



Seabees impart skills and build hope for eager Iraqi construction tradesmen

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPH BY BU2 JEROME KIRKLAND

AL ANBAR PROVINCE, Iraq — After the initial success of the Iraqi Construction Apprentice Program (ICAP), members of Naval Mobile Construction Battalions (NMCB) began additional rounds of

teaching construction skills to Iraqi youth.

The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force Engineer Group (IMEG) runs the overall program and provides guidance to instructors from NMCBs 74 and 23. IMEG funds the

projects and overseeing ICAP classes, which are conducted in four cities. NMCB 23 assumed the program when that battalion relieved NMCB 14.

The ICAP is designed to teach enough basic construction skills to 14-25-year-old Iraqi students that they can then get a meaningful job in their local communities. The classes are organized to give each student an overview of electrical, carpentry, plumbing, and masonry trades so that the students can later concentrate on the construction field they most want to pursue.

The program is divided into two stages, beginning with six to eight weeks of classroom and hands-on instruction followed by four to six weeks of on-the-job training. The schedule is flexible to allow the program to be tailored to student needs.

ICAP has been so successful that hundreds of local Iraqis want to attend. Plans to expand the program are in development. The program helps Iraqi youth earn new respect in their local communities, provides new jobs and helps the Iraqi people rebuild their country and their future.

Upon completion of the ICAP program, students are awarded a completion certificate and a prized tool belt containing such tools as hammers, tape measures, squares, screwdrivers, chalk lines and retractable razors.

The tool belts are a gift of friendship from the American people via the nonprofit group Spirit of America. SoA provides students the basic tools needed to begin their careers in the construction trades.

Since OJT training runs concurrently with a new class, new instructors were added, bringing the new total to seven. One of the new instructors, Equipment Operator Constructionman Thomas Gilberti, from Delray Beach, Fla., said, "This is what we came here to do, to help the Iraqi people." When asked to describe his young students, Gilberti's comment was "They're just like American kids."

Another new instructor, Builder 2nd Class Nathan Allen, Jr., from Green Acres, Fla., said, "I like the idea about helping them out because they're a bunch of young guys just starting out." 🌐

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