

## North East tilers take top national honours

**Date of issue** 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2006  
**Publication number** LSC0607-049  
**Embargo until** For immediate release

A pair of North East floor and wall tilers had to be scraped off the ceiling after winning gold and silver in a national skills competition.

Glenn Rourke and Stephen Elliott – both trained with the support of a Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded Apprenticeship – took first and second places in the annual Skillbuild contest.

Glenn, 21 and from Wideopen, has now completed his training and works with John Foley and Sons – a family firm established in 1957 which carries out work for many of the region's top house builders. Stephen, 17 and from Wrekenton, is in the second year of his training and has followed in his father's footsteps by joining R Parker Tiling Contractors, a Gateshead company which specialises in commercial work and is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

In addition to the training and experience gained with their employers, both attended Northumberland College and their success means it has become the first in the UK to have students scooping the top two places. Lead tutor Steve Ainsley is delighted, saying: "It was a fantastic effort by both lads. They are up against strong competition but really excelled."

Glenn, who had previously won bronze in the contest, said after taking gold: "I just really enjoy what I do so I was able to work without pressure. The test was quite complicated and challenging with lots of corners and curves but I just got stuck in."

Stephen added: "I was pleased to have made it to the final and never expected to do so well. It was difficult, so getting second place was fantastic. Now I want to go back again and see if I can win it."

Skillbuild, which is part of UK skills, begins with regional competitions at colleges around the UK. Young people between 16 and 21 compete in a number of specialist trades to become the best in the country.

The six tiling finalists were required to work on a replica bathroom with a few very difficult extras such as diamond insert and a rounded wall. They also had to insert movement joints, trims and fix floor tiling to a diamond pattern.

During the two and a half day competition, Under Secretary of State for Skills, Phil Hope, dropped by, taking time to visit every competition area and talk with the contestants. Each of the regional winners received a cheque from the Tile Association and each finalist was presented with a Rubi Tile Cutter.

The presentation event marked another first for Northumberland College as it became the only one in the country to receive The Tile Association centre of excellence status for a second time.

Regional Director with the LSC North East, Chris Roberts, commented: "It is good to know that the region remains at the forefront in producing skilled craftsmen through centres providing training support of the highest calibre. Our

congratulations go to Glenn, Stephen and everyone at the college for their outstanding achievement.”

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**Editor's Note:**

The LSC exists to make England better skilled and more competitive. We are responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for everyone. We have a single goal: to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to world-class standards. Our vision is that by 2010, young people and adults in England have the knowledge and skills matching the best in the world and are part of a truly competitive workforce. Established in 2001, we work nationally, regionally and locally from a network of offices across the country.

**Photo caption:**

Left to right – Glenn Rourke and Stephen Elliott

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