

FRWA Apprenticeship Program

Florida Rural Water Association kicked off its new Apprenticeship Program last week! This program aims to offer training to new and less experienced operators in water and wastewater treatment. This program ensures that apprentices receive the training and work experience necessary for receiving the Class C license. However, apprentices are encouraged to not stop there! Toward the end of the two year program, additional material is covered that allows apprentices to test for higher level licenses if they have the required work experience.

The program started with five apprentices, all working toward their water licenses, with various levels of experience. These apprentices look forward to learning with hands on experience at both the job site and in class. FRWA has partnered with member systems and local vendors to receive cut away models of pumps and motors to teach maintenance hands on. The equipment doesn't stop there though, FRWA has also obtained Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to help train apprentices. Safety is a major concern in our industry and this program stresses the proper way to utilize PPE at work as well as safe workplace practices. "It's one thing to know about PPE," said Mark Hallett, Program Coordinator, "it's another to get to wear it and practice with it." PPE and safe working practices will continue to feature in the program's 288 hours of classroom training.

In addition to the licensing curriculum and the hands on training, FRWA plans on training apprentices to handle heavy machinery. In addition to your usual vac-trucks and front loaders, FRWA will offer CDL training to apprentices. CDL Training was a key area of interest and need when FRWA consulted its members. Apprentices will use FRWA's semi to practice driving. Utility management training is built in to the curriculum as well as emergency response and emergency coordination training. All of these aim at helping an apprentice become a valuable resource to their employer in the short term and the long term.

FRWA continues its tradition of providing quality training with this apprenticeship program. Ben Lewis and Jamie Hope are the primary trainers working with the Apprenticeship Program. Both Ben and Jamie have worked with FRWA for over a decade. They have received and given thousands of hours of training ranging from the basics of water and wastewater treatment to safety to utility management and beyond. Other FRWA staff members are available to assist the apprentices as they work by providing all the membership services they already do.

This class also served as the orientation for apprentices in how the program will function. From simple monthly reporting forms to more complex questions and needs, the orientation covered it all. Mentors were also invited to attend the orientation. While there, the mentors were also informed of their role with the apprentice and the expectations of being a mentor. The Florida Department of Education (FL DOE) who oversees apprenticeship programs in the state, could not attend but sent their regards to the apprentices. In his letter Richard Corcoran, Commissioner of the Apprenticeship Advisory Council, stated, "Workforce education is a top priority for Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida Department of Education with the goal of being number one in the nation by 2030. We rely on local businesses with a vested interest in student success to supplement the tremendous work taking place throughout Florida's education system and provide ongoing world-class education opportunities." FRWA received a Certificate of Registration in addition to the letter.

Heading forward, FRWA plans on working to develop the program further. In addition to securing apprentices in the wastewater industry, FRWA plans to help veterans enter the program. FRWA is also working toward partnering with Local Workforce Development Boards to secure funding for systems of all sizes to send apprentices through the program. FRWA is always looking for applicants interested in water or wastewater operations as well as systems that wish to partner or sponsor an apprentice. If interested, please email Apprenticeship@frwa.net for more information.