

Building Scene

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Getting that journeyman's card: that's the first step

By Doug Funko
Staff writer

Residential subdivisions, office complexes and retail centers don't just materialize.

They're built by carpenters, electricians, bricklayers, pipefitters and ironworkers.

And craftsmen are made, not born.



Apprentices learn in school as well as on the job. Chris Essary, a future ironworker, tries his hand at cutting metal while Robert Nickel observes in the relative comfort and safety of the classroom.

Apprenticeship programs jointly operated by union contractors and organized labor still are offered in the skilled building trades. Some are easier to get into than others.

All combine several years of on-the-job training with formal classroom instruction.

Acquisition of a journeyman's card ensures quality work for an employer and usually results in better

wages and job opportunities for the laborer, say directors of apprenticeship programs.

They agree on a couple of other points. Construction work often is seasonal. If you're the type who needs the security of a weekly paycheck, it may be best to avoid the building trades.

Nepotism is on the wane, too, due to efforts of contractors to attract the best possible workers. Then there's the matter of the U.S. Department of Labor monitoring apprenticeship standards and guidelines for recruitment of minorities.

Here's what's happening with some union-sponsored apprenticeship programs on the local building scene.

DETROIT CARPENTERS APPRENTICESHIP SCHOOL

There are no prerequisites for applying for this apprenticeship. But if you're not a self-starter or have very little initiative, you can forget it.

"Anybody can come in here and get information and an application," said Herb Schultz, director of the apprenticeship school in Ferndale.

"You've got to be sponsored by a contractor. We give 'em (applicants) a list of all union contractors in the area."

"I've seen young men come down here who didn't know anybody, fill out an application at 8 and were back at 2 with a letter of hire," Schultz said.

Upwards of 5,000 carpenter contractors are in southeastern Michigan, he added.

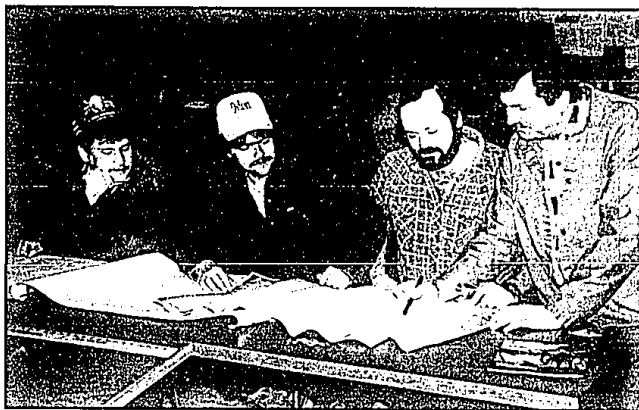
The carpentry apprenticeship lasts about four years. Workers are in school one day for every nine on the job. New school sessions start in March, July, October and January.

Some 160 journeyman cards were awarded last year. About 800 apprentices are working toward that end.

"You've got to be a hustler and sell yourself," Schultz said.

Most — but not all — apprentices have a family background in carpentry, he said.

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Photos by ART EMANUELE/ATAT photographer

You have to understand the job before you can do it. Here, apprentices Robert Nickel (left), Chris Essary and Dave Lipke go over specifica-

tions with instructor Ron McDonnell in a classroom at the ironworkers school in Livonia.

Skilled trades training class offers non-union alternative

A journeyman is a person who completes a prescribed apprenticeship program, whether it's provided by a joint apprenticeship council of union contractors and organized labor or non-union contractors.

The U.S. Department of Labor, in consultation with the trades, sets apprenticeship curriculum standards.

Associated Builders and Contractors, an association of non-union contractors, has offered an apprenticeship program in the Detroit area for about five years.

"Our programs have been approved by the (federal) Bureau of Apprenticeship," said Duane Olds, director of the school. "We have a

program set up that parallels the unions."

Applicants for ABC apprenticeship training must be at least 18 years of age. If applicants aren't high school grads, they must earn a diploma or obtain a GED equivalent.

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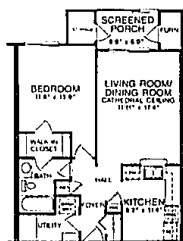
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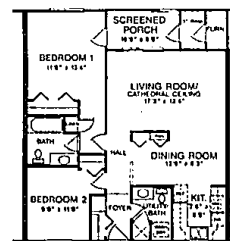
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