

ELECTRICAL



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In Texas, Training To Meet The Customer's Needs

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TRAINING
CENTER

BEJATC, OR THE BEAUMONT ELECTRICAL JOINT Apprenticeship Training Committee, which is operated by the IBEW-NECA partnership in eastern Texas, prides itself on being a responsible corporate/educational citizen. “My challenge to our community and to the industry is to hire local first,” says Training Director Danny Prosperie.

“If we can keep our jobs in the hands of the people who live here, our superior training program will have the opportunity to win them over in time. We can’t do that if persons are hired from outside of our jurisdiction. They take the local jobs, finish the jobs, and then leave again. So if our local community will hire locally, we’re all better off.”

With that philosophy in mind, the representatives of the program are looking around at their home and making inventive efforts to help the local community combat unemployment and dwindling opportunities. “You know, it’s your customer who creates your work,” points out Charlie LeBlanc, co-owner of Crown Electric Inc. of Beaumont, the senior member of the BEJATC. “The best thing we can do is find out what our customer needs and jump out there in front of him and tell him what we can do to meet that need.” →



In the region served by BEJATC, which stretches from the Galveston Ferry to the Trinity River and north, just above Jasper, Texas, nearly a dozen of those customers are oil refineries, and what they need are wiremen who are certified in the field of instrumentation. Therefore, the committee has built an instrumentation lab to give instruction specialized to the needs of the refinery market.

“It’s really a process plant module,” says Prosperie. “Trainees get to work with flow, temperature, and pressure instrumentation and learn how to install and test them. The lab also includes the controllers—programmable logic controllers—and panels and wiring that they’ll need to learn to work in a refinery.”

The training program has been designed to accommodate the new EPRI (Electrical Power Research Institute) Certification process. That organization has created the testing and qualifying process for workers to become certified, and the IBEW and the United



Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters (UA) have adopted it as the national standard for demonstrating proficiency in instrumentation work.

“Certainly since the standard has been adopted, lots of other programs are going to begin doing this same thing,” says Prosperie. “But I believe we might be among the most active right now. When we began, there might have been 30 persons in the nation

who’d been EPRI certified.” Within the first year of incorporating the process, BEJATC had added about 80 people to that distinguished roster.

The process involves 80 hours of training with a final test for Level One. The BEJATC also offers the opportunity for students to attain the highest, Level Two Certification, which involves an intense, four-hour, one-on-one, all practical (hands-on) examination process.

“A lot of our people have already been doing refinery work,” points out Prosperie. “But the goal is to upgrade the pool of skilled workers from which the refineries can choose. We’re trying to ‘up’ the level of the playing field so all of the workforce is high quality.” In fact, the IBEW has paired up with the UA to train and test both groups of workers for this specialized market.”

Partnering seems to be “something in the water” in east Texas. The refineries themselves have joined together to form the Port Arthur Industrial Group. That organization recently approached

the BEJATC and discussions are underway to form a Skills Enhancement Training program at the apprenticeship training facility.

“This Skills Enhancement Training program is something I’m personally most passionate about,” says Prosperie. “We’re trying to do something important in partnership with our major industrial group, and to reach into

an economically challenged part of our community to give them a hand up. We’re matching workers to jobs in our neighborhood. It can’t help but enhance the process.”

“The Texas Workforce Commission is involved as well,” says LeBlanc. “The most recent development is that they’ve come down here to inspect our facilities and see our program. What they were most impressed by is our historically low wash-out rate.”

“We’ve seen a need for skills training in our area,” Prosperie adds. “One of our local areas leads the region in unemployment numbers. So we’re going to work with the Port Arthur Group on providing scholarships to economically challenged individuals, to allow them to come into our facilities and get job skills training. We’ll place them into a classroom environment and teach them things like first aid, OSHA 30 hours (a safety certification course), and also a math course that will give them Algebra I credit. That’s pretty powerful for a sector like this, where many young people never had a chance to finish high school.”

Part of the effort stems from a strong desire to serve the local community. But self-interest also plays a part “We want to get the best apprentices into our program,” LeBlanc explains. “By opening up doors like this not only are we helping our community and our neighbors and our customers; we’re also getting to these people first, so we can see a young person early on who’s possibly got the ability to excel as an electrician.” ■