

Apprenticeships Hot Ticket To Paid Training, Education

The highly touted four-year college degree is not the only ticket to success, especially in fields requiring workers to possess specialized skills. In fact, the need to balance skills training with college course work is leading many young people to consider apprenticeships in place of traditional college programs.

The rewards of registered, multi-year apprenticeships can be substantial. Apprentices receive a competitive salary with regular increases while they undertake classroom studies and extensive on-the-job training. Graduates of the more rigorous apprenticeships can easily enter the job market earning more than \$50,000 a year.

Many of these registered apprenticeships are tantamount to fully paid career scholarships, offering participants the opportunity to also earn college credits or link their apprenticeship studies to a college degree program. An excellent example is the NJATC apprenticeship program, sponsored by the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW).

Established more than 60 years ago and responsible for training the bulk of the nation's electrical construction workers, the NJATC program offers exceptional multi-year apprenticeships for commercial/industrial electricians, IT systems installers, linemen and residential electricians.

NJATC apprentices typically earn between \$50,000 to \$150,000 in total wages over the course of the three- to five-year apprenticeships, as well as health and pension benefits, and the option of earning college credits.

Depending on local pay rates and the career specialty chosen, they can enter the job market as union journeymen making as much as \$45,000 to \$70,000 a year.

"These are challenging, high-paying occupations that require in-depth knowledge and well-honed technical skills," says NJATC Executive Director A. J. Pearson.

Because today's electrical work involves complex technology, Pearson believes the importance of hands-on training can't be understated.

"A college degree won't help if you need to install an integrated platform that connects various building systems to each other and the Internet," he adds. "You need to have actually done it."

Pearson believes the NJATC's "inside wireman" or commercial/industrial electrician program best exemplifies the benefits of using an apprenticeship to prepare for a high-paying career in a specialty field.

This four-to-five-year program requires 1,000 hours of classroom learning and 8,000 hours of on-the-job training, during which time apprentices generally earn between \$80,000 and \$150,000 in total wages and benefits. Many also elect to pick up an average of 60 college credits for the NJATC course work they complete as apprentices.

Upon graduation, they are fully qualified and experienced in installing highly complex electrical infrastructure systems. In many high-wage urban areas, they can often enter the job market earning as much as \$70,000 a year.

"An apprenticeship program isn't for everyone," says Pearson, "nor is a four-year college program. But in the future I think you'll see more individuals, particularly those in highly technical careers, look very carefully at the exceptional advantages of today's apprenticeships."

For more information about any of the NJATC apprenticeships, visit their website at www.njatc.org.