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*Air Conditioning & Refrigeration Program:*  
**Strong Workforce Program Building on ECC Compton Center's Successes**

It's students like Carzie Jones and Jose Solomon Cabello who exemplify the spirit and the goals of the newly launched statewide Strong Workforce Program.

Both are in El Camino College Compton Center's Air Conditioning & Refrigeration (ACR) program, both are in their 40s, both are making career changes, and both say the program is changing their lives.

"The ACR program is a good thing for Compton," Cabello said. "It's making a difference in our community and is an opportunity for those who really want to make a change in their lives."

As ECC Compton Center embarks on its three-year Strong Workforce Program, it can look to its ACR program – and students like Jones and Cabello – as a model of success.

The Strong Workforce Program is a \$200 million statewide program designed to boost Career and Technical Education programs on community college campuses throughout California. Under the program, ECC Compton Center is receiving just over \$716,000 annually in state funds, beginning this academic year for three years.

The funding comes with requirements that colleges demonstrate that their programs are improving, both in terms of quantity and quality. They must show progress in such areas as increased enrollment, completion and transfer rates, employment, and proportion of students who attain a living wage.

Although improvements must be shown in all Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, much can be learned from its Air Conditioning and Refrigeration program, said Dean of Student Learning Dr. Rodney Murray.

The first CTE program started at ECC Compton Center, in 2009, ACR grew slowly in its early years but at the end of the 2015-16 school year it issued 37 certificates to graduates.

"That was really high for our program, and it was the first time it was higher than the number of graduates in our nursing program," said Dale Ueda, ACR instructor and program coordinator.

The program, which typically takes 1 ½ years to complete, prepares students for federal Environmental Protection Agency-approved certificates in repairs for HVACR – Heating,

Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration – and in automotive air conditioning, Ueda said. The certificates never expire and are good around the world, he said.

In addition, the program has a Success and Retention Rate of 90 percent, and job opportunities are excellent, both nationwide and in Los Angeles County, Ueda said.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that there were 292,000 jobs in the field in 2014, with a median pay in 2015 of \$45,110 a year. The national job outlook projects the demand for workers in the field will increase by 14 percent from 2014 to 2024, a growth rate much faster than average for all professions. Ueda said the job growth rate projection is similar for Los Angeles County.

While the data looks good for the program, the human impact is perhaps even more impressive.

Jones, 41, enrolled in the program in January after working three years running a restaurant kitchen and, before that, getting laid off from his job as a real estate consultant for Chase Bank.

“I was tired of living paycheck to paycheck and not seeing much of a future in the restaurant business,” Jones said.

So, after researching some of the technical professions and saving money, he sold his car and devoted himself full-time to being an ACR student. Most days he walks to campus, a 5-mile round trip from his North Long Beach home.

“The program has changed me,” he said. “When I first started at ECC Compton Center, I didn’t have many friends and I was not very sociable. But now I feel like I’m part of a brotherhood. It’s boosted my confidence because I will often explain things to other students.”

Jones also said that he enjoys being secretary of the ACR Icebreakers Club, which volunteers to help out at various campus events, partially as a way to build teamwork.

Cabello, 49, who started the program in August 2015 and graduates this month, has also found the ACR program rewarding. Owner of a family-run restaurant, Pizza King on Alondra Boulevard in Compton, Cabello first got interested in refrigeration from his business.

“As soon as I got my pizza place, I needed technicians to fix my refrigerators, and received bills of \$500 to \$700,” he said.

But the father of four adults said it was his 23-year-old son – himself an ECC Compton Center student – who told him about the ACR program. In fact, father and son graduate together from the program Dec. 14.

Cabello said not only can he fix his refrigerators himself now, he is in a position to start a new career in ACR because his family can run the pizza restaurant.

Murray said ECC Compton Center has formed a Strong Workforce Program Task Force, which is in discussions on how best to use the state funding. He said it has been decided that first-year funds should be used to enhance programs by making them state-of-the-art and by hiring various experts to meet the goals of the program.

The CTE programs under the Strong Workforce Program, aside from ACR, are Auto Technology, Auto Collision & Repair, Welding, Machine Tool Technology, Administration of Justice, Business, Computer Information Systems, Cosmetology, Early Childhood Education, Fashion, Fire & Emergency Technology, Manufacturing Technology, Nursing and Real Estate.

For more information about the El Camino College Compton Center Career and Technical Education Programs programs, please visit [www.compton.edu/academics/cte](http://www.compton.edu/academics/cte) or call 310-900-1600, ext. 2780.

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### **About El Camino College Compton Center**

El Camino College Compton Center is the community's education solution offering a full complement of transfer and degree courses, as well as career and technical education. Students may earn an associate degree or certificate, transfer to a four-year university or train for a career. El Camino College Compton Center is located at 1111 E. Artesia Boulevard, Compton, CA 90221.

**Photo available online:**

<http://www.compton.edu/campusinformation/currentnews/Photos/2016/ACR-Strongworkforce-ComptonCenter.jpg>

**Caption:** *Carzie Jones (left) and Jose Solomon Cabello (right), pictured with Dale Ueda, Air Conditioning & Refrigeration (ACR) instructor, are both in their 40s, both are making career changes, and both say the ACR program is changing their lives.*