Volunteers Focused on Workforce Development

Contractors, industry reps, manufacturers weigh in on why they play a part … and what’s in it for you!

With the spotlight on the staggering worker shortage these days, workforce development efforts are taking center stage, particularly the valuable role of the SkillsUSA competitions and the PHCC Educational Foundation’s National Apprentice Contests. Each year, students and apprentices, respectively, demonstrate their knowledge and skills, gain confidence, and make valuable connections, with winners taking home incredible prize packages of tools and cash.

As contractors, industry representatives, educators, and manufacturers all agree, these contests are the key to motivating future workers, developing leaders, and instilling proper techniques and safety, but they don’t happen without countless volunteers buzzing behind the scenes.

Why do they do it?
The common thread: these volunteers are passionate about filling the workforce gap with qualified professionals to secure the future of an industry they all treasure. “You have to be part of the solution to keep from being part of the problem,” says Jim Steinie of Atomic Plumbing, who chooses to pay it forward in this fashion. He never forgets that an apprentice contest is where he got his own start 30 years ago. Today, he views supporting the apprenticeship programs – and the contests – as an ideal way to create a “real world experience” for these budding professionals… as a way to “fuel my labor force.”

As Chairman for the Foundation’s HVAC Apprentice Contest, Scott Balmer of Shoffner Kalthoff Mechanical Electrical Service says it’s a way to “give back to a trade that has been very good to me.” In the business for 48 years, he admits he tends to “look at the end result of it all.” Better training up front, he explains, means giving the customer a better experience, which leads to better loyalty and better profit. “If you get a job done well, your business will take care of itself,” he says. Plus, “if your employee is happy and his friends who are not involved in the trade see that,” he says, “they might get involved.”

James Walls, who represents the Cast Iron Soil Pipe Institute, is dedicated to keeping “all materials” in the contest. “If you’re a plumbing professional, you’re going to come across cast iron applications,” he says, praising the “quiet pipe” for its noise reduction and “fire stopping” qualities. So, each year he does his part to ensure that contestants know how to safely cut cast iron and properly connect the fittings. And, like Balmer, he takes pride in giving back to an important industry. “If we don’t teach the youth, we’re not going to have anybody out there to do this work, other than those who aren’t truly qualified,” he says.

From a manufacturer standpoint, Michael Kirby of Milwaukee Tool considers the contests “a collective

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– Scott Balmer, Shoffner Kalthoff Mechanical Electrical Service

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effort of industry professionals who truly care about the future and sustainability of our industry and developing its future leaders.” With that, Milwaukee Tool provides innovative cordless tools and accessories for the PHCC contestants to use during the event and to take home after the contests; the company also provides prizes for top-place finishers. “As a manufacturer,” he adds, “Milwaukee Tool is dedicated to putting people on the job sites … and to understanding what we can do to make users more productive, more safe.” The company, he says, “is not about being all things to all people but rather is focused on delivering solutions to our Core Trade Users.”

What’s in it for you?

As a contractor, Steinle says his volunteer work for the contests has been priceless in “gaining an understanding about how to bring apprentices into my company… how to use them… how to maximize those opportunities.” He adds: “Knowing how the apprenticeship program works and how the high school and technical centers work has benefitted my company tremendously. I know where the young kids coming into our industry are and how to attract them, and I understand what motivates them.”

Likewise, educators, Steinle says, learn about the opportunities for their students and for their schools. For 22 years, he explains, his state of Virginia has implemented a contest for its apprenticeship program for a couple of key reasons: “one, so students can show what they’ve learned, and, two, so we can evaluate the program.” It’s an ideal vehicle, he adds, for highlighting both areas of expertise and deficiencies that might need attention.

“Manufacturers,” Steinle continues, “love to donate [to the contests] because their products get in the hands of the apprentices who are the top-notch players in the industry… and they get real-world feedback about their products.” With safety in mind, Walls adds that it behooves manufacturers to share their time and materials to ensure their products are installed properly. In fact, he explains, volunteers often meet with apprentices after the contests and share what they did correctly and what needs improvement… an ideal opportunity to reach – and teach – those just entering the profession.

As Balmer explains, the benefits of getting involved in the contests are a win-win-win for everyone who participates. “If we have good employees in the field, the customers will be happy, the manufacturers will have fewer warranty calls, the contractors will have more business and will, in turn, generate more sales for the manufacturers or wholesalers.” But, to make this happen, “we all have to work together.”

WHAT PART WILL YOU PLAY?

As a volunteer for the Skills USA Contest and the PHCC Educational Foundation National Apprentice Contests, Jim Steinele says “the camaraderie is unbelievable … I truly love the people I work with.” Plus, he adds, the work becomes easier as he goes. “After the first or second year, it just becomes second-nature,” he says.

Balmer concurs. “Yes, it’s a way to give back, but I think I personally get a lot more out of it than what I give,” he says. “In this trade, you install a unit, and you get instant gratification; working with the contests is very similar to that: you get involved in the contests, and you see the results… it’s very rewarding.”

How can you get involved?

The PHCC Educational Foundation welcomes volunteers to:

- Market the contests in local areas
- Recruit contestants
- Solicit sponsorships
- Donate tools/materials and prizes
- Set up and tear down contests
- Judge the HVAC and plumbing contests

For more information, please contact Merry Beth Hall at hall@naphcc.org. The Foundation still needs additional judges for the HVAC Apprentice Contest during CONNECT 2015, Sept. 30 – Oct. 2, in Hollywood, Fla.
Craig and Kathy Lewis join the Foundation Board of Governors

The Foundation is proud to welcome Craig and Kathy Lewis, R.E.C Industries, Inc., in College Station, Texas as new members of the Board of Governors. “It’s wonderful to add their names to the list of the Foundation’s most important supporters,” said Roger Peugeot, Foundation Chairman.

Craig is a second-generation contractor and a well-respected leader in the industry. He was the 2012-13 PHCC National Secretary and a past Zone 4 Director. Craig serves on the Foundation Board of Directors, the Investment Management Committee and the HVACR Contest Committee.

Kathy is an active member of the PHCC Auxiliary and worked closely with the Foundation on the career videos that debuted in 2012.

“The Foundation and our Association have been our partners in progress for many years, and it is appreciated by our family and our family at REC Industries, Inc.” said Craig.

The Lewises join other major supporters in promoting the Foundation’s mission of developing apprentice, journeyman and business management training programs for the success of plumbing and HVACR contractors, their employees and the future of the industry.

“Creating Super Foremen!” Workshop Tours the Country

Thirty foremen, superintendents and operations managers filled the Foundation’s sold-out workshop “Creating Super Foremen!” held in May at the Viega Educational Facility in New Hampshire.

The lead instructor, Kirk Alter of Purdue University, knows this material well. By the end of 2015, he will have presented this same foreman workshop at least seven more times at PHCC chapter training events and to individual member companies around the country.

“Contractors have been promoting their best field personnel to foremen as work has ramped up,” says Alter. “These new foremen must understand that they are in a whole new world. They are management now. They are getting paid to think and to plan. That’s very different than the role they have filled in the past.”

The training packed dozens of lessons on how foremen must serve as the first line of management into a two-day program. Please see http://phccfoundation.org/essentials for more information and dates of upcoming workshops.
REVISED PLUMBING 201 TEXTBOOK AVAILABLE

Plumbing 201, the PHCC Educational Foundation’s second year plumbing apprentice textbook, has been revised and is now available for sale through Cengage Learning. The e-book version will be available later in the summer for Kindle, NOOK, and Apple devices.

This title has been revised to include:

- Updated code references
- New chapter on communication skills and professionalism
- New chapter on fixture supports
- Updated information on water heaters
- New section on hydronics
- Updated safety information

For ordering information, visit the Foundation website at http://foundation.phccweb.org and search under Apprentice Education.

Simulation Software Coming to HVACR eLearning Courses

Learning to provide simulation software for electrical and mechanical troubleshooting for the HVACR eLearning courses.

The software is gaming-based and interactive, allowing technicians-in-training to diagnose hundreds of HVAC system problems using logical methods. Students enrolling in the program will be provided with a license to use the troubleshooting software for a period of four years, providing plenty of time for students to work through the many problem-solving exercises available.

Interested in learning more about the HVACR eLearning course? Visit the Foundation website at http://foundation.phccweb.org and click on Apprentice Education.
Hands ON, Pays OFF!
Register Your Top Apprentice for the CONNECT Contest

Give your top HVAC or plumbing apprentice a big boost of confidence... plus a shot at incredible prize packages and unlimited bragging rights. It’s a win-win for you and your company!

The PHCC Educational Foundation’s 2015 HVAC and Plumbing Apprentice Contests are now open for competitor registration.


Visit http://foundation.phccweb.org or email Merry Beth Hall at hall@naphcc.org for more information.

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As the economy has shown signs of strength in 2014 & 2015, the demand for the Foundation’s training has grown to match. Contractors landing more customers and larger projects have found themselves needing to train new entry-level employees to get the work done. These new employees need better trained managers and the company owners need to stay on top of new regulations, evolving management techniques and the constant march of technology.

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