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IBEW Local 34/NECA

Technology and talent marches ever onward. While Thomas Edison might have helped 'electrify' the United States, the men and women of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 34 and the signatory contractors of the Central Illinois Chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) help turn on the lights and clearly keep the power pushing in west central Illinois.



As renewable energy moves into the mainstream, thanks to a comprehensive and effective training program, "which all the contractors pay for," says Manager Mark Kawolsky of the local NECA, the members of IBEW Local 34 (17 west central Illinois counties) travel on the high-speed highway of tomorrow.

With emerging markets, new products, new tools and rapid advancements in technology, the need for up-to-the-minute awareness looms large. "We have a training director here, Brandon Currie, who takes training to a new level," Kawolsky says. "He's also established a relationship with the local community colleges."

While earning federal Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training (BAT) certification, Local 34 apprentices earn 36 credit hours of community college credit applicable to an Associate of Science Degree.

All apprentices undergo classroom instruction in the core subjects and skills in the first three years—electrical theory, pipe bending, wire pulling etc. Apprentices in the Telecommunications and Residential program spend three years, which includes 456 classroom hours plus 4,200+ hours hands-on to earn BAT certification.

Those who go on to complete the five-year Inside Electrician certification spend the fourth and fifth years specializing in such aspects as motors, industrial maintenance and repair, troubleshooting, building automation, etc., as they must complete a minimum of 760 hours of classroom (152 annually) instruction plus 7,200+ hours spent working hands-on at the job site.

Thanks to the efforts of the JATC, Local 34 members continue their education throughout their career so they develop skill in all aspects of the trade. Just a few recent examples of classes offered to members of Local 34 include: instrumentation, solar power, motor control, programmable controllers, fiber optics and more.

"The electrical industry is changing every day to meet the demands of our new technology," says Business Manager Paul Flynn of IBEW Local 34. "Our customers require the IBEW and its contractors to employ the best trained electricians in the industry."

The National NECA, plays the prominent role, "with writing the codes and setting the standards for our industry," Kawolsky says. "Then we train the members to those standards," adding, "that's why we're so far ahead of the competition and what sets us apart is the members' knowledge skill level."

Every three years NECA performs a complete code update and the new standards will become in force in February, 2014. "That code book becomes our bible," Kawolsky says, "our members know it's important."

When the new codes become effective the combined commitment of the signatory contractors and the members of Local 34 will put these latest codes into practice. "We'll have between five and

eight hundred members here," Kawolsky says, "as they learn about the new codes." He adds his appreciation for the commitment by Local 34 when he says, "The union buys in to the training because even though the members attend the session, they don't get paid."

Technology will continue to push the professional construction industry through rapid changes. Coupled with the current emphasis for energy efficiency and "green" products and processes, training remains the key component which helps Local 34 members create value on a consistent basis for both the contractors and customers.

These specialized skills allow both Local 34 and the signatory contractors in the local chapter of NECA maintain a strong commitment to offer seamless customer service because the members of Local 34 operate as professionals who have completed a rigorous, structured education.

The Local 34 jurisdiction covers west central Illinois and the days of simply bending pipe and pulling wire have disappeared. With both technology changes and customer needs expanding the contractors know what they need so they play a major role in the classes offered at the JATC. Local 34 and NECA collaborate on the JATC curriculum and according to Local 34 Training Director Brandon Currie, "There is a current push for LEED building"

The signatory contractors and Local 34 members can work on any call from residential, to high voltage, to specialized welding (aluminum), to nuclear power plants to the new LEED standards. Manufacturers visit the JATC and conduct training when they introduce new products or materials. This effort ensures the members of Local 34 acquire and develop the skills necessary to maintain the highest standards of quality and the signatory contractors deliver the promised rewards to the customers.

The emphasis on safety helps create a profitable environment. Many job sites now require OSHA certification of all the workers. "We teach everyone the OSHA 10-hour class, CPR and First Aid," says Currie.

The focus for 2013 will continue to be education. "Without trained personnel, contractors can't do their job," Kawolsky says. The Local 34 members realize they can learn something which "enhances their skills and makes them more valuable."

The ongoing emphasis on training assures the contractors and customers who seek the highest value can rely on the members of IBEW Local 34 and signatory contractors to deliver that value. "In order for IBEW Local 34 and NECA to be the best trained, electricians continue with training throughout their careers," states Flynn. "IBEW apprentices learn from journeymen both on the job and as instructors in the classroom to install electrical systems right the first time."

The skill level of Local 34 members allows NECA and Local 34 to offer the *+Five Program*, which gives a homeowner an additional five years of warranty on the wiring on any new home construction.

For more information call IBEW Local 34 at (309) 673.0393 or visit, www.ibew34.org, or call the central Illinois Chapter of NECA at (309) 673.6900.