

## Labor Management Viewpoints: Laborers training – the secret to success

December 8, 2004

In the construction industry, productivity and quality are the linchpins of success. And in construction, you don't get there without starting here — training.

So it's hard to believe that not long ago opposition to providing training for construction craft laborers ran pretty deep in this industry. Even when we finally succeeded in implementing Laborers' training in 1978, the facility was confined to a lonely job trailer with no heat or running water, in the middle of a farmer's field miles from the interstate in north-central Wisconsin.

Over the years, we proved the critics wrong and for all the right reasons. As our industry has advanced, the demand for a more skilled, more productive and safer work force has grown. Wisconsin Laborers have been ready and able to meet the challenge. By the mid-1990s, that job trailer had evolved into a state-of-the-art training facility servicing more than 1,000 students annually in all facets of the industry.

Wisconsin Laborers are in the business of meeting the demand for a skilled, safe and productive work force. That's why we work with contractors to provide the best possible apprenticeship and training opportunities.

Nothing illustrates that philosophy and commitment more than the Laborers' new training facility.

Conveniently located just off Interstate 90/94 at the Highway 19 exit just north of Madison, the 50,000-square-foot Laborers Apprenticeship and Training Center features three training bays and separate instructor demonstration and classroom areas. In all, 35 courses are offered on site in the following industry areas:

- Heavy and highway
- Commercial and industrial building construction
- Utility construction
- Environmental remediation
- Building demolition
- Asbestos removal
- Nuclear decontamination and demolition
- Tunnel work
- Trenchless technology

Described by contractors and students alike as one of the best-kept secrets in the construction industry, the Laborers Apprenticeship and Training Center permits continuous full-scale, pipe-laying, mason-tending, concrete-pouring, scaffold-building and other hands-on instruction, regardless of weather conditions.

The center maintains a rigorous training schedule throughout the year.

The main session starts in January and continues through late June. That is followed in late fall with a series of other more specialized classes, including environmental remediation classes or other training for supervisors. In between, the center conducts satellite classes for local unions across the state, covering topics ranging from all-terrain forklift to lead abatement.

In addition, hundreds of other members attend other contractor-sponsored traffic control and construction safety courses taught by training center instructors.

There is no substitute for learning by doing. Both in the classroom and out in the field, instructors at the Laborers training center focus on instilling in each student the proper techniques they'll need to become knowledgeable, safe and productive workers.

Regardless of topic or size of the class, safety and safety-related issues are also viewed as essential components of every course offered at the center. Learning proper techniques, especially in today's competitive market, helps insure the safest and most productive job site.

With the lack of a skilled construction work force remaining one of the top concerns of contractors, labor and management, trustees to the Laborers Apprenticeship and Training Fund know the training center is essential to success in the industry.

Classes at the training center are open to construction laborers who are employed by contractors contributing to the Wisconsin Laborers Apprenticeship and Training Fund and who are members in good standing of any one of the five Laborers locals around the state.

For more information, please contact Al Friedl, training director, at 800-275-6939.

*Mike Ryan is the chairman of the Wisconsin Laborers Apprenticeship and Training Fund.*