

Electrical Industry Invests in the Future of the Workforce

Opens a State-of-the-Art Training Center for Positions of All Levels

By Michelle L. Fallon
Industry Consultant, Contributing Writer

On October 12, 2010, the Atlanta Electrical Joint Apprentice Committee (AEJATC) held the grand-opening of their state-of-the-art Electrical Training Facility – 7 years in the making. Members of the AEJATC, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 613 (IBEW), members of the Atlanta Electrical Contractors Association (AECA), and equipment manufacturers gathered at the Bay Circle campus in Norcross for the celebration of its new 37,000 sq. ft. facility.

The AEJATC, which is made up of members of the Atlanta Electrical Contractors Association (AECA) and union representatives from IBEW Local 613, has worked together to provide training to apprentices, construction wireman and construction electricians, as well as journeymen electricians at its old facility located at 501 Pulliam Street in downtown Atlanta for 35 years. “The apprenticeship program itself has been accredited by the Federal Government for 63 years,” says Max Mount, Jr., President of the IBEW Local 613 and a Trustee of the AEJATC Building Committee. “We are proud of our past and confident in the future,” continues Mount.

“This modern Electrical Training Center is part of a workforce development plan that serves as a shining example of what happens when an industry invests in itself for the future through forward thinking training and education,” says Russell Smith, Director of Training at the facility. He explained that needs arose as baby boomers retired and the number of new applicants declined; it became apparent that a new updated facility would be required to meet the future needs of the industry and attract talent of all skill levels.

In this unique partnership between the AECA and the IBEW, the operating costs of the training programs are funded through a payroll assessment to the contractors, as negotiated through the collective bargaining agreement. The facility was funded from the school’s reserve as well as several finance vehicles. The mortgage is also being paid through a special payroll assessment to the contractors.

“We have made a substantial financial commitment to the tune of \$5.5M to fund the construction of this new facility, and therefore provide meaningful employment for individuals who want to make the electrical construction industry a career choice, says Jeff Giglio, Chairman of Inglett & Stubbs and also a Trustee of the AEJATC Building Committee. “The client gets the best-trained electrician to install critical components on their project; the contractor gets the best-trained electrician to meet the increasing technical and sophisticated requirements of their contracts; the electrician gets the best training available to secure meaningful employment, fair wages & benefits in order to provide for their families; and the American society gets a well-trained workforce with marketable skills who won’t be a burden to society in the future,” Giglio explains.

Students attend the various training programs tuition free, paying only for books. The AEJATC is non-profit organization in contrast to some other programs available in the area.

Making this facility a reality was not an easy task in this economy and met its share of challenges. First, the AEJATC needed to anticipate the training necessities of the industry for the next thirty to forty years. As a result, the location in Norcross has the flexibility to expand and re-tool as the needs change. The existing program requires 20,000 sq. ft, with an expansion capacity to about 40,000 sq. ft. The Bay Circle location was a 37,000 sq. ft shell that was built out 25,000 sq. ft leaving 12,000 sq. ft for future expansion.

The second challenge was to find the financing to purchase and build the facility. "As you can imagine, 2009 was not an easy time to go to the bank to ask for a real estate loan. With the help of Affinity Bank and Community Business Bank, we were able to put a financing package together that met our needs and budget," Giglio says.

Getting commitment from the industry to support the new facility turned out to be one of the least of the committees' challenges. "The IBEW Local 613 committed their full support to the concept of a new state-of-the-art facility and the electrical contracting communities pledged their full support through the special assessment to pay off the facility as soon as possible," Giglio explains. Mount believes the completion of the training facility "is a perfect example of what can be achieved through the collective bargaining process," and adds, "For every hour an IBEW electrician works, that assessment represents an investment in the future of the industry."

The program also received tremendous support and donations of more than \$350K in products and services from various electrical equipment and material manufacturers. This allowed the installation of true state-of-the-art, latest technology, green-friendly products, as well as the latest lighting, audio-visual and teaching tools for learning and demonstration.

One of the goals of the project was to increase the lab space so that more hands-on-classroom-training would be available to students. "We have classrooms which are equipped with the latest manufactured equipment, products and tools ensuring the student receive a real-life experience, in the laboratory, of what they can expect on a construction site environment," says Smith. "Manufacturers were critical in achieving this goal, since it was their products and equipment being installed in the labs," continues Smith.

The Electrical Training Center offers three primary curriculum tracks.

- 1) **Five-year Apprenticeship Training Program.** The facility currently trains approximately 800 apprentices. Each apprentice is required to attend school one day, every two weeks and work on construction sites the other nine days to obtain the on-the-job-training. If the Apprentice is successful in passing various evaluations they move to the next level. In total, each Apprentice receives a minimum of 800 hours of classroom training and 8000 hours of on-the job-training.
- 2) **Construction Wiremen/Construction Electricians (CW/CE) Training Program.** The facility currently serves 800 CW/CE's. This program is a maximum eight-year training program for those who have been in the electrical construction industry for some time, but

are not part of the structured Apprenticeship program. Applicants are tested, and based on their skill evaluation, are slotted into the program. CW/CE students are required to take a set number of classroom and on-the-job-training hours in order to be promoted to the next level. This program is a self-paced program, as opposed to the mandatory Apprenticeship program.

- 3) **Continuing Education Classes for Journeymen Electricians.** The curriculum includes a full program of various electrical subjects for Journeymen Electricians who wish to advance their skills beyond that which they have received during their apprenticeship and construction experience.

In the future, plans include adding an expanded continuing education program for a fourth segment of the industry, such as owners, architects, engineers, inspectors & project managers on issues such as code, technology and product updates and innovations.

Chuck Little, H.R. Director for the AECA, and responsible for recruiting students into the program says, “Our new Electrical Training Center is a true showcase, with a great location.” He continues, “Our new building will serve as a recruiting vehicle for us and is open to schools for field trips.”

For more information on the new facility or training programs, please contact Russell Smith at rsmith@aejatc.org or 404-523-5400.