

Demand

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joint venture of the IBEW and NECA, whose members hire union electricians. Nationally, there are 40,000 apprentices in 290 such programs.

"We never have to look for apprentices," Sivertsen said, "but our training programs are always trying to attract women and minorities because on a lot of government projects they like to see a percentage of the workforce comprise women or minorities."

The story of overflowing interest in the electrical field is echoed at the Morris County School of Technology in Denville, which runs two types of apprenticeship programs — one for high school students who participate in a share-time arrangement, studying both academics and a trade, and another for adults outside the school district.

"We have an apprenticeship program both in electrical and plumbing, and, for the past three years, enrollment has been very good in both," said Irene Schrader, manager of continuing education. "In fact, we turn people away because our capacity is limited."

"Our maximum is 22 to 24 students in a class," she added. "We have had occasions where we've run two sections because we've had so many."

Such popularity is no mystery to those who run four-year apprenticeship programs, in which an apprentice attends electrical classes at night and works in a paid position with a licensed electrician during the day.

After an apprentice completes four years, he or she works full time in the field for one year as a journeyman, explained Joe Miktus, apprenticeship coordinator for the Morris County School of Technology. Only after the fifth year is complete can a journeyman sit for a state-administered exam and get a license.

Those who join the Electrical Apprentice Program at the Morris County School of Technology know it's a long haul, but a paid one, Miktus said. They also realize electrical skills are in demand.

19.7 percent growth

According to ProjectionsCentral.com, the field is projected for 19.7 percent growth, with the number of available positions increasing from 583,500 in 2012 to 698,200 in 2022.

Pay for a licensed electrician — the ultimate goal for many apprentices, though some will opt against licensing and work at jobs with a licensed foreman — is similarly attractive. The annual mean wage for an electrician in the New York/New Jersey Metro Area in May 2013 was \$37.44 an hour, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Annually, that's \$77,870.

"Interest in the Electrical Apprentice Program is growing," Miktus said. "I field a lot of phone calls from parents now. I have families come in and I try to help them determine whether their son or daughter wants to do plumbing or electrical. I'll give them options, go through the catalog, let them meet instructors, and take them for a tour of the campus."

Rich Lyzenga of Branchville is now a second-year electrical apprentice at the Morris County School of Technology and he works during the day for Jet Electrical Service of Oak Ridge, which sponsors him. That means Jet pays the \$4,800 tuition — \$1,200 per year —



KAREN MANCINELLI/CORRESPONDENT
Apprentice Anthony Sanchez, 20, of Madison works with electrician Joe Esposito of Esposito Electric.

Learn more

APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM: Morris County School of Technology Electrical Apprentice Program, <http://tinyurl.com/oc8prmx>; Apprenticeship Coordinator Joe Miktus, 973-627-4600, ext. 245, miktusj@mcvts.org; Continuing Education Manager Irene Schrader, 973-627-4600, ext. 231, schraderi@mcvts.org

APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM: Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee Application Process, IBEW Local 102, Parsippany, <http://tinyurl.com/lmtx2nl>

ASSOCIATION: Independent Electrical Contractors Association, New Jersey Chapter, Springfield, www.nj-iec.org

ASSOCIATION: National Electrical Contractors Association, Northern New Jersey Chapter, Mountainside, www.necannj.com/neca

ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR: Joseph Esposito, Esposito's Electric, Denville, www.espositoelectric.com

UNION: International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 102, Parsippany, www.ibewlocal102.org

WEBSITE: Career Overview, National Labor-Management Cooperation Committee, www.electrifyingcareers.com

for Lyzenga to go through the program, which follows the standard Independent Electrical Contractors curriculum.

Lyzenga, 26, graduated Sussex Technical High School and immediately went to work in the field.

"At first I didn't know which specialty to choose," he recalled. "My grandma said, 'Electricians make a lot of money.' So I figured I might as well give it a shot. I researched it a little bit and I went for it. I enjoy working with my hands."

He's never looked back. "I make \$15 an hour now as an apprentice," Lyzenga said. "I'm definitely glad I went this route instead of getting all that debt for college. This is a good path."

Well-defined program paths for the trades — with plenty of guidance from Miktus, who even shepherds apprentices through their paperwork with the state — is exactly what the Morris County School of Technology offers.

In the past few years, to help with increased interest, Schrader said, the district created two one-semester programs, Introduction to Electrical Trades and Introduction to Plumbing Trades.

"These are for folks who think they want to be an

electrician but have never wired anything," she explained. "At the end of the intro courses, the hope is folks can get jobs as helpers, either an electrician's helper or a plumber's helper, and segue into one of our apprenticeship programs."

A big shift

All the activity represents a huge shift in a field that licensed electricians were exiting during the Great Recession, which technically extended from 2007 to 2009 but lasted much longer for the construction industry.

"A lot of older electricians packed it in during the recession. This last round was really rough. There really was a shortage of work," said Joe Esposito, owner of the 40-year-old Esposito's Electric in Denville and past president of the New Jersey Electrical Contractors Association.

"Many of the older guys looked to do something different," added Esposito, who has sponsored many apprentices. "They sought other professions. A very good friend of mine moved up to New England. He's 62. He decided to collect his Social Security and retire."

At times the discouragement was even more profound than that, according to Carl Van Horn, director of the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University. He said the trades were unpopular for a long while because of an emphasis on attending college and a decline in the number of apprenticeships offered through unions.

"Even certified electricians were encouraging their children not to follow in their path," Van Horn said, adding that the attitude toward apprenticeships and the trades has changed nationwide.

"There's a resurgence of interest because of the difficulties that some baccalaureate students have entering the work force," Van Horn said, "and the realization that a skilled tradesperson can make a significant living."

Esposito said all his apprentices are making more than all of their friends who have graduated college.

"And they don't have \$200,000 in debt and that's a big factor," he said. "I've got guys who have finished a four-year apprenticeship who are making \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year."

Twenty-eight-year-old Ray Klas, an apprentice at the Morris County School of Technology, said he's been changing outlets since he was three. His father, also Ray Klas, owns Klas Electrical Contractors, based in Chatham Borough, a 30-year-old business that has survived the recession.

After working with cars and with HVAC, and graduating another electrical apprentice program in California, Klas said he's finally getting just what he needs.

"At the business, we do everything," Klas said, "but we tend not to do new construction anymore because it's so driven to be cheap. We're a little bit more expensive than Joe Schmo Electric because anybody who works for us has experience. Ninety percent of our work is fixing other people's mistakes. The contractors always call us in at the end to do the finish work. They call us the finish electricians."

He wants to help the business keep pace with new trends, too, he said. Already, Klas Electrical specializes in lighting controls and, ever since hurricanes Irene and Sandy, Kohler Generators.

"We do a lot of training with the generators," Klas said. "I'm going out to the Kohler facility in Wisconsin in April for two weeks for training on the liquid cooled units. Being an electrician doesn't just deal with residential wiring, anymore."

Jobs and more jobs

The view of more work right over the horizon has many in the electrical trades buzzing.

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Georgetown University Medical School
Lucy, Living with Multiple Myeloma and Michelle, Caregiver to Lucy

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