

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Building on Workplace Experience

Troubleshooting and teamwork. They may not be the first skills that come to mind when picturing manufacturing careers, but they're as equally valuable as technical ability.

The Catapult Indiana initiative helps workers hone their talents through a four-week, 160-hour course. The first half is dedicated to classroom learning (e.g., lean manufacturing, OSHA, work ethic) while the second emphasizes hands-on training.

"Catapult is designed to help build a stronger workforce pipeline, increase the employment participation rate and worker wages," comments Brad Rhorer, chief talent programs officer of Conexus Indiana, which manages the initiative.

Catapult's origins are at Subaru of Indiana Automotive (Rhorer's former employer), where it was launched four years ago. Since then, it's expanded to other communities such as Anderson and Greensburg.

Catapult Greensburg attracted approximately 80 students (divided among three cohorts) last fall. Training took place at the Greensburg Learning Center. Teresa Wade, president of CFA Staffing (payroll services provider) in Plainfield delighted in watching the individuals' confidence – and earning power – grow.

"They started off at \$12 an hour," she notes. "A lot of them ended up gaining employment (with community partners) between \$15 to \$17 an hour. It really changed some of their lives. They were mostly people who worked in the manufacturing sector and this was just (a way to enhance their careers). It was an advanced manufacturing course."

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 60. Upon completion of the course, each earned three points toward an advanced manufacturing credit at Vincennes University.

Weeks three and four feature labs. Topics range from sequencing and functioning to skill training, blueprints and measurement.

"We had community partners (such as Honda, Hitachi Powered Metals (USA) and Delta Faucet) that did interviews the third week," Wade remarks. "What we (CFA Staffing) did was help build resumés for all of the individuals. We helped them capture their skill set (to) voice who they were as a person and what they've done as an individual."

While CFA didn't place individuals with companies for employment, Wade estimates that, "I'd say over half of them – maybe 60% of the people that went through the class were placed."

Catapult plans to kick off its first high school programs this spring in Greensburg, followed by Lafayette.



Catapult Greensburg has graduated 150 students (spread throughout three cohorts) to date.

RESOURCES: Brad Rhorer, Conexus Indiana, at www.conexusindiana.com | Teresa Wade, CFA Staffing, at www.cfastaffing.com

Camp Shines Light on Construction Careers

Steve Snyder can't wait for the second Tuesday in June to arrive. That's when the Tippecanoe Building Trades Summer Construction Expo (also known as construction camp) returns for its second year.

Snyder is president of the Tippecanoe Building Trades Council, which represents 17 trade associations throughout nine counties.

"We (educators and industry) are starting to gain speed and we're starting to get in front of these kids to let them know that you don't have to go to college. Even though we still need doctors. We still need lawyers. We still need architects," he stresses. "But the doctor needs a hospital to work in. The architect needs someone to build his structure. Everything starts with construction."

The expo will follow a similar format as in 2019 (six-week course spanning eight hours per day on Tuesdays) and a multitude of trades (carpenters, bricklayers, sheet metal workers and more). But a major difference is the minimum age limit – reduced from 16 to 14.

"We lowered the age group, per the direction of one of our counselors, because kids at 14 have to now start thinking about career pathways," Snyder explains.

In addition, 12 trades will be represented as opposed to 10.

Nearly 80 people from roughly seven high schools signed up for the 2019 event. Most were students, but some teachers and counselors also participated.

"(Attendees) could spend a day learning what a pipefitter does," Snyder reflects. "Spend a day learning what a heavy equipment operator does. Spending a day learning what electricians do. We opened up our training facilities. We brought in our professional educators who are tradespeople themselves (who train our apprentices)."



Hands-on exercises are front and center at Tippecanoe Building Trades Council's Summer Construction Camp in Lafayette.

It was no cost to anybody who wanted to attend, and it gave them a taste of what that trade was about.”

He enthusiastically describes the hands-on elements.

“The heavy equipment operators, for example, bring out mini equipment. They bring out mini excavators. Bulldozers. Things of that nature.”

“We open up our entire welding shop here (in Lafayette). We’ve got 24 booths where the kids are able to weld and see what it takes to weld. We’ve got other interactive stuff they can do as well with heavy rigging. Crane lifts. All very much controlled (from a safety perspective). Very instructional.”

Snyder adds, “That opportunity is there to go through those (broader apprentice) programs and graduate nearly debt free – if not 100% debt free – with a full benefit package, full insurance, making \$100,000 a year. It is there for many people – a lot of them just don’t know it.”

RESOURCES: Steve Snyder, Tippecanoe Building Trades Council, at www.unionsbuilditbetter.com



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