



United Service Workers Union apprentices celebrate graduation

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Instructors and graduates celebrate after delayed graduation ceremonies

Bohemia, NY 31 skilled union craftsmen have officially graduated from the United Service Workers Union's state-accredited four- and five-year apprenticeship training program.

Based in Suffolk County, the program combines on-the-job training with educational programs that teaches critical construction skills including steamfitting, fire sprinkler, plumbing, and sheet metal work.

For the duration of the program, each of the graduating apprentices from the classes of 2022, 2021 and 2020 was employed full-time for contracting firms across New York City and the bi-county region, simultaneously working union jobs, with union pay and benefits, while pursuing educational training through evening classroom and laboratory diagnostic study.

The New York State Department of Labor approved program is the United Service Workers Union's (USWU) Joint Apprenticeship Training Program (JATF), with 100% of the tuition underwritten by contracting firms that are part of the Long Island-New York Mechanical Contracting Association (LI-NY MCA) together with the union.

"One of the unique things about the JATF apprenticeship program is that our instructors are not only teaching, but they are also actively working on major job sites, and that allows all of the industry's newest technology, tools, building codes, and laws to be brought into the classroom and educational experience in real time," said Brian Keating, JATF school's director. "You couldn't ask for a better way to prepare the next generation of leaders in construction and building system maintenance, for a quality lifelong career path."

Keating said, "In this day and age, when the cost of education is so sky-high, each of these 31 graduates received an education underwritten by their contracting firms, while simultaneously being paid throughout their 4 or 5 year training."

The JATF graduated its first apprenticeship class in 2009. USWU Local 355 created the program with the LI-NY MCA to fill a need within the mechanical trades for trained professionals, as well as provide workers within those trades with vital training they need to succeed.

“The apprentices applying for the program, may have previously had related work experience, some come to us immediately after high school knowing this is their desired career track, while others have already graduated from colleges and universities and never quite found career fulfillment,” said Kevin Barry, business agent for USWU. “Through the contributions of the contracting firms within the LI-NY MCA, this apprenticeship program is a great alternative to a university education.”

Apprenticeship is the way a new generation of craftsmen learn a trade or profession through paid, on-the-job training and extensive related instruction. It enables those working in regulated professions, such as construction, and building operating system maintenance to earn a certificate in their respective trades and be recognized as New York State Department of Labor Approved Journeymen.

This provides a viable career path for the now journey worker and their family and enables them to gain first-hand knowledge of their trade—both from hands-on experience and from working side-by-side with established journeymen.

“Graduating from the JATF has made a massively positive difference in my life,” said Amilcar Banos, a sprinkler fitter graduate and the highest performer of the 2022 class. “The better wages, benefits and training that I get from working in union construction and through the JATF are outstanding.”

The JATF created an apprenticeship program in which the next generation of tradesmen and women could learn their skills from the best in the industry.

The JATF program has grown and has obtained four (4) New York State approved Apprentice programs: Steamfitter, Fire Sprinkler, Plumber, and Sheet Metal Worker.

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