>> Hello and welcome to the Valley. Today I'm your host, Janet Michael, it is Laurel Ridge Community College. Today I am back on the screen with guy Curtis, he is their Director of Marketing. We've got a cool program, we're going to talk about today. Guy, we always have cool programs to talk about. You bring something cool and fun every single month when we have a conversation.

>> That's the best part of the job. We get to highlight the greatest and the latest things that are happening on campus and what we're doing for our local community. Excited to share some upcoming programs that are happening on campus and one of the high demand areas, information technology. I'm glad to have a couple of colleagues on the call today.

>> Joining us is Samantha Brill, she is a program manager. Rafael Caballero is with us as well, he is an adjunct IT instructor. We're going to be talking about IT programs today Rafael. You are an instructor for that. Are you the guy that all of your family members call when their email doesn't work or their phone isn't doing what they think it should?

>> Then some, yes.

>> I'm that person for my family. I have no training and no knowledge, so I feel for you, I really do.

>> Yes, it's a cursed title, for sure.

>> Let's talk a little bit about some of these programs because IT is hot right now. Everybody thinks they want to be an IT, but I think a lot of people have this misconception that you got to know more than you do, to get started in this field. What are some of the misconceptions that you run into?

>> Some of the misconceptions are, they initially think that they can take a course and all of a sudden make six figures or work from home. That's not necessarily the case, because you have to have a lot more field experience, a lot more training, and one class doesn't cut it. You'd have to have additional classes and you'd have to have the quality training that we provide here at workforce solutions.

>> In this program for data center technician, you don't necessarily have to have any IT knowledge. There is a pathway where you can start from zero and literally work your way into this program.

>> That's correct. There's numerous courses that you have to take prior to that.

>> When we're talking about a data center technician, what is that exactly?

>> Data center technician is a person that is well rounded in various facets of

a data center. They have to understand electronics, they have to understand our requirements, they have to understand the complexity of networking. They have to understand some of the basic fundamentals of how to turn a screw driver on a piece of equipment or turn a circuit breaker on or off. They also have to know how to run conduit and cabling and repair those types of data as well. Also, the other fundamentals that go along with it.

>> I think sometimes people think when you hear that term data center technician, that it literally is just sitting in front of a computer. But you're right, there is a physical aspect to this as well.

>> Yes, there is. You can do anything from taking a piece of equipment and installing it on a rack, to actually building an entire rack, or building an entire raceway to run the cables that go inside of that. Then there's also the configuration, so to speak, of network devices that you have to put so the customers are available, so there's a lot of things that take place. It's not a one and done type thing. You'll have to be well rounded in those barrier assets.

>> Sam, is this a program that Laurel Ridge has offered for a while? Is it new? Is it bigger? What's different about it now?

>> No, it is a brand new program. I don't think it's any secret to anyone. All the different data centers that are popping up all over Virginia, and it's not stopping anytime soon. We have been watching, we've been talking to employers. There's a definite need, an increased demand for these data center technicians. It was time for us to put together a training program to meet that demand.

>> You work a lot with those data centers, the employers in the area, because Guy and I have talked multiple times over the last several years about that partnership with local employers so that you're training the staff that they will need at some point in the future to grow their business.

>> Yes, absolutely. We have already been around visiting multiple different data centers. In the last few months, we've talked with a number of employers just to really understand what they need and how to build out a quality program.

>> Is this program specific to a particular campus? Is it online? Do you have a certain building? How does it work to actually go through the course?

>> As of right now, with our space limitations, the classes will kick off in our Middletown campus. We are hoping very soon to expand out to fall here. Right now it'll be starting off in Middletown.

>> These programs fall under that fast forward and G3 funding that we talk about a lot on the show, which is super cool because A, it's fast and B, you get to get through it with a lot less out of pocket.

>> Yes, absolutely. As long as a student has lived in Virginia for the last year and potentially meet some income requirements, they could get these classes free.

>> Guy Curtis, you like free?

>> You had me at free, Sam. Yeah, I think having these funding options and folks understand the options, especially IT. There's so many ins and outs in different careers, but certainly the data center one sounds very intriguing, what Rafael described. Wow, you like working with your hands a little bit and understand the tech. That sounds like a cool environment. Especially some of the football size field type facilities that are being put into Virginia. Send one of the locations that you guys tour just a couple of weeks ago. There are massive facilities that require this technician. That's just one of many roles that are in these data center facilities. If you think about the Amazons of the world and all the data that's moving across the globe, it is a high demand area and there's always going to be a need for it. It's great that we're here providing these solutions, like meet those in demand needs. But also the funding that backs the individual, so they can come into the class knowing that their return is going to be well worth it. Certainly finding a job right away, but also not launch out of pocket as well. Two, they're part time on weekends or weekdays where they can conveniently still work at home or whatever it may be and accomplish their degree and move forward with our program.

>> When we were talking earlier about misconceptions, I think that a lot of people see these data centers and they just look like these big, stark buildings. We hear a lot about, the robots are taking our jobs. That's not necessarily the case, particularly for data centers, because while it may be a giant building full of a lot of equipment and machinery, you have to have these technicians to keep all of that working and running. That's where the people will come in.

>> Yes, you need someone staffed at a data center or multiple people 24 hours, 7 days a week. Someone has to be there to troubleshoot, because if you think about it, one server, if it goes down business could lose millions of dollars in a matter of 5 minutes. They need to be fully staffed.

>> Do you find that people come into the classes, Rafael, and they really don't know the scale of the type of position that they're about to take on?

>> Yeah, that tends to be the case. They're making a career change or they're new to the IT field, they're fresh out of high school, or they are already in the field, but they're not exactly sure what they want to do. They're working in some type of capacity, maybe a help desk or just answering phones at a call center, so to speak. Once they come into the course, one of the things that we had instructors do is we go over the students with what they call a CompTIA career path. We show them the various classes that are available and also the career paths that they choose to take. We help them along the way and we

point them to the career counselor when they need to get more information.

>> A lot of these career paths have intersections too, where you can start out on this path and then maybe get this certification. It leads you down a separate path so that it's all related but still on the same road.

>> Yeah. All of our CompTIA courses are stackable. Students have the capacity to start out under one pathway, and if they decide, maybe I don't really want to do a help desk job for the rest of my life, they can transition over under project management or they can go in a whole different path and go down software developing. There's numerous pathways, all stackable, all lead to great in demand careers.

>> Let's take a break when we come back, Rafael, will you walk me through what a typical class is like? What things I'm going to learn, how long it takes when we talk about fast track, how fast is that really? Can we talk about that in the next segment?

>> Sure.

>> We're on the screen today for Laurel Ridge Community College day, Guy Curtis is on the zoom with me, he is their Director of Marketing. Joining him is Sam Brill, she is a program manager along with Rafael Caballero. He is an adjunct IT instructor. We're going to talk more about the data center technician program when we come back in just a couple of minutes.

>> This Saturday, Henry Mueller will change the world. He has no idea that's what he's going to do. He only knows that he went to Justserve.org and signed up to spend time at a senior center Saturday morning. As he browsed through service opportunities in his own community, he remembered the words of Paul to the Galatians, by love serve one another. Little does Henry know that Saturday morning he'll end up speaking to one senior in particular, who hasn't seen his family in several weeks and is feeling especially lonely. Henry doesn't know the short time he'll spend with this man will lift his spirits, cheer his heart, and make his life just a little better. Through love and service. This Saturday, Henry Mueller will change the world, see the difference you can make. Sign up for service opportunities in your community. Visit Justserve.org.

>> Welcome back to the valley. Today, I'm your host, Janet Michael, is Laurel Ridge Community College. Today we are on the zoom today with Guy Curtis, he is Director of Marketing for Laurel Ridge Community College. Joining him is Samantha Brill. She is the program manager along with Rafael Caballero. He is an adjunct IT instructor. We've been talking about the data center technician program. Rafael, I'm curious how the process looks. If I have a high school student who's graduating in June or I'm a 30, 40, 50 something that has decided, I'm done working retail or done working in an office, and this is something I want to do. What does it look like once I register for the very first

class?

>> Typically when the students come on board, we give them an orientation the first day of class. What the expectations are of the course, the course requirements, the passing grades, and things of that nature. The courses typically run 40 hours, which is two days a week. What might be a four hour class on one day and another 6 hour class day. But typically they generally run 5 hours per day per class. Inside the class, they have 40 hours. The class includes labs and things that help them overcome the course material. Outside of class, they can expect to work about 10 to 12 hours on study to include external labs, review for the tests and things of that nature. Once that course completes, they're given about 10 days to take the exam and pass. Once they pass that exam, they're able to move on to the next leg. Typically a student that wants to go to the data center technician program can expect to do over 280 hours total before they're comfortable in securing a position.

>> I really like that these seem to be structured, like you just mentioned, two days a week because you can still have a full time job then and be taking some of these classes while you're still employed somewhere else doing something else.

>> Correct. Many of our students come in or either straight out of high school, as you mentioned, or people that are making career changes. Of course, it's great for people that are making career changes or you have the part time people that are working part time or maybe a housewife who wants to make a career change. They're able to take classes in the evenings and we also offer classes on the weekends. They have to start with ITF fundamentals. Then from there, after that particular class, they'll move on to A+ and then from A+ plus they'll move on to Network+, and then from Network+ to Server+, and then we're in the data center realm.

>> I am by no means an expert or even slightly knowledgeable, but I know those terms that you just used, the A+, and things along those lines. I see a lot of that requirement in job descriptions online. This class while you may start it thinking you want to end as a data center technician, you're really getting a lot of skill sets that you're going to be able to apply in any number of other IT jobs that you're going to have to have that base knowledge anyway.

>> That's correct. The ITF, as we call it IT fundamentals, that gives you an overall picture. It covers everything from initial networking, databases, virtualization, maybe some Linux in there as well and also security. It gives you a real rounded scope of what you're expecting to move forward with. Then when you move on to the later courses such as A+ and Network+ and even Security+ for that matter, they're more focused on those particular pathways. As Samantha mentioned earlier, they are stackable certifications. As you get one certification, you move on to the next step. You'll receive that certification but also become another stackable certification. Later on if you want to change

a career path, you can do so.

>> It sounds like it would be very easy to do just that and decide, you know what? Now I've learned through this particular course that I am really more interested in cybersecurity or I am really more interested in programming of some sort. Then you just move off in that direction with this space already behind you.

>> That's correct. You can easily do that, but it also takes effort. These classes are challenging, especially for someone who's new to the field or unaware like yourself. You do have to put forth the effort, but the rewards are outstanding once you're done with it. But you come in with lack of experience, but when you're done with the courses and you work your way through the certifications, you'd be surprised how many people feel that sense of accomplishment.

>> Do you think that there is a certain personality trait, maybe for people that are perfect for this type of position? In my mind, I'm thinking someone who is analytical, someone who thinks this step, then this step, then this step or someone who likes to be able to start and finish something all at the same time. Are those personality traits that would be helpful for this type of a career?

>> That is definitely a welcome advantage to having that because you do have steps by steps. We've been able to take people that have changed from a retail and being in the retail for 15 years and now working at the government in an IT field. We have had the success stories come through our program.

>> When we talk about this being a fast track program, you mentioned earlier, it's about 240 hours, so that's what? Six months, nine months. How long is that in real time?

>> That's spread out over the course of the year. Again, since it is a part time course, they're able to take two classes a week with cycle breaks in between the classes. They're able to move forward and complete that. That's the total collective hours that they have to go through.

>> That means that within a year, somebody could literally go from working in an office to actually being a data center technician in any of the data centers that are fairly close, that are right here in the Shenandoah Valley?

>> Yes.

>> That is correct.

>> Then Sam, when we're talking about that final position, is there a high demand for that here locally?

>> There are so many different types of data centers. You have very large

scale data centers to very small data centers. They range, but yes, we do have them right here in our backyard.

>> It's not a bad first year salary range. Always a range because every company is going to be different and their requirements are going to be different and their starting salaries are always going to be different. But it's not a bad out of the gate, let's get started paycheck.

>> Right now, the average yearly salary within a 25 mile radius of Middletown is anywhere from 62-65 thousand a year.

>> Which is absolutely nothing to sneeze at when you can get it in less than a year.

>> Absolutely.

>> You're going to be overloaded with this program. People are going to listen today and now they're going to start calling. They're going to start coming by the college and you're going to have to add second and third and fourth classes. You're going to clone yourself. Rafael, that's a whole another class you'll have to learn.

>> That's good. Then I'll just get so many students to the course.

>> Yes.

>> You can't see us right now, but we're actually sitting in our lab that we are currently building out. We are bringing in server racks for students to actually work on, so we're having our own little mock data center.

>> When will these classes start? Do they start with the start of the semester? Do they start at the beginning of the year? Do they have staggered starts?

>> They're staggered starts, so for someone who just brand new to IT, the next IT fundamentals class will kick off mid January. But for someone who's maybe already in the field, our Server+ first class that's really honing in on the data center technician will kick off in March.

>> Guy, for these hordes of people that are listening right now and they're like, set me up, how do I do it? I have to assume that you either are going to have an info session or you've just had one that I can watch the replay of. Which of those two is the case here?

>> Yes, we had a session just last week, but it's not too late to rewatch it. We have it on demand so you can look at the session through our website, laurelridgeworkforce.com. Just go down through the navigation menu and look for upcoming events and you'll see the latest listing and future events to our upcoming information sessions. It's a great opportunity to get really into the

deep dive of how Sam and Rafael laid out the programs. There's a great student handbook also to get and look through and realize your long-term potential with those programs and the expectations as well. I think that nicely frames up what folks may anticipate for the class. I think a neat nugget to plug with this program is that there is through the CompTIA coursework, Sam has outlined some of the credit for prior learning. Like she mentioned before, it is very stackable with the credentials that are offered, that are fast track and I would say the non-credit options. But there are also other opportunities to build on top of that. Once you become a technician and move forward in your career path, the college as a whole has a lot of opportunity when it comes to additional coursework and IT. But to learn more about the data center technician program that's up and coming, I would recommend folks to visit laurelridge.edu and search the keyword data center technician. That will give them a lot more details about that particular role. A cool thing on the site too is this nice little widget that showcases those upcoming salaries, the job postings related to the data center technician role. That's a great way to just take a deep dive in those opportunities and those employers are looking for folks who would go through the program. Additionally, Sam and Rafael also mentioned that fundamentals class, that CompTIA course, starting roughly the second week of January. You want to get involved with that class as soon as possible, so that's where your first starting point would be. Visiting laurelridgeworkforce.com/CompTIA, that's a great page that actually goes over all the programs entirely in the steps and progression you would get through to eventually get to that data center technician role. It's an awesome opportunity. Certainly if the website is not exhaustive enough for you or that pass information session, we do have a great team of operations folks who can help with registration and that process, helping people walk through the financial assistance application they would want to submit before coming in. That's a key thing about this particular program, you don't necessarily apply to the college. It's actually a different enrollment strategy and process. Simply filling out a financial assistance application to see if you're G3 or fast forward eligible and then from there you would enroll into the course. If there's any fees and things up front depending on that person, they would be due at the time. But otherwise, you need to start as early as January and those folks can help you out. If you're still undecided and you need to have someone to talk to, there's an awesome resource within the Workforce Office, her name is Lisa Heiser. She's the fast forward career coach who can give the additional assistance on some of those details between roles and positions of IT to other careers like trades, or healthcare, or even advanced manufacturing. She can provide additional support for those who are uncertain about their next steps.

>> I love that you guys offer so many different options for people who are on the fence. Because Community College typically is one of those places where you think you should go and you think you should start, but you're not sure exactly how to pull the trigger or where to actually make that first step. You guys make it so easy no matter where you are in the process or what you think you might want to do to just be able to walk in the door and there is somebody

behind one of those office desks that is going to be able to help move you forward.

>> That's right. I think it stayed around 97% of our students would recommend us to other folks for a number of reasons. But it is that front line staff and I think that you hit it on the head there, Jane, as far as having us help you navigate your pathway. I think it's the biggest challenge because all the jobs that were described today and the opportunities with data center technician, there's so many ins and outs and opportunities. But it depends on where you want to go and how you want to get there and how long do you have to get there. Sometimes a person can actually just walk you through it. We're at that events here. We have AI, we have some programs are going to be rolling up some AI very soon. We have a lot of support with ChatGPT and everything else. But sometimes you still need a person in a human connection to help you navigate through that process. Certainly Sam and Rafael on the team can help you with that as well too. But sometimes just that initial point of contact will help you move forward. Definitely reach out, ask the questions, and make sure you're not taking unnecessary steps, you don't need to. I think that's where Laurel Ridge really excels with a lot of programs offered that really meet the demands of the employers of the region, but also makes it very affordable and efficient for folks who want to come here.

>> Sam, thank you for coming back and doing the show again. I always worry when I have somebody on once or twice that they never want to come back again. I was happy to see your face on the screen today.

>> Thank you so much for the invite. Happy to join at any time.

>> Rafael, you've done it now once, so don't be shocked if Guy reaches out and says, hey, you want to come back and talk about phase 2 of this program?

>> I'm just the phone call away.

>> Guy Curtis as always, it is always great to talk to you. You do such a good job. Can I do an employee evaluation and send over to Kim and say, hey, that Guy Curtis, he really knows his stuff, he needs a raise and another week's vacation. Would that help at all?

>>I think that would be greatly appreciated. College is coming and it'd be great to have that. It's awesome. Thank you, Jane. It's a pleasure to work with you and be on the radio and share the great things we offer at the college.

>> I'm looking forward to 2024. Thank you.

>> Same here. We have that date already set, right? We're going to be ready to go.

>> Of course.

>> Well done.

>> In the meantime, there is still one more day left in a week. I will be back tomorrow with a brand new episode of the Valley Today a few minutes afternoon, so meet me here then.