GAINING NEW SKILLS, REFINING OLD ONES

Local programs offer training for industry newbies, veterans

BY BRANDON BOSWORTH

Whether you are an experienced professional hoping to refine your skills or a recently graduated high school student looking to start a career, Hawaii is home to a variety of training programs related to the construction industry. Some focus on less common trades. For example, Local 627 offers training for boilermakers.
“Boilermakers’ primary skills are to work on the rigging, welding and fitting of pressure vessels on power plants, oil refineries, shipbuilding, tank building and repair and much more,” says Jacob Evenson, Local 627 business manager and secretary-treasurer. “We build the environmental projects to clean the air at these type of facilities. Boilermakers perform a number of job tasks, from loading and unloading materials, changing crane booms, torch burning, various welding processes, arc gouging, removing and replacing boiler tubes, interpreting blueprints, laying out components and aligning and fitting components.”

The boilermaker apprenticeship is a 6,000-field hours program, and requires 376 hours of classroom training. An apprentice must complete 21 on-the-job training booklets and 360 hours of online learning.

Plumbers and Fitters Local 675 offers four crafts in the pipe trades: plumbing, refrigeration and air conditioning, fire sprinkler fitter and steamfitter welder. Apprenticeships require five years of 10,000 work hours and 10 semesters of related and hands-on classroom instruction. Each apprentice is trained in their specified trade.

“Apprentices are trained to cut, thread, solder, braze and weld pipes,” says training coordinator Charles Shima, “and install all types of equipment, controls, fixtures, layout and assembly of related piping. Apprentices are trained to fabricate and erect pipes of every kind: glass, plastic, ferrous and non-ferrous types.”

Shima says the first week for an apprentice “would be working with a journeyman learning the tools, materials and the work involved in their craft while working on job site. The work is hard, but if the apprentice is willing to learn they will earn good wages and benefits.”

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Honolulu Community College’s Apprenticeship Program currently offers 21 apprenticeship programs covering 30 different trades. A semester can have more than 400 classes, including courses in trade-specific knowledge and skill areas, health and safety, blueprint reading, technical math, electrical and plumbing codes, journey worker refresher and upgrades.

“Based on the number of inquiries that we receive year after year and anecdotal information on the number of applications received during trade program recruitments, it appears that the most popular programs are the state-licensed trades—electrician and plumber and also elevator constructor and refrigeration technician,” says James Niino, HCC’s apprenticeship coordinator. He adds that “it is important to note that apprenticeship courses at HCC are restricted to state-registered apprentices.”

Niino says the Hawaii Carpenters Training Program (carpenters and drywall installers) has “by far the largest number of apprentices.”

Skills in Demand
Not all training programs are designed for apprentices and others new to construction. For example, the Hawaii Asphalt Paving Industry (HAPI) offers a variety of courses and training programs for newcomers as well as industry veterans.

“When I came into the asphalt and paving industry seven or eight years ago, there wasn’t any regularly scheduled training,” says HAPI Executive Director Jon Young. “I decided to create a few courses that would be held on a regular schedule. That way, if someone couldn’t make it this year they knew they could attend next year. This is good for companies that can only send one or two employees at a time.”

A typical class might focus on industry best practices,
from design and specifications to actual construction. "Hawaii needed a general, overall class," Young says. HAPI also holds more advanced classes. "The 'next level' class is limited to 20 students," Young says. "They are divided into four groups of five, then watch a video of a paving project and discuss it. Groups are assigned to get a mix of different people. Each group leads a larger discussion after."

HAPI's courses are very "customer-oriented" Young says. "At the end of a class, we give participants a list of 10 or 12 subjects and ask them to pick the top four they want covered in future classes."

No matter what trade a worker pursues, future prospects look bright. "I believe there will always be a need for skilled labor in Hawaii," says Shima. "A good skilled craftsman in any trade will always be in demand."
with certain terminology."

Fortunately, Bullard says the journeymen were understanding and "didn't mind taking a little extra time" showing him the ropes—or the wires.

Gradually, the new-kid jitters faded. "I worked 11 months on the same job site," Bullard says. "I found that after a while I was eager to show up and see what I would learn for that day. We would start our day with stretching exercises led by myself or other apprentices. After that, we would report to our supervisors and be assigned to a journey-worker or group with a specific task laid out. Breaks and lunches were scheduled, and I looked forward to seeing my classmates in the break room, trading stories about what we had learned."

Lance Hirai, a project architect with G70, got his start with the company working three summers as an intern.

"The first summer, 2009, my jobs were pretty straightforward: organizing files, making copies, running deliveries to the Department of Planning and Permitting, etc.," Hirai says. "No task is beneath anybody, and we all have to start somewhere. It's something I learned early on and try to instill in our current interns."

Besides, Hirai says, "over time I was lucky enough to be exposed to"