

## **IBEW offering training to future work force**

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It has been a hot topic recently among employers, educators and legislators: what to do about our predicted work-force shortage. Boomers are retiring (or slated to retire) in the next decade, and plans to find and train tomorrow's work force are under way within our state and our industry. We know building a work force takes time, so now is the moment to be training and mentoring students.

We also know that the future work force will look different than the work force of today, with greater and richer minority representation. Our industry is actively reaching out to nontraditional groups to fill the gaps that will be created, with so many shortages predicted that we'll need every qualified, hard-working applicant we can train. There already exists a number of positive programs designed expressly to help women and minorities learn about the trades, achieve the requirements necessary for landing an apprenticeship, and to help ensure success throughout the apprenticeship program. But we know that it's essential to reach kids very early -- middle and even grade school -- to provide them with information about what they need to do in their teens to ensure that a future in the trades is a possibility. Life choices they make, such as successfully achieving and keeping a driver's license, will impact their opportunities later.

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Great Lakes Training has designed a new educational program titled Taking Charge: Careers in Utility Construction. Rolling out this fall in four Milwaukee Public Schools middle schools, the objective is to provide students with in-depth, hands-on knowledge of the multiple occupations within the field of outside utility construction. Reaching children early and helping them develop the personal characteristics, aptitudes and skills necessary to enter the field is one step toward making this career goal one they'll be able to realize.

### **Hands-on learning**

The program is simple: Fifty students from four middle schools attend six educational workshops taught by four select journeymen line mechanics from management along with an education coordinator.

In these hour-long workshops, active student participation and hands-on exploration will be emphasized. Students will become familiar with the variety of occupations in the field of utility construction and practice skills required for entry into the trades -- such as math problem-solving and computation, measuring, reading technical terms and procedures, and even some mechanical skills. The requirements for admission will be outlined to motivate students to make positive choices in their high school years that will allow this career choice.

Students who participate in the program will be contacted annually with additional information. A contact person will be available to students if they have questions or want to learn more as they progress through school.

The program goal is for a minimum of 5 percent of participants to enter the utility construction trades apprenticeship program by September 2011, the year they graduate high school.

We Energies is generously underwriting a portion of the program costs, but additional industry support is needed. Sponsorships are still available and will allow attendees to become familiar with your company. By working together, we can help avert the predicted labor shortage that will impact your business in 10 years, at very little cost to you now.

Remember, we're hoping that the students we reach this year could one day be your employees.

*Sharon E. Crowe is the director of training with the IBEW Great Lakes Training in Waukesha.*