

Category: Category 1 - Contribution to the Community

Contractor: Encore Electric

Project: Encore Electric Mobile Escape Room

Encore Electric has created a new way to engage and educate students about the electrical trade with a Mobile Escape Room titled “Exit the Room, Enter a Career.” The escape room promises students an opportunity to learn about electrical design technology, how electricity works, and what it is like to be an electrician. Inside the escape room students will find familiar items: outlets, switches, lamps and fans, all thoughtfully chosen to encourage participation and cultivate a desire to learn more about the electrical trade.

“The point is to make students safe and comfortable while simultaneously sparking their curiosity,” said David Scott, director of Human Resources for Encore Electric. “Encore Electric is looking for students who have a natural curiosity about how everyday things work, and a desire to learn more.” The Encore Electric Mobile Escape Room made its debut on August 28, 2019 at Dakota Ridge High School in Jefferson County, Colorado.

The Mobile Escape Room was the idea of Brad Artz, a superintendent at Encore Electric, in conjunction with the leadership of AGC Colorado. David Scott, Encore Electric director of Human Resources, carried the project from there. Scott and Bryan Garver, our talent acquisition manager, are tasked with finding the very best talent for each job. Most times this means finding talented electricians and bringing them onboard.

But the real purpose of the Encore Electric Escape Room is related to long-term recruiting. The Escape Room hopes to tap into the enthusiasm of the next generation of electricians to help spark career ideas and introduce electrical and technology work as viable and exciting career paths.

The team that worked on the Mobile Escape Room was comprised of nearly every department at Encore Electric – virtual design, construction, prefabrication, preconstruction, technology solutions, human resources and even marketing were involved. Each member brought expertise in crafting Scott’s vision and making it work. So many aspects of the build needed to be designed and built from scratch – from each of the puzzle stations, to the technology to tie it all together. The group had to overcome the challenge of having no drawings, no template and no idea how or if something like this had been built in the past.

A trailer was acquired, and the virtual design team, with input from construction and technology solutions, design a series of puzzles that students would have to solve. Each of these puzzle

stations had to be interconnected to make it all work, with updated audio-visual requirements for the outside television, the inside station triggers and the success state.

Before even entering the Mobile Escape Room, students have a chance to explore a virtual model of the space, so they can see what they are getting into and are enticed to explore further. When they do walk in, there will be four timed stations: wiring an outlet, LED lamp, fan, and a three-way switch. When each is wired properly, an Encore Electric core value sign illuminates, and when all four are wired, a doorbell rings. Through gamification, learning about electricity can be memorable and engaging. The hope is that a handful of students who experience the Encore Electric Mobile Escape Room really will exit the room, and eventually enter a career in the electrical trade.

After the design process, the construction of the trailer began. That's where the Encore Electric prefabrication team came in. With meticulous planning and precision, they built the stations inside of the trailer and wired them all together. Finally, the technology solutions experts came in, added their controls and wiring to enable some cool aspects of the build – a timer, audio, and a system to make it all light up with correct wiring by a student.

Not only was the Mobile Escape Room designed with function in mind, there are several touches that make it truly a special experience for students to connect with the trade and the Encore Electric brand. Each station is color coded with the four main Encore Electric colors to make it easy for instructors and students to speak the same language. The stations were installed with plexiglass between the interactive portion of the puzzle and the electrical work behind it, so students can understand exactly what is usually behind walls or coverings in real-life electrical scenarios.

There is an “easter egg” hidden in the design documents that allows students to gain an advantage when going through the Escape Room- a virtual jar of Ovaltine. This stands as an homage to the working name of the Encore Electric group that put together the Mobile Escape Room – dubbed “Project Ovaltine” because of the secretive nature of the project at the beginning, and needing a decoder to figure it out – just like in the classic “A Christmas Story”. On the outside, the trailer is wrapped with graphics and information to get students excited about the event they are taking part in, as well as branded with Encore Electric information to give them a path to learn more. And after they are done with the inside portion of the trailer, they are invited outside where an attached television shows them a video that lets them know what it like

to be an electrician, and how Encore Electric is looking to them to be the next generation of craftspeople.

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“For a company like Encore Electric to take an interest in teaching and helping my students find a way to follow their career passion is a dream come true,” said Pam Cummings, Dakota Ridge High School career explore coordinator. “My students are excited to get this rare opportunity. The career trailer that Encore Electric is bringing gives students a chance to actively engage in learning the beginning skills needed to enter the electrical industry.”

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Encore Electric Preconstruction Manager Adam Dillman has made it his mission to educate students on the career paths that exist beyond the traditional four-year college degree and knows the Encore Electric Mobile Escape Room will amplify those efforts. He has been involved in career connections programs for years, helping students understand the electrical trade and educating them on their options after high school, including apprenticeship programs and internships in the trades.

“I graduated from Dakota Ridge High School, and at that time it was widely believed that you had to go to college to have a good career,” said Dillman. “But college is not for everyone. I went to college for a year, and I didn’t know what path to follow. I eventually decided to become an electrician and have been able to move up through the organization and build my career in this trade for the last 14 years.”

Before things were put on hold due to the coronavirus, the Mobile Escape Room visited more than 40 schools and events in fewer than six months and the challenge was taken by hundreds of students. The Escape Room is only just beginning to inspire students, and there are many more future plans ahead, especially as part of the ongoing AGC Colorado effort to reach out to students about a career in the construction industry. In the program, Encore Electric ambassadors see students four times a year for a jobsite tour, panel interview, build day, and

mock interview. Once schools are back in action again following the global pandemic, activities will pick up again.

“Great momentum is being made with educators to teach students about the trades and other opportunities beyond what was taught when I was in high school,” said Dillman. “Now we talk about all the options. It’s also great to see the industry support for trade programs.”

In Colorado in 2017 the Associated General Contractors of Colorado (AGC) led a coalition to change the law. Military and trade career paths became a required part of the wider post-secondary education conversation held in high schools, as opposed to what had been a “college for all” conversation. Because of that, Encore Electric has been working with organizations like the AGC to volunteer in more than 30 different high schools across Colorado, providing students with the opportunity to understand and consider the fulfilling and challenging career opportunities in the trades, particularly in electrical construction, technology and service.