

APPRENTICESHIP UPDATE



Martha Ponge
Director of Apprenticeship

Apprenticeships - A Reflection *Past, Present, and Future...The Benefits are Timeless*

Recently my husband and I traveled on vacation to Nashville, TN. Nashville is a beautiful city and very welcoming to out of town visitors. While we were there, I picked up quite a bit of information on the history of apprenticeships and a reiteration of the skills gap across the nation.

The Past

A few miles outside of “The Music City” is the homestead of our seventh president, Andrew Jackson. During a tour of Jackson’s homestead, the Hermitage, we learned that Andrew Jackson came from very humble beginnings, was orphaned at a very young age, and was mostly home schooled. He was an avid reader and had little formal education in math, literature, and Latin. He began his career as an apprentice to two attorneys in private practice. He was an apprentice for four years and his training consisted of on the job learning with his employers as well as a great deal of reading from applicable texts and historical books that outlined the history of the law. Jackson went on to pass the Bar exam and became not only an attorney, but a judge, and then President (and an Army General too). A hugely successful apprenticeship story. Some of the companies in CNY are using apprenticeship programs to train for what would be considered highly professional jobs – for instance, BNY Mellon’s new apprenticeship in Data Analytics, the first of its kind in NYS.

The Present

Later that day, I toured the famous Hatch Print Shop. The shop has a rich history of 125 years of letterpress print making. They printed posters for both candidates of the 1928 presidential election, Elvis Presley’s first performance, and signs for traveling acts during the late 1800s. They are still actively printing custom posters today. The tour of their facility was fascinating; some of the blocks

being used are over 100 years old. They are still printing on machines from their original facilities and they still mix their custom inks by hand which allow them to create custom colors every time. The fact that the text blocks still exist and are still functioning allows the designers to spend more time on the designs. Current Hatch designers come in with degrees in graphic art, but little to no experience in the process of hand carving the blocks, setting type, or operating the presses. The process of learning is that of an apprentice; a combination of on-the-job learning supported by related instruction. Today, Hatch Print Shop employees are cross-trained on all steps in the process – ensuring that they stay competitive, having flexible production changes and keep costs down. Many of MACNY’s members also utilize cross training for the same reasons.

The Future

My husband and I decided that for this trip we’d use Uber and Lyft to get around. Travelling this way provided us the opportunity to meet many interesting people. We met Steve on Saturday night. Steve is an auto body technician during the week and an Uber driver during the weekend. We had an interesting discussion about how he began working in the field. His mom was instrumental in getting him into a technical school certificate program after seeing his older siblings struggle to find their way after four years in traditional college programs. Steve was chatty and spoke of how he enjoyed working in the auto body technician field for the past 10 years. Steve’s next comment came out of the blue but hit very close to home for me. He asked me if “up north” we struggle to find employees in skilled trade positions like they do in Nashville? His business continually struggles to keep up with the amount of work they have and he commented that they pay really well, yet they still can’t get enough good employees. The encounter reminded me once again that although the need for skilled technical workers is probably the biggest challenge for Central New York employers, we are not alone in our struggles – it is a challenge for employers across the country.

Apprenticeships are a timeless and proven method of developing a skilled workforce. We have some recent momentum in CNY with the MACNY Apprenticeship Program and many state and federally funded support programs for apprenticeship. However, we need many more CNY Manufacturing companies to take advantage of the programs that exist and use history’s teachings to guide us into the future.

For more information on how you can be involved in apprenticeship contact me at mponge@macny.org.