

Technology at the core of IBEW Local 351 apprenticeship program

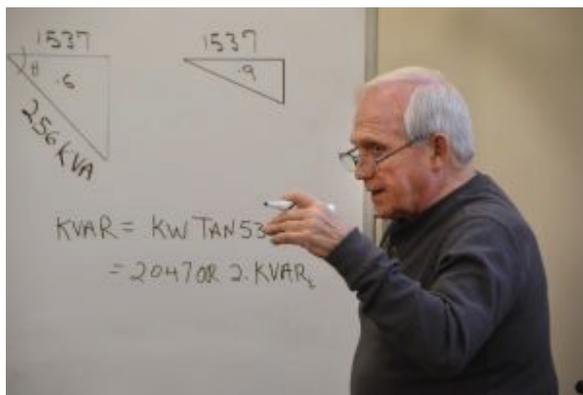
APPRENTICESHIPS

RECENT NEWS

Chris Ferrari 4490

By Joe Tansey

At the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 351 training facility in Hammonton, New Jersey, the thing that is most striking is the technology used in the five-year apprenticeship program.



John McCord, a long-time instructor at the IBEW JATC center in Folsom, NJ, teaching a class. Photo / Curt Hudson

“Technology is a huge factor in the electrical business,” says Charles “Chuck” Della Vecchia, Business Agent for Local 351. “This is an industry that changes daily, so if you don’t keep up with it, you get left in the dust.”

Training Director Louis R. “Louie” Jiacopello is in charge of the apprenticeship program, and he makes sure that apprentices get hands-on technology experience.

“Everything’s changed in the last four years,” says Jiacopello. “Everything is done on the computer now.

Workbooks are obsolete. We had to make sure we had enough computer equipment in here to handle

a couple hundred apprentices at once. Technology is everything now.”

“The reason we have this state-of-the-art Joint Apprenticeship Training Center is because of the collaboration between the union and our contractors,” says Dan Cosner, Business Manager of IBEW Local 351 and President of South Jersey Building Trades Council. “It’s a partnership with our contractors because they understand it too. We look to Louie to determine how we invest in technology and he keeps up on all the advances. We want to produce the best workers, so we don’t have any issues investing in journeyman training.”

Jiacopello was instrumental in developing the facility on the Black Horse Pike, which was a major upgrade over the Vineland training center.

“Louie was very instrumental in creating this space,” says Cosner. “He invested a lot of time helping plan and overseeing construction of the new center. When we merged three locals, we kept the school in Vineland and built this training center in order to have an updated facility.

“We are also conducting more specific journeyman training. You have to have specialists,” Cosner says. “It’s not just five years of school anymore. It’s the Built Right Process Safety Management classes, the code classes, journeyman updates, safety and more.”

The apprentices are also appreciative of how Jiacopello designed the facility that sharpens their skills.



Instructor Tim M cBride, standing, teaching aspects of usin voltage meters

“It’s like night and day basically,” says fifth-year apprentice Brett Brestel. “Doing the hands-on training really helps us better understand what the teachers are talking about. It’s really helpful for moving ahead in this field.”

“There’s a lot of hands-on opportunities,” confirms second-year apprentice Katrina Funkhouser. “We have many different tools we can learn to use.”

during a class at the IBEW JATC center in Folsom, NJ. Photo / Curt Hudson

The program generates plenty of interest from applicants, but only around 30 per year are admitted.

“Last year during the interview process, we had a very diverse group of applicants,” says Cosner. “We had college graduates, some from law enforcement, as well as the 19-year-olds looking for a career. We also saw a number from open shops wanting to get into the trades.”

“This five-year program consists of a total of 160 hours a year minimum,” says Jiacopello. “Sometimes we go between 175 and 200 hours. They generally start in September and go through April or May and they start again in January, so I have rotating classes.

“The first year is mostly DC power theory and some hands-on teaching about things like switches and plugs,” Jiacopello says. “The second year is 95 percent theory and all the math. In the third year, we begin to go into transformers, some rigging, certification rigging, rigging transformers, and torquing. Every year includes a code update and safety training.

“In the fourth year, we go into motor control and more on transformer training,” Jiacopello says. “Fifth year includes programming, instrumentation and general foremanship. Every year they get code updates as the electrical codes change annually. We do tons of journeyman training, consisting of everything from OSHA to Built Right, and what they need for different jobs.”

Joining the apprenticeship program is viewed as a good alternative to other education if you ask those teaching and learning the trade.

“I did try other things before this, but my dad is an electrician,” Brestel said. “I went to college for three years. I do have an associate’s degree, so I may take the credits from here and apply them to another degree.

“I’d tell people it’s a great learning experience to further yourself,” Brestel said. “One of my buddies just asked me about the union and I had nothing but good things to tell him. You can make a great living and learn a lot.”

“I’d recommend this to anyone,” Funkhouser said. “I went to college and worked at a nursing home. Now, I wish I had done this right out of high school. I would’ve been a lot further along.”

No matter what amount of technology is applied, one old school maxim remains true when talking to all of those involved in the program: brotherhood.

“Everything I have is because I am a member of the union,” Della Vecchia says. “I want to give back and that’s why I’m here.”

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