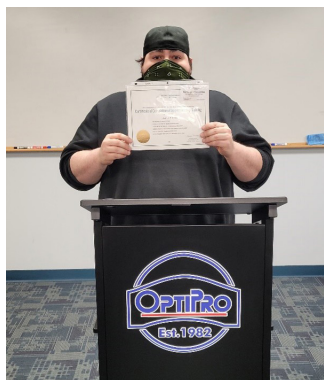




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OptiPro Graduates Apprentices

Congratulations to Josh Torres and Sam Swenson of OptiPro Systems in Ontario, NY! They recently achieved Journey Worker certification from the New York State Department of Labor in their respective trades, Quality Assurance Auditor and Electro-Mechanical Technician. Both are MACNY-sponsored apprenticeship trades.



Torres attended Wayne Senior High School, which sits nearby OptiPro Systems on the map. Upon his graduation, he considered college his only option, advice offered to him by guidance counselors. If he'd known about apprenticeship, he'd have saved himself a bit of "floating around" and accumulating college debt.

Josh says that apprenticeship was "perfect" for him; it allowed him to earn while he learned his trade. He appreciates the education he's received and that this path left him debt-free.

The Quality Assurance Auditor job description lines up with his personality; Torres likes coming up with solutions to problems presented by OptiPro customers. He wasn't necessarily oriented toward sitting in classrooms, but rather enjoyed electrician and designing courses, "tech stuff." His job at OptiPro allows him to apply all that he's learned.

Swenson's path to certification included graduation from Naples High School and the attainment of an associate degree in Applied Science/Instrumentation and Control from Finger Lakes Community College. He went to work at

OptiPro in 2013; by the time he began his Electro-Mechanical Tech apprenticeship, he'd already accrued three years' on-the-job experience toward trade requirement.

Like Torres, Swenson was approached by OptiPro to consider apprenticeship. Both men appreciate their employer's interest in the training and development of their employees, as well as OptiPro's involvement with local high school students with job shadows and plant tours. While still learning every day, Swenson likes the fact that he's "not always doing the same thing." He wears many hats, moving between mechanics and electricians, guiding new employees, and adding to his own list of skills. OptiPro's commitment to cross-training offers these two the opportunity to work together from time to time.



When asked, "What's your advice for today's high school students," both Journey Workers emphasize the importance of exploring your interest in the "tech stuff." Swenson advises, "Start early taking as many tech classes as you can. Earn college credits if possible. Take a job and see if you like it. Ask for help from your guidance counselors." Agreeing with these statements, Torres adds, "There's a skills gap. Education is important, but if you can go into a trade, you can make a great living in a job that is necessary." Both feel that the trades are unfairly "looked down upon," and that they need better press to attract high school students.

Both Journey Workers look forward to acting as "ambassadors" for apprenticeship. Indeed, Swenson already works with local students exploring manufacturing career opportunities at OptiPro. Here at MACNY, we applaud their success and OptiPro's investment in workforce development programs like the NYS Registered Apprenticeship.