

**TUITION:** \$31 per unit; 90 units total required for an associate degree.

**TIMELINE:** Two years.

**WHAT'S NEW:** An updated certificate of achievement and Associate of Arts degree offers 36.5 core credits plus general

education and elective units, and an option to earn one or multiple employable skills certificates out of nine choices: climbing instructor, basic mountain guide, basic ski guide, ski or snowboard instructor, white water rafting guide, sea kayaking guide, search and rescue, wilderness naturalist, wilderness medicine. ▶

## Tahoe Lift Maintenance Apprenticeship & Language of Lifts

Frank Gerdeman, director of ADVANCE, a collaborative education network based out of LTCC, is in the process of developing the Tahoe Lift Maintenance Apprenticeship ([advance-learnearnngrow.org/programs/tahoe-lift-maintenance-apprenticeship](https://advance-learnearnngrow.org/programs/tahoe-lift-maintenance-apprenticeship)) based on the skills and standards presented in NSAA's Lift Maintenance Training Resource Guide (LMRG). It also draws heavily from the culinary apprenticeship program that ADVANCE runs in partnership with the American Culinary Federation.

Following the standards already established by NSAA's LMRG, including the skills and instruction needed at each technician level, this program aims to personalize the pathway. Ski areas will be able to take the guidelines — for instance, the approximate number of apprenticeship hours required at each level and how to test the skills that demonstrate proficiency — and start employees when and where they're ready, as opposed to waiting for a group-scheduled educational offering. It will also enable employees to track hours, courses and skills through a portal accessible on a computer, tablet or mobile device.

Gerdeman and team have plans to develop tools and processes that would allow existing lift maintenance staff to test out of levels and establish level "certification" based on skills, training and experience already in their wheelhouse. They built additional flexibility into the apprenticeship out of the realization that once the lift tech gets into level two material, there's a potential split between the traditional path of a mechanic and going toward becoming an electrician. Whatever the choice, ski areas will have the freedom to assign their apprentices an elective requirement, left intentionally open so that managers can meet the employee's and the resort's specific needs.

On the classroom front, the team looked at all the areas of coursework, broke them into individual classes that were either existing, to be determined or to be developed, and is stringing them together across various learning institutions "because no one college has all the pieces that we need," according to Gerdeman.

"This would also allow for more flexibility and personalization at the individual level and connect the work being done by other institutions and organizations like Selkirk College and CMC," he pointed out. "Intro to lift maintenance, there's no reason not to use the new course at Oregon State, it's online and could be available to anyone. Sierra College has a mechatronics course. Welding, there are two at Sierra College, but we're working with them to modularize so that the lecture component is separate from the hands-on component — which means you could sign up for welding at Sierra College, do the online component, but all of the lab you would do on the job."



One of the courses Gerdeman hopes to have up and running first will be designed to prepare senior lift mechanics so that they're ready, supported, trained and comfortable teaching and mentoring apprentices. Amended from a wilderness leadership course, the "training the trainer" pilot program is tentatively slated to roll out in the fall.

Held up by the pandemic so far, Gerdeman is planning to partner with Tahoe-based resorts to start proving out the concepts and determining timelines for the program. Once it's up and running, this apprenticeship and an accompanying operations manual are designed to scale, and Gerdeman's hope is that the model — free and open to any interested ski area — provides an infrastructure and systematic approach that can be replicated across the industry. Another goal is to make this low to no cost for the apprentices by tapping federal, local and state training dollars to cover course expenses and potentially even reimburse partial wages.

Gerdeman has a separate, but somewhat related program available now: lessons for non-native English speakers to become familiarized with some of the introductory language and technical lift maintenance concepts. He worked with ESL company Voxy to develop 20 lessons with features like the ability to click on certain terms for the definition and pronunciation. The first of its kind specific to ski lifts, this program was designed with the substantial Spanish-speaking local demographic in mind, but will also come in handy for native English speakers who don't have a background in ski lift maintenance.

"For us here in Tahoe, about 38% of our population is Hispanic," reported Gerdeman. "Even at the entry level, but at the top end [especially], a seasoned level two or level three lift maintenance tech makes a pretty decent wage for Tahoe. We don't want to exclude 38% of our population from accessing that pathway."

This language program functions as a standalone but can also be used as a pre-apprenticeship activity and/or support along the way. Ski areas that want to give employees the opportunity to learn the language of lifts can do so with a Voxy license or in partnership with Gerdeman. To learn more about this limited-access pilot opportunity, reach out directly at [fgerdeman@ltcc.edu](mailto:fgerdeman@ltcc.edu).