

your people continuously trained. Demanding mandatory certification maintenance could be just the way to get those journeymen back into the classroom again.

Now comes the point: to accomplish this, there will have to be more money invested in the NJATC. I envision a National Training Fund, paid into equally by the IBEW and NECA members. This used to be the case—that our NJATC was jointly funded.

The current method of funding the NJATC is not allowing for expansion of services. It is placing too much responsibility on the local JATC programs, which has resulted in the fracturing of the training itself as well as the lack of consistent infrastructure to deliver the quality of training the marketplace demands. It has resulted in our being among the best-kept secrets of the new century due to lack of consistent, nation-wide marketing.

On the NECA side, I envision a pay-in to this National Training Fund in the neighborhood of 2 cents an hour. A Unionized Electrical Industry national training program is not only to the advantage and for the advancement of the IBEW membership—these are our employees, after all, and this is our industry.

Our Industry

We contractors need lifelong learning and training programs also, just to keep up. This National Training Fund will support not only these training-program initiatives for survival and change—but also to support contractor training. MEI and the National Convention are both training opportunities our industry provides our contractor membership. But both programs have become less and less cost-effective for the average contractor. Fewer and fewer of us are able to take advantage of these excellent programs. A National Training Fund would not only help us beef up all aspects of the JATC programs nation-wide, but also boost the contractor attendance at Conventions and MEI programs by offsetting some of the expenses.

Having a coordinated, robust and national marketing program would immeasurably benefit the local JATC efforts to attract new electricians. Currently, we have a great NJATC. But they're

stretched too thinly to cover all the areas of the US in the core delivery of programs—their primary obligation—much less in the roll-out of marketing initiatives. There must be a way to give them an assist. The surest way is to partner in financing a National Training Fund that will benefit equally the partnership that is the industry: IBEW/NECA.

Sure, it's expensive. But the alternative is more costly still: a cost we cannot afford.

Anthony L. Shreve began his long career in the electrical construction industry in 1957 working as Apprentice, Journeyman, Foreman and General Foreman. He has worked with several companies throughout his career and has been with Kirby Electric in Steubenville, Ohio for over 20 years. Tony has served the North Central Ohio NECA Chapter for many years and is currently Chapter President. He has numerous state leadership appointments including 14 years on the Ohio Construction Industry Licensing Board. Along with his exceptional service to NECA and the industry, Tony has always been a strong proponent of apprenticeship education and training and has devoted countless hours to this endeavor including service on the Advisory Committee of The National Training Institute of the National Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee (NJATC).

THE ACADEMY OF ELECTRICAL CONTRACTING

**Paper Presented by
Anthony L. Shreve, Fellow**

**CONTRACTORS AND OUR TRAINING PROGRAM:
Investing in Education is Expensive; Not Investing in Education is
More Expensive**

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Through the fifty-odd years I've been in this industry, we've pretty much done the same things in the same ways. Hey, it was working, so there was little incentive to change. We were doing things so well, in fact, that the nonunion shops began to copy parts of our approach to the marketplace, especially in the area of training.

While much of our training philosophy, delivery systems and approach have stayed the same over fifty years, the marketplace itself has changed. One prime example is the fact that it's no longer economically feasible to give apprentices on-the-job training at the fast-paced construction site of the new century. Neither contractors nor journeymen have the time nor resources to devote to the kinds of hands-on training I was able to take advantage of back when I was an apprentice.

Many other things have changed through the years. Most notably, for the first time in 30 years the Department of Labor has recently issued a Proposed Rule that will have a significant impact on the way we run our apprenticeship programs in the US. Should this rule stand as-is, it will become our jobs to change many aspects of our training programs, delivery systems, and evaluation criteria to meet the new DOL Standards.

Not only that—the young people coming into our programs are changing. During the next five years or so, applicants to our programs will be both better and worse than in the past—better at accessing, using, and understanding technologies that we'd never even dreamed of back 20 years ago, much less when I started into the training program. But these individuals will be worse in that they'll require more remedial and preparatory work than we did in the past.

The competition for our young people among various industries is increasing, making it more and more difficult for us to be able to locally sell the advantages of entering our JATC programs. A trend toward lowering our aptitude test cut-off score will only quicken under these conditions.

As fewer opportunities for hands-on training are available on the job site, the practical training falls back into the laps of the local JATC and AJATC programs. Many of these facilities simply don't have the labs or space available in their buildings to deliver that training. Many of our local training programs struggle to find the time, space,

and resources to accomplish the training that is required by today's marketplace.

Meanwhile, the current trend toward each individual JATC and AJATC program accommodating local needs, and delivering locally-crafted curricula to meet these needs will continue. While the emphasis on organizing new members continues to grow, the gaps in knowledge and skills delivered among the different training programs across the nation will continue to increase. If this trend continues, the journeyman trained in Ohio might not have the required skill set for the job that is available in Chicago.

These aren't predictions of some distant future. These trends and challenges face us today, and the reality is that they're only going to increase and become more problematic in the future, especially so if we do nothing. If our current training approach stays the same, we will continue to lose ground on the training front in the marketplace.

Here's another problem that our industry faces that we've all seen first hand. Succession planning is more and more of a problem for current NECA members. Our sons and daughters and young in-laws are coming up differently than we did. They're coming out of colleges and vocational schools with specialized training that does not hold the construction industry in high regard. Where we came up through the industry and arranged our whole lives on the benefits of union training, the young folks taking over the existing businesses today don't have that experience and loyalty. They look at the bottom line—and rightly so. But that hard look, in many cases, makes them consider modeling their business after the non-union shops instead of the organized industry. Today, more of our younger electrical construction business owners are modeling their shops after the non-union approach to the marketplace because their hearts are not in the industry—their minds are concentrating on the bottom line.

The costs of our doing nothing at this point could be the most expensive cost we've ever imagined—the total failure of the industry itself, as more and more shops turn non-union; as fewer and fewer entry-level workers enter our training programs because they're not getting what the marketplace demands; as consumers aren't given a good enough reason to choose a union shop over a non-

union; as contractors continue to throw up their hands protesting that training is the exclusive purview of the IBEW.

I see several approaches to reverse these trends, but I will say now and will say again that reaching and keeping our young people not yet in the industry will be our best tactic for saving the organized electrical construction industry. But I'll get to that in a moment.

First, now is the time for more contractors to become involved in and engaged with their training programs. We have to get out there and help guide, direct, and advise our training directors so we have a say in what is trained and how its delivered. Join the committee—show up at the meetings. Speak your minds. I firmly believe that if you don't make this effort, you honestly have no right to complain about the skill levels of the people who show up on your job site.

We've got to become better and better about communicating the advantages of our excellent training program. How is it that we've had a training program in Steubenville, Ohio for 75 years, and I still get blank looks from people at our Community Colleges who've never heard of us? We've failed to tell the world about the long-term financial and career benefits of entering this industry through our training program. We've got to end the term of us being the best-kept secret in the marketplace.

Reaching the Next Generation

Let's face it. I'm too old to change much. We aren't going to be able to change the 50-year-old electrician who's out there on the job and has been doing things the same way for 30 years. But that fresh-faced 20-year-old who's gotten a degree that he or she doesn't know what to do with? Or that 18-year-old who's looking for a way to support a family starting now instead of four years from now? These are the people we have the structure in place to teach—we merely need to reach them. We need to attract and retain them just like any employee—by marketing ourselves well, and then by training appropriately, to the shifting needs of the marketplace itself.

To do this, we need to change our delivery system. We need to change our minds and our

approach to training because it's through these young people that our industry will be changed—either for the better or the worse. It's still up to us to choose: change and survive; or do nothing (or do the same things over and over and over) and watch all our years of work and talk and bargaining slip through our fingers. It's up to us for now, but if we wait too much longer, the choice will not be ours. The next generation of contractors, for the most part, does not have organized labor under their fingernails, in their sweat and toil, in their tools and hearts.

What I envision for the future of our industry is a fresh, nation-wide commitment to the youth of our industry. We need to continue some of the things we're already doing or working towards: the expanded means of entry channels into our industry; streamlining the application processes, including providing aptitude testing and applications on line; expanding the access of young people to on-line and distance learning options.

We will have to boost the facilities within our training centers for the kinds of hands-on teaching that is no longer available on the job sites. This will require re-vamping our training facilities themselves to accommodate larger, more technically-sophisticated labs and equipment that are consistent across the nation. But it will also require getting a lot more technology into the classrooms not only for the use of the students, but also for the instructors in the effort to expand that delivery channel.

I see beefing up the training itself to the point where our journeymen will leave the program with various certifications. This will require some sort of third-party oversight or testing, as well as continued maintenance of training/education to keep up with not only the advances in technology that enter the marketplace every day, but also the certification process itself. This won't be an internally-driven piece of our future—it is market-driven. Put simply, the marketplace demands it. But while externally driven, we can adopt this approach internally instead of beating our collective heads against it. It can become a highly advantageous marketing tool—a new level of distinction between us and the unorganized shops, verified not by us alone, but by an outside observer. Besides that, it's simply good business to have