

Union apprenticeship program teaches construction trade

By Paul J. Nyden
Staff writer

Under an interstate bridge in South Charleston, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters Local 160 has an education center it has operated for the past 12 years to help train young people hoping to make careers out of working on construction projects.

The Carpenter Local's program is one of hundreds of training and apprenticeship programs throughout the state, programs supported by construction unions, construction contractors and companies.

The Affiliated Construction Trades Foundation, based in Charleston, provides a map of those apprentice programs on its website at: <http://wvappren->

[ticeships.com](http://wvappren-ticeships.com)

The programs offer training to help people become: boiler-makers, bricklayers, carpenters, cement masons, electricians, iron workers, insulators, millwrights, operating engineers, painters, plumbers, roofers, welders and sheet metal workers.

The ACT Foundation map also provides links to details about each program and about how to enroll as a student. Many links also include printable copies of apprenticeship applications, detailed schedules of training programs, and links to unions that represent workers in each of the occupations.

Jeremy Jeffers, director of the Carpenters Union's training program, said, "We help apprentices and journeymen up-

grade their skills in building and installing aerial lifts, metal framing, drywalls, acoustical ceilings, stairs and flooring — including ceramic tiles, vinyl composition tile, sheet vinyl and linoleum."

The United Brotherhood of Carpenters also operates training centers in Parkersburg, Bridgeport and Wheeling. They are all part of a four-year apprenticeship program registered with the U.S. Department of Labor.

Jeffers said it takes 760 hours of classes and 6,400 hours of on-the-job training to become "a journeyman carpenter."

Steve White, executive director of the ACT Foundation, said, "The apprenticeship method of training is finally

being recognized as a very efficient and successful method. The federal government has put out some grant funding opportunities for industries that want to create apprenticeships."

The apprenticeship programs, White believes, help many people who want to get good construction jobs.

"These programs are a recognized method for high skills and high productivity training," he said. "We have nothing against colleges. A college education is a great education. The apprenticeship programs are a combination of on-the-job training plus classroom training."

"You are working, getting paid, learning on the job, and you also go to class throughout

the years," he said.

Most apprenticeship programs, White said, last between two years and five years. "They prove to be very successful, as opposed to college, where you just sit in the classroom," he said. "That is all theoretical."

The ACT Foundation and various unions in West Virginia work with over 1,000 employers in these training programs.

"These are cooperative programs," White said. "With employers and labor folk at the table, we are constantly assessing how many jobs we need and what skills we need."

"Apprenticeship is not a narrow task. We train students how to do a wide range of tasks within their craft. There is more than just working on

framing, metal studs, dry walls or making concrete forms," he said.

Prevailing wages, which maintain decent pay levels, are critical to maintaining the quality of construction jobs and construction workers.

"If you get rid of prevailing wages, you would also get rid of these apprenticeship programs," White warned. "Today, West Virginia contractors do work cheaper per square foot than North Carolina contractors. But West Virginia contract workers get better wages."

"Workers who are really well-trained can be competitive and very high-skilled," White said.

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