

It's Never Too Late to Learn...Or to Change Careers

Over the past decade, change has never been more apparent than in the American workplace. New technologies and advancements have created scores of start-up industries and dramatically altered others.

Amid this swirl of change, thousands of workers have decided to leave their jobs for entirely new careers. For many of

these individuals, an apprenticeship has given them the financial, technical and emotional support to master a new career.

"In recent years, we've seen more and more apprentices join our program from varying professional backgrounds," says A. J. Pearson, executive director of the organized electrical construction industry's apprenticeship program, known as

the National Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee or NJATC. "We welcome the trend because of the diversity it brings to our workforce."

Pearson said over the past decade, advances in technology have dramatically transformed the industry. "I think the challenges and excitement surrounding these new technologies have been a real plus in our ability to attract people from other industries."

Just what types of individuals have decided to chuck it all and begin training for a new career? Pearson says many apprentices come from other construction areas (carpentry, plumbing, etc.) in search of better pay or more challenging work. But other notable career jumpers in recent years have included an aircraft mechanic, a restaurateur and a former NFL player.

Pearson says he would strongly recommend that individuals weighing a career switch consider the various financial advantages of an apprenticeship. "With a registered apprenticeship, there's the comfort of having a steady paycheck while you train. Our program also offers health and pension benefits, as well as college credits, all of which can be important factors to consider."

Although many private companies and commercial schools also offer job training, most charge enrollment fees that can be quite expensive. If you are set on one of those programs, Pearson recommends checking their business references care-

fully, comparing each program and its costs to others available in the industry, and ascertaining whether there are good jobs awaiting program graduates.

The NJATC program is a registered apprenticeship program with the U.S. Department of Labor. That means its sponsors – the National Electrical Contractors Association and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers – pay for virtually all training costs and apprentices earn regular wages from participating employers as they move through the program.

Currently the NJATC operates four apprenticeships — commercial/industrial electrician, IT systems installer, lineman, and residential electrician. The apprenticeships run from three to five years.

NJATC apprentices earn a competitive wage with regular pay increases, as well as health and pension benefits, throughout their entire apprenticeship. Upon graduation, many enter the workforce earning as much as \$50,000 or \$70,000 a year, depending on their electrical specialty and geographic location.

Still, apprenticeships require commitment. Most NJATC apprentices devote full workdays and work weeks to on-the-job training, in addition to classroom curriculum and homework assignments.

For a brochure describing the NJATC apprenticeships, write Electrical Construction Careers, 1156 15th Street, N.W., Suite 900, Washington, DC 20005.

Registered Apprenticeship Programs: What You Can Expect to Receive

Many of the more established apprenticeship programs are registered with the U.S. Department of Labor, which indicates they meet certain standards for quality training. According to the Labor Department, participants in registered apprenticeships can expect the following financial and educational benefits:

- Apprentices earn a salary during the apprenticeship period.
- Almost all training costs are paid for by the program's sponsor, which can be a private firm, government entity, association, or joint labor/management group.
- Apprentices receive wage increases as they gain more skills.
- Apprentices receive both classroom instruction and on-the-job training.
- Upon program completion, apprentices receive a nationally recognized credential certificate.
- Registered apprenticeships provide the opportunity to earn college credits.

More than 400,000 Americans are currently enrolled in registered apprenticeships in such diverse fields as construction, manufacturing, telecommunications, health care, public utilities, retail and services industries, and public sector areas.