ABORIGINAL APPRENTICESHIP BOARD OF ONTARIO

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Putting Careers in Trades First

"We're introducing them to careers at a younger age so they will consider skilled trades as a first career choice rather than having them drop out of school and decide to pick up a trade as a last resort," explains Lawrence Enosse, Wikwemikong AHRDA apprenticeship coordinator. For nearly seven years, Lawrence has been running the weeklong youth skills camp on Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve, which allows participants 11 – 13 years of age to gain experience in the skilled trades. "What we do is we invite different employers or tradesmen, they come down and they promote their skilled trade in a workshop and from there it's all hands-on activities and the kids get to take their projects home," says Lawrence.

Run partly in the Waase Abin High School and partly in Wikwemikong's trades building, the program focuses on a different trade each day and is presented in a way that gets youth excited about the trades. Mornings are spent learning employability skills to help them not only get a job but keep it, while afternoons focus on various trades. Each workshop is facilitated by a local licensed tradesperson and results in a finished project for students to take home with them. "We did brick and stone masonry and the kids got to put all the mud together and made a brick wall and then they took it apart. After we made little Inukshuks and they got to take those home," explains Lawrence.

As summer time is generally a busy time of year for tradespeople Lawrence says they are at the mercy of availability. "We put a call out to different tradespeople in this area, let them know what we do, that we're running this camp and then see who's available to come in," he says. While this past year youth were immersed in electrical work, the automotive trade, cooking, and brick masonry, other years have seen students learn carpentry and cabinetmaking and even hairstyling. To get students fired up Lawrence says they usually focus on auto mechanical work the first day of camp and have kids rotate tires, do oil changes and top up fluids. "The kids come in with all their funky clothes and … they get all dirty after and they don't even realize it because they're having a lot of fun," he says.

In remote locations such as Wikwemikong, the skilled worker shortage is becoming more apparent. With cutbacks in non-trade jobs, apprenticeship is an obvious solution. "I think it's important because a lot of trades aren't as pushed or

promoted as a first career choice and if you look at a lot of jobs right now there are lots of cutbacks. If we can get these kids thinking, yes I can have a career in skilled trades it would be more beneficial to them," says Lawrence. However, he feels the trades are not just a necessity but also a tie to ancestors. "A lot of our kids are hands-on learners and if we look at it traditionally their grandparents worked with their hands and their great grandparents worked with their hands so it's something they've kind of lost but now we're trying to promote it again."

Originally, the community partnered with Skills Canada to introduce the program but was forced to continue the initiative solo after the organization decided to partner with colleges and not focus on communities. "We're about two hours away from any college so they couldn't come back to us. What we did was we kept going ahead with the camp and we kind of geared it towards First Nations kids," he says. Since beginning the program Lawrence estimates they've put 92 kids through. Already the community is seeing the success of the program as one of the original participants has begun a heavy equipment co-op placement. Lawrence believes in the program and says they will continue to "promote and market skilled trades as a first career choice."

Apprenticeship Feature

Climbing to Success

A job not for the faint of heart, the role of powerline technician puts those brave enough high aloft hydro poles and towers suspended by harnesses and belts or hanging out of helicopters, often in wild conditions. Powerline technicians service hydro lines and maintain the flow of electricity from generating plants to the consumer. Whether up on steel, wood or concrete poles, or down in confined spaces such as trenches and tunnels, powerline technicians are hard at work keeping the lights on in your home.

Often called in during extreme conditions, powerline technicians must be prepared to get the job done in snow, rain, sun and wind. Climbing structures, operating bucket trucks and boom trucks are all in a day's work as they install and maintain distribution lines, transmission lines and street light systems. When you're walking home in the evenings you can thank a powerline technician for lighting the way. Not your standard nine-to-five job, as a powerline technician you may be called in to work for long periods during emergencies such as storms causing power outages. Most workers are employed by utility companies, highway and heavy construction firms, or electrical construction firms. For those daring enough, a job as a powerline technician can be challenging, exciting and diverse.

The DARING Life of a Powerline Technician

Work Environment

Powerline technicians work in any weather, be it rain, sleet, snow, or beating sun! Travel is a necessity with workers often venturing into remote areas using all-terrain vehicles, and helicopters. While some may work 40 hours a week, most are on standby, often called upon at all hours to venture out into extreme weather.

Education/Training

To become a powerline technician you must be at least 16 years of age and have a minimum Grade 12 education with credits in math and physics. Apprentices will complete 8,000 hours of training before ascending to journeyperson status. Related work experience or completion of a powerline technician program at a technical institute may reduce the time required to complete apprenticeship.

Are You the Right Fit?

Do you crave excitement and diversity? Are you comfortable working at heights? Are you a stickler for safety? Powerline technicians have varied work that can take them anywhere from out into the wild to just up the street. The work is constantly changing and conditions can be tough when called upon to work in difficult weather at extreme heights. Safety and the ability to communicate effectively with co-workers are of the utmost priority.

Common Trade Names

Powerline technicians are known by a number of names within the industry including:

- Power lineworker
- Construction lineworker
- Cable installer – Electrical power
- Cable splicer – Electrical power
- Lineworker

How Much Can You Earn?

Powerline technicians can expect to make between $18 and $34 an hour depending on experience and area of expertise. Apprentices will make a percentage of the journeyperson's rate, usually 50-60 per cent in their first year and go up in wages at each level of apprenticeship.

Job Prospects

The trade is battling an aging workforce in a physically demanding job. Employment for this occupation is expected to grow at an average rate though growth is dependant upon expansion demands in urban areas and replacement of old systems.

Nolenn Martin: Modern-Day Daredevil

Evil Knievel and daredevils of the like have nothing on Nolenn Martin, a 29-year-old apprentice powerline technician and member of the Canadian Union of Skilled Workers currently working for Hydro One. “I like the heights. The higher the better,” explains the Six Nations native who is currently in his fourth and final year of apprenticeship. With only 1,000 hours standing between him and full tradesperson status, Nolenn is on the rise, literally.

As a powerline technician Nolenn spends much of his time up on wood poles or steel towers constructing and maintaining hydro lines to maintain the flow of electricity from hydro generators to consumers homes. Nolenn emphasizes the need to safely approach all the work he does and ensure safety systems are in place to protect himself and his co-workers. “It’s pretty demanding, you’re hanging there and if your foot kicks out you’re going down,” he says. Nolenn has been lucky enough to avoid falling himself but says unfortunately he has had co-workers suffer fatal falls. “You’ve got to be on your feet, you’re belting and unbelting, belting and unbelting so many times, sometimes 20 times, if you mess up once then you’re gonna go down,” he says.

“It’s pretty demanding, you’re hanging there and if your foot kicks out you’re going down.”

As a former hull technician in the Navy, Nolenn is used to exciting and daring situations. Taking a job that sees him up 100 feet in the air suspended by harnesses and held up by spurs on his feet, feels like second nature. When asked why he likes heights so much he chuckles saying, “I’m Mohawk, come on, ” citing the legend that Mohawk members of the Six Nations have always been known as having an affinity for heights.

A typical day for Nolenn will often include climbing 150-foot structures two or three times a day depending on the job with about 30 lbs of tools and rigging on his harness. While working with high voltage electricity comes naturally to him now, he says he never would have considered a job dealing with electricity before entering the trade. “I don’t like household electricity, I don’t like drilling a thousand little holes to feed a wire down to a panel box but I don’t mind dealing with 500,000 volt towers because everything is big and it’s easy to follow,” he says.

Currently living in London, Nolenn says the hardest part of the trade is the travel. Driving from London to Toronto and Niagara Falls for work every day Nolenn has seen first hand how hard the travel can be on a car. “It’s really rough on vehicles. I’ve got a brand new Cadillac and there are already 116, 000 kilometres on it in less than a year,” he laughs adding that he is looking for a “junker” to handle the long drives.

Nolenn’s “can do” attitude has won him respect and praise in his trade with promises of promotion in the works. “I’ve been told that I’m supposed to be going up as a sub-foreman position,” explains Nolenn adding, “It’ll be more paperwork, I’ll be laying out the jobs, I’ll be in control of the guys underneath me which will be apprentices. When they ask questions I’ll have to know the answers.” The new role will be challenging but much like other tasks in the trade Nolenn fearlessly says, “If you don’t want to do it tell me and I’ll go do it.”

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Bringing Bright Ideas to Light

"All stakeholders, including industry, governments and educators need to work together to address our pending skilled labour crisis by raising awareness of the issue and proactively developing and implementing plans to actively recruit (attract), train (develop) and retain workers," says Sanela Turkanovic, communications project manager for the Electricity Sector Council.

The electrical trades sector, like all sectors involved in skilled trades, is feeling the strain of dwindling workers. With this in mind the Electricity Sector Council is focusing on an Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative. Projects under the initiative seek to increase participation of Aboriginal people in the electricity workforce by overcoming barriers and building communication bridges between the industry and Aboriginal people.

"Recruitment strategies need to change and increased effort needs to be put toward utilizing less commonly accessed pools of labour such as Aboriginals, internationally trained workers, and women," stresses Sanela. Part of the recruitment changes will focus on promoting employment practices which support hiring and retention of Aboriginal people.

The initiative involves the enactment of a number of projects including an Aboriginal Symposium, five Aboriginal youth camps, and adult initiatives in the form of pre-apprenticeship training or an employee mentoring program. Finally the council hopes to develop an employer toolkit, consisting of a web-based HR guide highlighting the benefits of hiring and retaining Aboriginal people.

To date, Sanela says the initiatives have been met with positive feedback. "There has been huge interest in the work we are doing from a wide range of constituencies, including employers, Aboriginal associations, government, educational representatives, and the unions," she says.

The electricity industry faces an immediate shortfall of 1,300 positions every year for the next three years, and must replace nearly 30 per cent of technical industry positions or approximately 25,000 people within the next six years to meet Canada's energy demands. According to Sanela the initiative will, "make a vital contribution towards enabling industry stakeholders to meet the challenge of both current and projected labour market shortages by broadening the candidate pool employers choose from and support."

Apprenticeship Resources

Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario
www.aabo.ca

Construction Sector Council of Canada
www.csc-ca.org

Electricity Sector Council
www.brightfutures.ca

Careers in Construction
www.careersinconstruction.ca