

## Celebrating the Value of Job Corps

**O**n many occasions over the years, people have asked me a question something like this “What is the value the Job Corps brings to this organization?”

They understand the part about people coming out of poverty, but what value does it bring to our organization? It would take me much longer than the few minutes I have with you to enumerate all the benefits, so I'll keep it short.

The Job Corps contract with the U.S. Department of Labor is worth approximately \$6-and-a-half million annually to the IUPAT. There are 52 training programs across the country, each with an instructor. There are six field coordinators, monitoring these programs and placing our graduates in our apprenticeship programs. There are three administrative staff and two support staff working in our Hanover headquarters, for a total of 61 paid positions occupied by IUPAT members—your members.

Most of that \$6-and-a-half million goes for those salaries, pensions, and health benefits. The remainder pays for travel, supplies, office rent, and accounting and support services to our GST's office. The 52 training facilities, including all the tools and equipment, all the vehicles, goods, and materials that we use to conduct training, are paid for entirely by the U.S. government, over and above the cost of our contract.

Also, under provisions of the Workforce Investment Act, our local apprenticeship programs are permitted to use these facilities to conduct training for journeymen and apprentices free of charge.

More and more of our district councils are taking advantage of this opportunity to expand their training capacity, such as DC 36, at our glazing and industrial painting programs in Long

Beach, and our flooring program in San Diego.

Indeed, there are a few areas in the country where the Job Corps facility provides the only available training venue that we have for apprenticeship and journeyman upgrade training.



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Our signatory employers have also rediscovered the value of hiring IUPAT-trained pre-apprentices, enabling them to bid (on) large projects in remote areas of the country where our journeyman members are scarce. This is where we get into the real value the Job Corps brings to this organization.

The most valuable resource is not so much the money or the jobs provided to our members, though these definitely have value. The most valuable resource is the young people our instructors work with, day in, day out, in preparation for

that day when they pick up their tools and go to work alongside us as IUPAT members.

What makes our Job Corps program more successful than any other pre-apprenticeship or job training program is the amount of time it allows our instructors to spend with their students—eight hours a day, five days a week of hands-on craft instruction, safety training, union history, and life skills. This structure gives our instructors the opportunity to assess the students' motivation and their potential to meet the demands we know they will face as they enter the finishing industries.

Not all will meet the challenge, but those that can are recommended by our instructors to begin their apprenticeships with one of their local unions.

Let's face it, folks: We're getting older. The average unionized construction worker in all crafts is over 47 years of age. Statistically, it means that, when we get together again five years from now, at least one-third of us will be drawing that excellent pension we've been working so hard for.

The problem is our older members are retiring at a much faster rate than younger members are entering the trades. That's making it difficult for us to sustain the long-term growth of our membership base and, with it, our operational finances and our pensions. To do this, we need to recruit a younger membership base that will continue paying into our funds over a longer period of time. In other words, younger workers are what this union needs to survive.

By making a living wage that allows them to put food on the family table, (get) access to decent health care, the means to own an automobile, and eventually a home, our Job Corps graduates are able to show other young people in their communities that these things are not out of reach if they have the desire

and the commitment to assume the responsibility that comes with union membership. No marketing campaign ever devised could deliver this message of opportunity more effectively to where it's needed most than our Job Corps programs.

Job Corps, of course, can't prepare nearly as many people as we and our employer partners need to grow our market share and remain viable as an organization. We have to look to many sources and strategies to attract the people we need to fill our ranks. The non-union work sector is facing the same shortage to an even greater degree.

Pre-apprenticeship is now the buzzword for all the merit shop programs, community colleges, public school districts, and technical schools in applying for government training grants. Most of these programs have been using the ABC's NCCER curriculum, which has been enormously profitable for them, but (has) done little to prepare people for actual work.

To the extent where building trades unions have partnered with community colleges and school districts in places like Philadelphia, New York, and Cleveland, to name a few, there has been some success in preparing and moving our young people into apprenticeship programs. The Building Trades National Apprenticeship Council, which includes our Finishing Trades Institute, has collaborated with the National Labor College and developed a multi-core, multi-craft core curriculum for use in pre-apprenticeship programs.

The more our local apprenticeships and building trade councils enter into partnerships for pre-apprenticeship training with local community colleges, school districts, and community organizations, the better chance we will have of creating another national network of job-ready apprentices. Until we do,



nothing will ever come close to being as effective as our Job Corps programs on a national scale.

Why? Simply because it's all ours. IUPAT instructors, IUPAT curriculum, the IUPAT network of registered apprenticeship programs and district councils and employer partners who all continue to recognize the value of an IUPAT Job Corps trained apprentice. For 40 years, that's been our unique recipe for success that has never been duplicated.

The true measure of value is in the untold numbers of people who came to this organization through our Job Corps programs. We might never know exactly how many journeymen, foremen, job superintendents, employers and business owners, apprenticeship instructors and coordinators, union officers, business agents, organizers, and even now retirees got their start through the Job Corps. I know of at least a few who are in here with us today—and out there right now, at one of the those Job Corps centers, is a kid who might one day be seated at this dais.

As one of our long-time instructors used to say, you never know who is going to walk through that door.

So, what does the future look like for our Job Corps program? In a word, it looks brighter.

We took some hard hits over the last five years—deep funding cuts, the closure of nearly a dozen of our programs, and, of course, a plummeting economy that has reduced the work opportunities for all of our members. Even so, thanks to the renewed commitment of General President Williams and the General Executive Board, our instructors; our LMCI, FTI, and employer partners; our business managers/secretary-treasurers; and especially you, our members, the performance of our program has steadily increased and we've even managed to open up a few new ones—a flooring program in Colorado and two painting programs in Los Angeles and the Twin Cities; a new glazing program in St. Petersburg, Florida; and another painting program in Milwaukee are in the works. And we've had requests to bring programs to other locations as well.

Of course, we have a new president in Washington—one that we brought to town. So, when our economy improves and the wave of work hits, as we know it will, our Job Corps programs will be there to add support and help grow this union.

Thank you all for your time. God bless you.

[Standing ovation.]

