

# Program aids unemployed, underemployed

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**MASON CITY** — Robert Walker decided to go back to school after his job was moved to Mexico a few years ago.

The Mason City resident received his associate degree as well as a building trades diploma from North Iowa Area Community College.

After that, he said he thought he should “find out what I know versus what I thought I knew.”

That’s why he enrolled in WorkKeys, a job skills assessment system developed by the educational company ACT to advance education and employment opportunities for unemployed and underemployed workers.



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Celeste Christensen, adult literacy instructor at North Iowa Area Community College, and Robert Walker talk about the WorkKeys program which Walker is currently participating in.

NIACC recently received a grant from the Staples Foundation to offer this program to the public for free.

This system incorporates the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) assessment program and KeyTrain learning curriculum.

NIACC is offering KeyTrain classes on Fridays.

The assessment program has different levels of certification designed to match the expectations of employers, according to Jessica Putnam, director of learning support at NIACC.

She said NIACC can help people improve their status.

The first time he took the assessment, Walker achieved the highest level of certification in all

areas except one — locating information — where he just missed the highest level.

Walker, who is launching his own bathroom remodeling business called The Tub Guy, is attending the KeyTrain class at NIACC to prepare to take the assessment again in hopes of achieving the highest level in all areas because “I’m a little stubborn.”

He also said he’s hoping it will “give me a little more confidence.”

Mary Schultz, adult literacy coordinator at NIACC, said the certificate is something job applicants can take to a potential employer along with their resume.

The certificate tells the employer what kind of skills the applicant has.

“It’s wonderful,” she said.

Those interested in learning more about the program can contact Schultz at 641-422-4176 or visit [www.niacc.edu/learningsupport/workkeys.html](http://www.niacc.edu/learningsupport/workkeys.html).

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