

# DAILY TIMES

## Williamson students engage in learning expeditions with POBS



Williamson College of the Trades student on the elevated ropes course at the Discovery Center in Fairmont Park as part of the Philadelphia Outward Bound School's program. "It builds trust and we had fun together," says a Williamson student. (COURTESY OF WILLIAMSON)

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For the past four years, Williamson College of the Trades has literally and figuratively been taking its freshman orientation program to new heights thanks to engagement with Philadelphia Outward Bound School (POBS).

Williamson leadership connected with POBS, a nonprofit experiential education organization that serves people of all ages and backgrounds through active learning expeditions that inspire character development, self-discovery and service.

Williamson's mission is to prepare the young men entering the school to be confident leaders, pursue fulfilling careers, and be productive members of society.

A customized curriculum was developed for a one-day Williamson freshman program at POBS headquarters, The Discovery Center in Philadelphia.

The POBS experience for the first class of freshmen made such an impact on the students, the program has continued for four consecutive years, engaging nearly 500 students in life-changing activities.

“Williamson and POBS look at the same goals: fostering teamwork and confidence building,” said Dr. Todd Zachary, Williamson provost. “The POBS program ties in beautifully with our program goals and is the perfect fit for our freshman students.”

Another commonality between POBS and Williamson is a dedication to leveling the playing field to ensure all people have access to the education and life lessons that build prosperous futures, whether that education is more traditional like a trade school, or innovative like the challenging outdoor learning programs POBS has employed to enrich the lives of approximately 75,000 Philadelphia School District students.

Williamson dedicates itself to empowering students in financial need, ensuring that each student gets a scholarship with full tuition, room and board while pursuing a three-year Associate in Specialized Technology degree in one of six trades.

“POBS puts our students in a different environment they aren’t used to and that makes them uncomfortable, and we want that,” Zachary said. “During the program, students make strong and very important connections with classmates to succeed, and they succeed with confidence. The POBS experience is always the most popular part of orientation.”

As for POBS, from its founding the school aspired to serve every Philadelphia public school student. Since then, POBS has expanded their reach to schools such as Williamson as well as businesses and organizations throughout the Delaware Valley, offering unique programming and leadership training. However, the ability to support underserved communities with a model that supports inclusivity, and philanthropic mission that reduces barriers to participation will always be at the forefront of what they do.

## **‘Great bonding’**

On two Williamson days at POBS the entire incoming class — 124 freshmen — is split in half and transported to The Discovery Center, a unique nature sanctuary and immersive outdoor space in Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park that POBS helped bring back to life through a partnership with the National Audubon Society and members of the Strawberry Mansion community.

Each group gets their own day, giving everyone an opportunity to interact with all the center’s facilities.

POBS staff guide them through activities, directing teamwork, and encouraging discussions that foster self-discovery.

Far from just a fun day outdoors, POBS' success comes from putting participants in challenging, physical situations that require working together, thinking outside the box, and trust in oneself and those around them. For Williamson students, these challenges include zip lines, ladder climbing, navigating an elevated rope course and more.

Smaller breakout groups also take place that allow for more intimate discussions about leadership and goal-setting.

Christopher Dyer, a Glenolden resident and Williamson freshmen working toward his associate's in construction technology-electrical, sees the POBS experience as one that was in synch with his goals for school. These include learning to be a better more mature person, mastering a trade, taking his skills to the next level, and eventually starting his own electrical business.

"My favorite part was the high ropes course," Dyer said. "As a friend you had to encourage classmates and help them through. How to step. Where to step. It builds trust and we had fun together. It was a great bonding experience with a real feeling of accomplishment at the end.

"Success was made possible because instructors were really helpful and uplifting with everyone. No one felt bad, pressured or left out. Everyone was included. It made the educational experience so much more enjoyable and fun."