

Five questions: Learning more about UA Local 469's apprenticeship training

We asked Rick Wieting, training director of the Arizona Pipe Trades Apprenticeship, and Rodney Pack, technical education director of the Arizona Pipe Trades Apprenticeship, to provide some insights on the training center. Here's what they had to say:

1. How is it possible that no taxpayer dollars are spent on apprentices' tuition?

All of our funding is negotiated through the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). For every hour worked on the job, the employer contributes a designated amount of money to the JAC Trust to manage the business of the apprenticeship throughout the year and years to come.

2. What is the value of the training – essentially what is the cost of tuition?

We are accredited through Gateway Community College. The apprentices pay tuition to Gateway throughout their apprenticeship. At the current cost of tuition, an apprentice will spend \$5,010 for tuition in their 5 years of the program. Our upgrade training is free to our journeypersons and apprentices, short of any third-party fee for certification.

3. How does the apprenticeship program help the community?

Whether it's an associate, master's or doctoral degree, apprentices have the ability to get their education, while they work. It's an earn-while-you-learn type of program. In most cases, apprentices also will get some sort of health coverage and retirement, so that can be started early and built up. We are always trying to work with organizations, whether it's schools or workforce groups in Maricopa County, to get people to work.

So in addition to the apprenticeship costing taxpayers absolutely nothing, we also value contributing to the community.

For example, we will put on classes for employees from the cities of Phoenix, Scottsdale and Glendale to learn how to do proper backflow installation and repair. That directly affects the health of the community, and we are teaching this type of stuff to city folks all the time.

Apprentices also are required to do 10 community service hours for a non-profit of their choice.

4. Why is the program five years?

It is determined by our apprenticeship standards and goals set by the United Association (UA) that we will train 240 hours a year for our apprentices to get the outlined training to become a journeyman. We are one of 350 UA apprenticeships across the United States and Canada.

This apprenticeship has been around since 1947. And through the decades, we have learned that it takes that much time just to get somebody at a certain skillset, however, the learning never stops. This is a trade where the technology constantly changes, and once you become a journeyman, you still have to stay on top of it. That's why we have all this upgrade training. This place is packed on weekends, nights and during the day because journeymen and apprentices want to keep learning and stay on top of their craft.

The apprentices receive three weeks of training twice a year for five years, as well as on-the-job training. After they have worked at least 1,600 hours of on-the-job training and have completed their first year of schooling, they can advance to their second year.

After first and second year training, the plumbers will go down a track taking classes such as drainage, gas systems, drawing prints and specs, fixtures and appliances, and others. Pipefitters and welders go down a different path, and some of their classes include steam systems, tube bending, hydronics, welding, basic pipe fitting layout, rigging/signaling and welding projects. The HVAC apprentices go through yet another track. They take classes such as testing and balancing, controls systems, and chiller maintenance and repair.

By the time the apprentices are ready to turn out into a journeyman, apprentices will have accumulated at least 9,700 hours of on-the-job training, a minimum of 1,200 hours of related instruction, and certifications that we require them to have.

5. Why is there more than 10,000 hours of training and classroom instruction? What does it entail?

Experience is the key to success. Without the continued on-the-job training combined with the apprenticeship training, they would become stagnant in their daily work activities and only learn one method of installation of a piping system

instead of many others such as copper, stainless steel, PVDF (polyvinylidene difluoride), high purity plastic piping systems, and medical gas systems.

One of the main purposes of the program is to reinforce what apprentices/journeypersons may have already learned out in the field. It also is meant to show them something that they've never learned. Another purpose is if they learned it one way, and it's the wrong way, then we'll teach them the right and safe way.

Most of the apprentices are going to be frontline workers, who are the bread and butter of our trade. But there are opportunities for them to go on different paths. We have principals or project managers in companies. We have individuals who go to work for the city or county and others who go into public office. They can choose to start their own business or get into the specialized part of the business, such as CAD (computer-aided drafting) and building information modeling (BIM). One of our instructors went through the apprenticeship, got interested in CAD, and that's how he made his entire career.

The biggest challenge some of the apprentices have is trying to balance their personal life with their work life and school life. This is especially difficult if they're working additional on-the-job hours. It becomes hard not only for them, but also for their families. And although the apprenticeship is supposed to be their hardest days, the biggest point that we try to make for them is to feel free to communicate with us. We will work with them if we know what is going on.

Getting actual on-the-job hours has a lot to do with what is going on in the economy. However, we try as hard as we can to give them the tools they need to get by. We even give them a one-day class that teaches them money management. It's about setting financial goals, staying out of debt, planning for the unplanned and how to save that extra money to do the things they want to do.

The biggest reward for apprentices is in the turning out moment, when they go from being a fifth year apprentice to becoming a journeyman. In addition to that bump in money, it's also a moment in their life when they are establishing themselves in a career. No one can ever take that away from them.

They pride themselves in being recognized by the rest of their peers as a journeyperson and that they have the ability take their job training and skills anywhere in the world. Some have traveled to Ireland, Guatemala, Costa Rica and other locations throughout the world for different projects.

6. What are some of the big projects that the apprentices have been a part of?

- Chase Field
- America West Arena
- Jobing.com Arena
- Renaissance Hotel and Conference Center
- Intel
- Microchip
- Motorola
- Honeywell
- Banner Healthcare Facilities
- Phoenix Children's Hospitals
- Solana Solar Generating Station

7. Once they turnout, or graduate, what's the average salary of a journeyperson?

Salary:

Commercial I projects, working full time will earn \$67,100.00 + \$17.45 per hour in paid benefits.

Commercial II projects, working full time will earn \$73,100.00 + \$17.45 per hour in paid benefits.

Industrial projects, working full time will earn \$79,100.00 + \$17.45 per hour in paid benefits.

More information:

UA Plumbers and Pipefitters 469

www.ualocal469.org/training-center/apprenticeship.aspx

Arizona Pipe Trades Local 469 Training Center Video

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9xJyyPGeDr4