake, about 100 km southeast of Yellowknife, and will be drilling at the site this summer.

Rare earths are critical components for high-strength magnets used in everything from flat screen TVs to hybrid cars. Demand for them has risen recently with the rising green trend.

The eight-week course runs seven days a week and is specifically aimed toward NWT aboriginal residents or people of aboriginal descent.

It began Feb. 1, with 12 students coming from communities around the NWT, from Fort Resolution to Tuktoyaktuk.

The curriculum is based on a program in Ontario.

"The only jurisdiction in Canada that has set qualifications for being a driller is Ontario, which has a thing called Common Core, which covers not just drilling but everything to do with mining – mine drilling or exploratory drilling," said Mercer.

"What Common Core has is a series of individual qualifications," he explained. "It's like when you do a university degree – there are a whole bunch of subjects, and according to whether you're going to be a surface driller or an underground driller, there's a different group of these qualifications that you need."

"What we've brought into

the NWT is the concept of following Ontario's Common Core. Other provinces are looking at it."

The course, which will train the students to work as driller's helpers, will be followed by apprenticeships.

"The people coming out of the course will get one sort of certification. Then they have to work in the field for maybe six months. At the end of that they'll be certified under Common Core," said Mercer.

Two Avalon contractors who will be drilling at Thor Lake this summer, Foraco International SA and Boart Longyear, have indicated they will take on candidates for six months of field work after the course.

"We were talking about how we could help people in the North get the qualifications so that they can start participating in the more qualified jobs, as opposed to being the guys who just cut down trees and shovel the snow and stuff like that," said Mercer.

Improving skills

Cliff Tsetta of Ndilo said he heard about the course from a friend. A week later, he was confirmed as a student.

A welder by trade, Tsetta was recently laid off by Nuna Logistics and has been unsuccessful in getting a new job in his field.

"It's an excellent opportunity to learn some new stuff and also as a backup. For me, it's a double hit, because

Diamond Driller Helper Program Students and Home Communities

Herman Abel	Lutsel K'e
Kevin Fatt	Lutsel K'e
Gary J. Jerome	Fort McPherson
Alan Mandeville	Fort Resolution
Rodney Norn	Fort Resolution
Darren Rabesca	Behchoko
Kristopher Robert	Fort McPherson
Freddie Collins	Fort Resolution
Cliff Tsetta	Ndilo
Douglas Vaneltsi	Fort McPherson
Bradley Voudrach	Tuktoyaktuk
Ashley Buckley	Yellowknife

Source: David Connelly

drillers also need welders," he said.

"I could do both things at once. It's kind of like having a dual ticket."

There's also a more personal reason behind Tsetta taking the course: he wants to get his life back on track, so he can support his children, son Keegan, 14, and daughter, Dzewa, 11, who live with his ex-wife in Edmonton.

"I haven't done so in a while," he said. "Now, that's the biggest priority."

New economic circumstances also prompted Ashley Buckley of Yellowknife, who's had some experience in surface mining at Diavik Diamond Mine, to take the course.

He was managing his father's fish plant, Buckley's Fish, until decreased business

meant the company had to cut back. Buckley decided to leave to help out – and find a new line of work.

"It will definitely teach me new things because old habits from other runners" – those who actually run the drill – "do pass on to the helpers, which is not always the correct procedure to do things," he said. "So taking this course will help me to learn the proper methods and proper terminology for the drills and parts."

And if the current economy makes it hard to find a job in the NWT, he's flexible.

"Other than Northern Canada and that, there's a lot other places you can go, like Chile," said Buckley. "There's a great demand over there for drillers. I would contract from Canada to go there, do a six month term, and then come back."



Cliff Tsetta of Ndilo, wearing a Superman T-shirt that he said speaks to his strong drive to succeed, said taking the course will help him learn the lingo of drilling work. "I know a lot of drillers personally and I'm always hearing them talk about this and that," he said. "It'll be nice to get into those conversations."