

## Painters union offers more than just basic training

Patricio Melivilu opens the door to a classroom where students bend over mannequins to practice their newly acquired skills from a CPR/First Aid class.

The scene may seem unusual for a group of students studying to become painters and drywall finishers. But it's not for Melivilu, the training coordinator for the Finishing Trades Institute of Arizona JATC.

The apprenticeship program provides safety training in OSHA standards, CPR/First Aid and equipment use, such as the scissor lift, so that members are safe and productive in the field.

"We want to give people the opportunity to have a good paying career in a safe environment, and with that, be able to support themselves and their families," says Melivilu.

Originally from Chile, Melivilu says he once worked at a Chinese restaurant making \$2.25 an hour. In his 20s, he turned to painting so that he could make a bit more money.

Others turn to the Painters union for the same reason – an opportunity to make a better living and support their families.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the job outlook for painters is expected to grow by 18 percent by 2020. That's a little faster than the average growth rate, 14 percent, for all occupations.

Painter apprentice wages in Arizona start at \$10.64 per hour, and drywall finisher apprentices begin at \$10.45 per hour.



According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the job outlook for drywall finishers is expected to grow by 29 percent, which is much faster than the average for all occupations.

Journeyman painters make \$19.35 per hour plus benefits, and journeyman drywall finishers make \$19 per hour plus benefits.

Currently, the Finishing Trades Institute of Arizona has 524 members. There are 316 journeyman

painters, 153 journeyman drywall finishers and 55 apprentices.

The apprentices earn four college credits for the semester (the entire program is six semesters). Painters train for 7,000 hours on the job and 432 hours in the classroom before becoming journeymen, and drywall finishers train for 4,440 hours on the job and 476 hours in the classroom before they advance to journeyman status.

Apprentices only pay \$50 dollars a semester for the credits. Everything else, such as books, tools and other needed materials are paid for by the apprenticeship.



“We try to stay on top of the technological advances so that our members are always learning new skills and are staying employed,” says Melivilu. “Currently, all our apprentices are working.”

Melivilu also teaches and handles quite a bit of the requests that come through the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT) office.

Melivilu says his team has worked on many big projects including Intel, Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, Latter Day Saints (Mormon) temples and the Vee Quiva Hotel and Casino.

Melivilu adds that one of the factors that separate union painters from the competition is the training.

He says their most valuable selling point is that their members are trained to do the job right, on time and in a safe manner.

“We know that what is cheap, in the long run will actually cost more, but it’s not always easy finding the right kind of skilled workers. That’s why we invest the time and money to train our guys,” says Melivilu.

Melivilu says he and another IUPAT member recently were interviewed by Univision about the lack of skilled labor in the construction trades.

“We’ve actually had to put ads in Craigslist and in the newspaper (to get skilled workers) because it’s tough to find well-trained workers, and the media was doing a story on the lack of skilled labor in construction,” says Melivilu.

In addition to offering learning and career opportunities, the apprenticeship takes time to help around the community.

“We’ve donated time and manpower for charity work that involves painting or fixing drywall, we think giving back is very important,” says Melivilu.



### **Learn More**

**Address** 210 N. 24<sup>th</sup> St., Phoenix, AZ 85034

**Phone** 602.244.0768

**Number of Apprentices** 55

**Number of class / work hours required to graduate**

5,000 to 7,000 on-the-job hours and 432 to 476 classroom hours