



**Eileen Donovan**  
Workforce Development Specialist

## Why Apprenticeship?

In my capacity as Workforce Development Specialist at MACNY, I'm afforded daily opportunities to speak with employers about a single issue: the worker shortage. They talk about lying awake at night, worrying about the urgency of replacing the technical expertise that is exiting in huge numbers, as Baby Boomers arrive at retirement's door. These employers describe scores of unfilled positions and good-paying jobs - if they could only find the workers on which their companies' sustainability and growth depends.

MACNY recognized that we needed to leverage our capacity as solutions-provider; in 2017, we became the first manufacturers trade association in New York State to attain NYSDOL approval to sponsor registered apprenticeships. Our research on the subject led us to believe that the time-tested, learn-while-you-earn approach would be a valuable avenue for employers needing skilled workers for 21st century technologies. Since 2017, our roster of approved trades has exceeded 16; our sponsorship agreements are active with over 50 companies across New York State.

Apprenticeship is a commitment for both parties; we understand the challenges and opportunities for the employer through countless conversations with MACNY members and others. With National Apprenticeship Week (Nov. 8-14, 2020) on the horizon, we agreed it would be helpful to consider the apprentice's point of view. What motivates a person to seek out this unique method of skills training?



*Julius Floyd, left, and Brandon McLellan, right, in front of the B+L 2020 calendar.*

I recently spoke with Julius Floyd, who joined Bausch + Lomb (B+L) in Rochester, NY, as an Electro-Mechanical Technician Apprentice in June 2020. It didn't take long for me to understand exactly why B+L would value this hire and to want to invest in his future. Mr. Floyd exemplifies the type of eager-to-learn, technically oriented employee they need to ensure the company's future, a perfect fit.

It almost didn't happen. Floyd describes a high school experience during which he awoke every day, looked out his window and witnessed a degree of aimlessness around his neighborhood that he hoped to avoid. He became a Recreation Assistant for the City of Rochester, managing children's activities, while attending Monroe Community College after graduating high school. Floyd's parents supported his work ethic and encouraged him to continue his education.

As City budgets tightened, he became less satisfied with his job and began to consider other options. The luck part of the story happened when he met Brandon McLellan, a B+L apprentice, during a class in Program Logic Control (PLC) at Monroe Community College. "I wouldn't be here if it weren't for Brandon," Floyd posits.

The two students were lab partners at MCC; it was during one of these sessions that McLellan mentioned the apprenticeship program at B+L, that PLC was what he was doing in his full-time job. Without really intending to, McLellan recruited Floyd to apply at B+L.

A brief aside – This random recruiting story got me thinking about some really promising programs, such as the Finger Lakes Youth Apprenticeship Program. Clearly, we could all be doing a better job of identifying and steering students toward careers that play to their strengths, although we appreciate the Brandon McLellans of the world!

B+L Apprenticeship Program Manager, Paul Wiesner, agrees that Julius Floyd has been a fortuitous hire for them. “Julius comes in with a great attitude every day, always with a smile, does what’s asked of him, eager to learn more. I can’t wait to watch him grow from a very green apprentice to an Electro/Mechanical Technician,” says Wiesner. Maintenance Manager and Co-Manager of Apprenticeship, John Scharr, concurs. “Julius expressed his interest in the Electro-Mechanical field, that he would like to develop his career here at B+L using the apprenticeship program as his foundation. That spoke volumes about Julius. He’s the type of individual we like to hire as we invest significant resources into each candidate to ensure well-developed, successful Electro-Mechanical technicians.”

Floyd told me that his parents support this direction for him; they appreciate that apprenticeship doesn’t compete with schooling, that it includes education. “B+L is great about training,” Floyd told me; he talks about the team atmosphere that makes work enjoyable at B+L. At present, he is on track to attain his associate degree in Applied Integrated Technology in December of 2020.

When asked how he would advise someone who currently walks in the shoes he so recently occupied, those of a high school student, Floyd recalls some of his early challenges; he was always the youngest among his peers. He always felt he needed to try harder...so he did. “Believe in yourself! Don’t try to be like everyone else. It’s all within you!” declares Floyd.

As we were on the phone, I had to imagine him smiling the way that his managers describe as he shares these thoughts.

Visit <https://www.macny.org/skilled-workforce/apprenticeship-program/> for information on MACNY’s Registered Apprenticeship Program.