

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## Dividing Lines | Apprenticeships train for trades needing skilled workers

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Kameron Landin played middle linebacker for Colonel Crawford High School near Bucyrus in north-central Ohio. Otterbein, Ohio Northern and Marietta all expressed interest in his football talents, he said. He thought about becoming a personal trainer.

But today, he's a carpenter's apprentice for Corna Kokosing, replacing ceiling tiles at the Hilton Columbus at Easton, among other duties.

For 20-year-old Landin, it was an easy choice.

"I really like to build stuff," he said. His grandfather makes furniture.

He also sees his four-year apprenticeship as a route to a middle-class lifestyle, or more. "I think you can go beyond that," Landin said. It just depends on how hard you want to work, he said.

Corna Kokosing, based near Westerville, is among a growing number of businesses taking it upon themselves to train their next generation of employees. Company leaders fear there won't be enough skilled-trades workers to replace those who retire, because parents and educators steer young people to college, saying that's the only way to make a good living in the 21st century.

But apprenticeships in skilled trades provide another option, one that more are noticing, even though the construction business is notoriously cyclical. During his State of the City speech on Feb. 23, Columbus Mayor Andrew J. Ginther said the city is putting up \$500,000 for Columbus City Schools to prepare students for pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. The city is looking for private companies to contribute another \$500,000.

"The school district has been increasing the size of these programs," said Stephen Sayre, director of special projects for the mayor's office.

American businesses have focused on lowering costs to compete, moving away from reinvestment to concentrate on increasing the value of stock and rewarding shareholders, said Peter Creticos, president of the Institute for Work and the Economy, a public-policy research group in Chicago. But now, he said, more business leaders are telling him that they are investing in apprenticeships.

“These organizations are taking an aggressive position ... as a way of changing the business,” he said.

Officials from Daetwyler, a Swiss company that makes parts for printers and has operations in suburban Charlotte, North Carolina, told him they spend \$160,000 per employee in a four-year apprenticeship program for machinists.

“Part of the business strategy is to reinvest into their workforce,” Creticos said.

Bob Romanelli is Daetwyler’s apprenticeship coordinator, and his company is part of Apprenticeship 2000. Five companies in the Charlotte area participate in the program designed to train people for technical careers.

Daetwyler recruits students entering their senior year in high school, he said. After coming to the United States, the company’s founder, “realized quickly that there wasn’t enough skilled labor for the workforce.”

“We do everything in our power to make them successful,” Romanelli said.

And if they are successful, they will stay. He said about 67 percent of those who complete apprenticeships stay with the company at least two years, and 53 percent stay for at least five years.

When they finish the program, apprentices receive an associate’s degree and a journeyman’s card from the state of North Carolina, he said. They then make \$36,000 to \$38,000 a year once they start working after the program.

But you don’t have to go to Charlotte to find successful apprenticeship programs.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services has more than 900 registered programs across the state, including many in the Columbus area.

Rick Roehrenbeck, president of Roehrenbeck Electric, said he has six people in his four-year apprentice program. His company pays for schooling and tools, plus an hourly wage and full benefits that include health care, a 401(k) plan and profit sharing

for the apprentices. When they start the program, they already make \$30,000 a year. By the end, they'll be earning \$42,000.

"They're all helping me," said Roehrenbeck, whose company employs about 40. "I want us all to be successful. I want them to be successful, too. There's a value in paying people well."

A solid electrician can make \$50,000 a year, Roehrenbeck said.

"There's no college, nothing to pay back."

In Ohio, the Operative Plasterers' and Cement Masons' International Association Local 132 has 60 to 80 apprentices at any given time at its locations in Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton and Portsmouth. But it's not easy to find or keep them, even though they'll be making about \$50,000 a year after the three- or four-year program.

"Recruiting is always a challenge," said Connie Sink, the union's regional apprenticeship coordinator. "It's very physical labor." Masons and plasterers work in heat or bitter cold. "Dirty, manual labor," she said.

Apprentices used to stick it out, but she sees a difference in the work ethic of people today. She also sees a difference in workers' outlooks.

"They want everything right now," Sink said. "They don't care if it comes with a pension plan, an annuity plan. They want the money now."

"They can't see out that far."

After completing the masonry program, they are registered apprentices with the state. Cement masons makes \$24.83 an hour, or \$51,646 a year. With benefits, that rises to \$81,494.

Jasmine Lakich of Zanesville is a second-year apprentice with construction company Shelly & Sands, helping build sidewalks and curbs. After two years of college, she worked as a dishwasher and a warehouse worker, and also at Pizza Hut and a children's clothing store before interviewing at Shelly & Sands in 2014.

Lakich, 27, wanted a better future.

"People are always going to need roads and buildings," she said.

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