

B O S T O N

E X P A N D S

A P P R E N T I C E E N R O L L M E N T

— A N D T R A I N I N G



Drawing recruits from the most populated metropolitan area in New England, the Boston JATC program is now among the largest in the nation. But the program's scope, diversity and success stems from a well-thought-out, concerted effort, not from the size of the population base.

"We have approximately 800 electrical apprentices in the program," says Training Director Phil Mason. "Also, we're running about 200 telecom apprentices through, for a total of 1000. In addition, we do quite a bit of journeyman training, as we do a lot of upgrade training. And we're getting into more areas like alternative energy and instrumentation."

But, only about two years ago, "We found we weren't getting the qualified applicants we were seeking. It looked as if we were drawing from an ever-smaller pool of potential electricians."

In addition, the trustees of the training program, which is funded jointly by IBEW Local Union 103 and the Boston Chapter of NECA, worried about a lack of diversity reflecting the service area. "We wanted to involve our local community more closely so that our neighbors would feel that we were truly a part of and serving our own community," says Mason.

The trustees took a multi-level approach. First, they hired a marketing firm to extend their outreach to those untapped groups and to convey the message that the electrical and telecommunications training program had a place for everyone. The marketing firm not only refurbished the JATC's web site (www.ibeweducation.com) but also created a number of brochures for distribution to any interested individual, wherever and whenever encountered. "We've been reaching out to people who have not been involved in the past, specifically targeting our recruitment efforts," Mason explains. →



The outreach effort Mason is most excited about, however, is the formation of a Speaker's Bureau backed by an impressive PowerPoint presentation that is shown at school career days and other such events. Twelve people from a wide variety of backgrounds serve as speaker/presenters.

Their focus on recruitment is working. "Up to about the year 2000, our average number of applicants was in the vicinity of 400 to 600 annually. Last year, that number went up to 1100. Thus far this year, it's been 1800. Part of that increase is due to our outreach efforts. Part is also due to the fact that we increased our starting salaries for our apprentices."

Expanding the Scope of Training

The group is also increasing service to its marketplace by instituting several additional changes, one of which is a photovoltaic training opportunity, which has been incorporated into the fifth year of the apprenticeship curriculum and also added as a journey-level course. "The customer expects that capability; we have to offer it," Mason explains.

The program has also increased the level of lab work or hands-on work at the training center. The "shop" component



of the Boston program makes up about one-third of the classroom curriculum.

"It's an expensive component to expand," admits Mason, "but it's absolutely necessary. The competitive nature of the marketplace today has made it such that the average apprentice isn't getting the time to practice a lot of these work processes in the field. So we

do that here, by increasing the shop component of what they do, offering more hands-on here at the facility than in the past."

As to the future of the training programs in the electrical industry, Mason says, "I feel there's a place for a generalist in our industry, and that our training should continue to produce well-rounded, widely-functioning electricians. There's tremendous pressure in today's training market to specialize. I have no problem with specialization at all, but I see specialization occurring after that broad-based, well-rounded training has been completed and developed.

"It's so important for the electrician on the job to be able to adapt to a wide range of technological challenges and changes," he continues. "Our imperative, I believe, is to train the generalist in such a manner that he or she can adapt to the changing technology on the fly. Once our electricians are well-grounded in the general knowledge, it will be easier for them to assimilate those changing technologies and move into specializations afterwards." ■

