



# A Bright Skilled **WORKFORCE**

By Rick Cochran

Will Walker, Northern Westmoreland Career & Technology Center

In the industry we hear it all the time – there’s just not enough skilled labor these days.

One of the biggest concerns in the home building industry is the future of the workforce. The number of young people entering the trades has been in a long-term decline. However, through the efforts of local associations, career and technical schools, employers, and PBA members, the future in Pennsylvania is looking bright.

Through programs, engagement, promotional efforts, and just plain hard work, the value of trade professions is now front and center in the minds of thousands of students.

PBA has always been committed to a viable, high-quality construction industry and supporting a future workforce that is qualified and prepared to join the trades. Industry members, educators, local associations, and more are all pulling together to develop new ideas to show young people the genuine advantages and benefits of a skills education.

Take a look at what’s being done around the state and how students and the industry are reacting. You are sure to be impressed.

## **PBA ENDORSED TRADE PROGRAM**

The Endorsed Trade Program (ETP) is a collaboration with schools throughout Pennsylvania to provide students with industry-recognized certification to strengthen their skills and introduce them to businesses that can set them on the path for success.

Programs include everything from building trades maintenance, carpentry, electrical, HVAC, masonry, plumbing, cabinet making, millwork, painting, and wall covering. More than 30 schools across the state participate. In order to qualify for the program, a review team made up of peer educators, representatives from the residential construction industry, local HBA representatives, and the ETP Director Dave DiPasquale review the applications and complete an on-site evaluation.

Schools must have an active NAHB Student Chapter and have the approval of the local home builders association. Several local associations sponsor various activities for student chapter members, including inviting them to local meetings and encouraging participation in associations’ activities and events. These local associations encourage their members to serve on local occupational advisory committees and participate in students’ year-end job-readiness assessments. Some local associations even allow



**Left to Right:** PBA CEO Dan Durden, students Johnathan Erickson and Jordan Carini, and ETP Director Dave DiPasquale met prior to a presentation to the Construction Trades program at the Greater Altoona Career & Technology Center.



**Above:** Masonry students at the Cumberland Perry Area Vocational Technical School benefit from hands-on experience."

recent graduates to participate in association activities as "Student Chapter Alumni" members.

The Endorsed Trade Program works closely with instructors and local HBAs to determine student awards that are presented at the end of the school year. Last year 24 students were presented with scholarship checks for outstanding performance.

"Preparing young people for the workforce is really a group effort," said DiPasquale. "It takes a partnership working with the schools, employers, and local home builder associations to effectively deliver qualified, confident, and effective workers."

### IN THE TRENCHES

Of course, the people on the ground working to further education in the trades are the instructors themselves. These are the individuals who work directly with the students every day. Their experience and expertise have the most direct influence on shaping the workers of tomorrow.

Chris Shirley is the masonry instructor at the Indiana County Technology Center (ICTC). He has

been working with area students for the past six years. Prior to that, Chris taught masonry at the Central PA Institute of Science and Technology in Bellefonte, PA. He is a graduate of the ICTC Masonry program.

When asked about the biggest changes in instructing these days, he points to technology. "The classroom now has an interactive smart board which allows for components of the masonry industry (arches, chimneys, fireplaces, etc.) to be broken down and easier to manipulate for instructional purposes," said Shirley.

In addition, there are several associations including the PA Concrete Masonry Association and the Mason Contractors Association of America that provide webinars and seminars offering the latest innovations, trainings, and code updates within the industry.

Recruiting students for the program is always tough. "The industry is physically demanding, but also very rewarding," Shirley said.

Ways to combat the problem are by working with sharing recruitment resources – such as videos, PowerPoint presentations, eye-

catching lab projects – that can attract students. Plus, ICTC works with tool vendors like Marshalltown and Bon Tool who provide incentives to outstanding students by rewarding them with tools for the trade.

All of the schools depend on local businesses who have been very generous with material donations and opportunities for students to take trips to construction sites and manufacturing facilities. Many of these same businesses participate in Occupational Advisory Committee meetings and serve as judges for competitions and NOCTI (National Occupational Competency Testing Institute) exams as well as evaluators for the PBA Endorsed Trade Program.

As for success stories, he says there are far too many to pick just one. "Once students graduate high school and the Masonry program at the ICTC, a large majority of them stick with the industry," he said.

Williamsport Area High School Construction Trades instructor Randy Williamson believes the



community's attitude toward a vocational education is changing. He has seen quite a few changes in both vocational training and the industry and community's perception during his 15 years of instructing.

"It's not the same vocational educational shops of the 1980s," Williamson said. "While on-site construction jobs are still – and will always be – needed, it is NOT the only route

for our students," he continues. "Our program provides pathways for direct job placement filling the skilled-trades gap – which more and more requires higher academic abilities in reading, writing, and math skills. There are also military options in construction fields and the program can be a pathway for post-secondary and four-year degrees."

The program prepares students for blue *and* white-collar jobs. "Many of my students will never touch a hammer again while providing a living for their family," he said.

Williamson agrees that the support and involvement of the community and industry has been a fantastic contributing factor to the success of bringing in students.

The West Branch Susquehanna Builders Association has been extremely supportive of the program at WAHS. Student chapter members are invited to monthly association dinner meetings and they participate in the annual home show. West Branch Susquehanna members volunteer at the school on the Occupational Advisory Committee and frequently engage with students and check out their progress and projects. The Association has also been generous in helping to fund student travel to the International Builders' Show to participate in the Student Competition. The ultimate support is that many of the students have been hired by association members either full-time or through a co-op program.

"I would say industry involvement has definitely increased. I think the industry is really starting to see



**Alex Smith of the Indiana County Technology Center has applied the skills he has learned in the masonry program outside the school as well. His latest project is these steps.**

the benefits of being hands-on in our shops and the value their personal engagement brings to the table," said Williamson.

The Williamsport program has countless success stories. Students going directly into the workforce for local businesses and those moving on to a four-year college degree program at the Pennsylvania School of Technology and graduating from the

Residential Construction Management Program are just a few examples.

Chris, Randy, and hundreds of other instructors across Pennsylvania work with students every day making sure they are ready to hit the ground running once they graduate.

## **LEARNING FOR THE FUTURE**

Emily Smith is a senior at Williamsport Area High School. She is currently in her third year of the CTE Construction Trades program.

"I always knew I was not a traditional learner. While I excelled in what some may call more 'standard learning classes,' I really became drawn to work that produced a physical result," she said.

During her freshman year, she took an introduction to precision machining class. She loved the fact that she was working on a tangible product that she could be proud of. She also saw the amazing things that the students in the program were accomplishing – everything from winning national NAHB titles to building a tiny house. She was hooked.

"I love that there isn't a day that goes by that I'm not either learning a new skill that will be helpful in my career or building on what foundation has been laid through Mr. Williamson's phenomenal instruction," Smith said. "I love that this class is available to any student receptive to learning a skill and trade that can form a lasting career and sturdy life plan."



---

**Left Top:** Johnathon Wolford from Hollidaysburg Area High School works with Mr. Englert, HVAC Teacher Assistant at the Greater Altoona Career & Technology Center, on fabricating a Plenum for a gas furnace.

**Left Bottom:** Nick Hughes, Northern Westmoreland Career & Technology Center

---

Emily, who is planning to join the Army after graduation and then enroll at Penn College's construction management program, is especially thrilled with the support students like her are receiving from the community and construction industry. The West Branch Susquehanna Builders Association and local companies are always willing to work with students and help them in the future.

Alex Smith, a masonry student at the Indiana County Technology Center, agrees with Emily.

"I think we get exceptional support from businesses and builders in the community," he said. "We have received donations from local businesses and some even give discounts to the students in the program. The Indiana-Armstrong Builders Association pays our dues for the NAHB Student Chapter. Local builders have allowed us to go on field trips to look at construction sites and many guest speakers from these businesses have come to our school as well."

Smith, who started out in the computer program but switched to the more "hands-on" masonry curriculum, feels that the greatest part of his education is that it will lead him into a fulfilling career in the masonry field. He also enjoys working with the other students and helping them with their projects.

His post-graduation plans are to either join the concrete finishers or bricklayers' union.

### **LOCAL HBAs WORKING WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES**

Local associations across the state are all committed to growing tomorrow's work force. Board members from locals like the BA of Fayette County serve on advisory boards at their local career and technical schools. In addition, many PBA members work closely with the schools on the Endorsed Trade Program certifications and staff booths at area job fairs.

The York Builders Association launched their WorkforceNOW initiative in October of 2018 in response to the skilled labor shortage. Since the program's launch, YBA has been busy growing awareness, hosting events like Construction Career Days, developing materials and resources, raising funds, and building connections in the community. As part of the brand's one-year anniversary celebration, YBA produced a series of videos designed to





Cumberland-Perry Area Vocational Technical School students showcase their skills.

promote the many opportunities for career success within the skilled trades. The videos feature YBA members and local area students and teachers. (To see the videos, visit the York Builders Association on YouTube or yorkbuilders.com.)

Dave Howard, of Howard Homes in Allentown, works directly with the Lehigh Valley Builders Association to promote vocational arts in education by hosting the District 11 SkillsUSA Council Championships within the five career and technical schools in the area. The gold medal winners advance to state and then the national competition. Howard notes, "Vocational education/training provides students with the skills needed to get an entry level job in the workforce or continue on to more advanced training. These students are able to get meaningful jobs in various technical fields without incurring the massive debt of college."

The HBA of Berks County works directly with the Berks Career and Technology Center to develop informational programs. A recent video, produced by the students at Berks CTC, focused on workforce development and featured Pat Dolan of Dolan Construction Company and Phil Harris, the Co-op Coordinator with the Berks CTC.

Dolan stressed the need for a qualified workforce and noted the benefits of good wages and the ability to learn and grow. "The need is very real," he said. "The CTCs do an excellent job and while the cost of a four-year education is expensive, the alternative's cost is lower and you can earn a wage while learning."

Dolan Construction has hired workers directly from the trade schools and high schools. Those individuals enter an apprenticeship program. Those from the trade schools can apply their experience directly to the apprenticeship.

Harris explained the need for balance in the transition from student to career. "Remember that these are teenagers who will need to be mentored," he cautioned employers. "Finding that balance is important."

The HOW Group, located in Conshohocken, is a member of the BIA of Philadelphia. Tom McHale is the Director of Operations as well as the Chair of the Workforce Alliance for the BIA.

The HOW Group partners with the University City District (UCD) in the Philadelphia area to create opportunities in the skilled trades. They offer a nine-week training program through the

West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI) that includes development of interpersonal skills as well as construction fundamentals through hands-on projects including building a shed. Students then put their accumulated knowledge into building a house that will eventually be purchased by a low-income family.

Upon completing the program, the graduates then interview for open positions at The HOW Group.

### IN THE FIELD

Jason Barshinger currently has two students working with the team at Michael Barshinger Builder/Developer, Inc., headquartered in York.

"Right now, the need is for more people at the beginning and middle levels," Barshinger said. "We need people with all different aspects of education. Moving equipment that requires GPS knowledge is just one example."

One of the challenges Barshinger sees is the maturity level in younger workers. "You have to remember to slow it down and get through to them on their level," he said. "We build condominiums and while the crew knows all the steps in the project, the younger workers need to learn those steps."

"I think it takes all kinds of different people," he said. "I think the pendulum of education where the four-year degree was the way to go, has swung back toward the middle."

And that's a great thing for students and the industry.

Michelle Larkins of HB McClure Company, serving the southcentral part of the state, has hired seven employees from four different local career and technical schools. She stated that students come from these environments both well prepared and willing to do anything.

"The instructors are really vested in each student," she said. "They do a great job of passing down their knowledge."

While the students do come prepared, Larkins says there is still a learning curve in the field. But she finds that the process is shorter for those who have graduated from a workforce program.

Through the efforts of many individuals, schools, and groups, the attitudes toward a vocational education

are growing more positive. The possibilities are endless, and the rewards are great. While we have come a long way, there is still much more work to be done.

We all have a responsibility to be mentors to young people – show them the industry, give them a chance. Supporting programs and creating awareness are vital to success. Volunteer where you can, share your craft.

The future of the workforce depends on it. **PBA**



## the right tool for the job.

When the final nail is driven and the last unit sold; when it's time to transition your community association or condo from developer to homeowner control, call us.

We're CAI, the nation's foremost expert on all things community. We're the right tool for the job. We can help you, the new board, and the entire association complete transition smoothly so that the community you've built can be their home sweet home.

PENNSYLVANIA AND  
DELAWARE VALLEY CHAPTER  
**community**  
ASSOCIATIONS INSTITUTE

**BUILDING BETTER COMMUNITIES**

[www.cai-paderval.org](http://www.cai-paderval.org)

877.608.9777

