

Building a career - Reggie Caverson

Mar 23, 2012

Giving students a head start in the trades

By: Guest Columnist

Over the past 12 years, thousands of secondary school students from across Ontario have jumped into apprenticeship training as registered apprentices, while working toward the completion of a secondary school diploma.

Through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), this opportunity has been a dream come true for many students.

Sharon Orlak, OYAP project manager at the Rainbow District School Board, said as a result of the program, many students have successfully graduated from high school, with a head start in the trades. Many are certified by the age of 23.

"Beginning a career in a trade eight to 10 years ahead of their peers has given these young people a competitive edge," Orlak said.

Many trades are in desperate need to recruit young people thanks to the effect of the baby boomer generation opting to retire.

By 2021, it is estimated that one million skilled trades workers are expected to retire across Canada.

Because of this transition to retirement, employers recognize that without new tradespeople, various industries will be impacted by shortages. With Sudbury's current mining super-cycle, the demand for skilled trades will be felt not only in mining, but industries such as construction, mining services and others.

"The sky is the limit," Orlak said. "Students and parents need to know that skilled trades provide a lucrative and rewarding career choice."

For Josh Brisson, a graduate of Chelmsford Valley District Composite School who was hired by Atlas Copco Mining and Rock Excavation Technique Canada, it certainly was.

"The co-op experience from OYAP was extremely valuable to me," Brisson said.

Brian Bernier couldn't agree more. The work shop manager at Atlas Copco said Brisson has "shined" to become one of the company's best apprentices.

"Taking a chance with the apprentice, in my mind, is no longer a risk — it is something that needs to be done for our trades to survive," he said.

Brisson registered as an apprentice heavy duty equipment technician while still in high school, and is now working in the trade. He said he plans to continue his apprenticeship and attend trades school at Sault College this fall.

Grade 11 and 12 students considering a future in the trades can talk with a co-operative education teacher or school guidance counsellor for more details on their OYAP options.

OYAP is funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) in partnership with school boards throughout Ontario. The apprentice pays only a small fee to attend. As a result, the "earn while you learn" apprenticeship route is a cost-effective way to get an education in the workplace with no tuition debt to repay. All school boards in our community offer OYAP.

Reggie Caverson is the executive director of Workforce Planning for Sudbury and Manitoulin. This article is the first in a series of four on the skilled trades. Watch for next week's column on what happens to students after high school and education debts.

Posted by Laurel Myers

Dispelling myths about the trades - Reggie Caverson

Mar 29, 2012

Weighing student debt and job prospects

By: Guest Columnist

Time to uncover the stigma and myths surrounding a skilled trades career. While college or university is the right route for some students, it isn't the only route, especially when post-secondary debt load, job prospects and salary are considered.

A 2009 Ministry of Education study found that after four or five years of high school, about 34 per cent of students go to university, 20 per cent to college, and six per cent to an apprenticeship program.

Approximately 15 per cent go into the workplace with their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), and about 25 per cent without. In other words, just under half of the students that leave high school or graduate go directly into the workplace.

Students choose to enter the work force immediately for several reasons: they don't know what career to choose; they don't have the finances for school; or they were unhappy with some aspect of high school (academic or social). Once they are on the job for some time though, some recognize that their salary and career options are limited, and choose to go back to school.

Going to university or college, however, is not for everyone, and it costs money, lots of money. The average cost of completing an undergraduate degree can be anywhere from \$25,000 to \$100,000, depending on whether a student lives at home or not. While college tuition is lower, this kind of investment comes with risks.

Student debt can severely impact a person's ability to own a home, buy a car, and even have children after they graduate. Starting salaries and job options are also limited. As a result, some go into a graduate program or take specialized college courses because they can't find a good paying job in their field.

So what are the options? What most parents don't realize is that the cost of a student taking an apprenticeship while in high school means no debt. In fact, apprenticeship students can complete their OSSD, get on-the-job training, earn a salary while working and become fully certified in a trade by the time they are 23, around the time most university students graduate.

It's important to dispel the myth that investing in a university or college degree automatically leads to a better job. Education alone is no longer a guarantee that a student will even make enough money to pay back their student loans. Starting salaries and job prospects are also lower than those in a skilled trade where demand and competition is high. These days, it is not uncommon for trades people to make an average of \$100,000 annually. Given the demand on the trades, other doors also open to relocate, own a business or teach.

While university and college are clearly an appropriate route for some students, it isn't for everyone. For other students, a career in one of the more than 150 skilled trades might indeed be the best route to go to reduce debt burden, and to be assured of a solid salary and viable career. It is time we dispel some of the myths and stigma about the skilled trades and show the true value of following this career path.

Reggie Caverson is executive director of Workforce Planning for Sudbury and Manitoulin. This article is the second in a series of four on the skilled trades, provided by its education co-ordinating team. Watch for next week's column on what is being done to connect employers with students to provide hands-on learning.

Posted by Laurel Myers

Matching apprentices with employers - Reggie Caverson

Apr 05, 2012

By: Guest Columnist

For employers, parents and students, it is hard to understand the true value of a career in the skilled trades. With the recent provincial and federal budget announcements, the reality is this; those once-lucrative public service jobs with good salaries, benefits and pensions are slowly disappearing. What we are seeing, however, is a growing demand in the skilled trades across various industries. As older workers retire, demand continues to grow. This demand is driving up salaries and pushing employers to take a hard and serious look at who is going to replace their workforce in the next five to 10 years. Right now, the outlook isn't good. Few students are entering the skilled trades, and someone needs to be trained to do the range of jobs that are required to keep industry going.

Employers and parents have a key role to play here. While some have turned a blind eye to forecasted trends, the reality is starting to hit home. We need to invest in our future workforce now.

The Employer Registry is one way for an employer to do this. Through the Ministry of Education's Passport to Prosperity program, employers can sign onto the Employer Registry to offer experiential learning experiences for high school students. This might include career talks, workplace tours, participation in career fairs, providing a cooperative education placement or taking on an apprentice. How much time and energy an employer is able to invest is entirely up to them.

For educators, the Employer Registry identifies which employers are willing to help students. By accessing the extensive employer database, teachers are able to connect their students to meaningful work experiences. All of this helps students become more aware of potential apprenticeship opportunities and possible career paths. In the Sudbury and Manitoulin area, more than 600 employers have already signed onto the Employer Registry.

Parents and students need to know that currently, there are more than 150 Ontario apprenticeship trades in industries such as agriculture, transportation, service, industrial, construction and manufacturing. Within each industry, there are a number of skilled trades' jobs available. The Human Resources and Skills Development Canada website provides the National Occupational Classification, NOC for short, for all jobs, including the skilled trades. Their website "organizes over 40,000 job titles into 500 occupational group descriptions." For all jobs and occupations listed, valuable information on education needed, training required, salaries and other useful information for parents, students, job seekers and employers is provided.

The Employer Registry offers a win-win for everyone. For the employer, benefits include access to a talented workforce at no cost, an opportunity to impact training for future employees and recognition as a valued corporate citizen, but the benefits don't end there. For the student, not only are they able to learn more about options beyond high school, but they are able to gain outside of the classroom experience and apply what they have learned to the real world. All of this helps to better prepare them for the workforce in the future. The Employer Registry can be found at employerregistry.ca.

Reggie Caverson is executive director of Workforce Planning for Sudbury and Manitoulin. This article is the third in a series of four on the skilled trades, provided by their Education Coordinating Team. Watch for the last column in this series next week.

Posted by Laurel Myers