

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Guy Carter, training coordinator and Local 1000 president, began his career as a millwright at age 38 and discovered a love of teaching six years later.



Guy Carter with his wife, Melinda, and their daughters Ashley, Kaelie, and Kelli.

Q: How did you learn about the millwright career option and when did you become a union member?

A: I came into the apprenticeship in 2005. I worked for Winn Dixie's milk-processing division in Plant City, Florida, for 15 years prior to that and went from entry-level to day-shift supervisor. One of my co-workers left Winn Dixie and became a millwright, and we kept in touch. One day his dad came down to work in our plant with another millwright. I was rebuilding a pump, even though I was in production, and he said, "Don't you have maintenance men?" And I said, "Yeah, but I can do it faster than they can." I repaired a lot of pumps and motors because it would take our maintenance guys so long to gather up the tools they needed. He told me I was wasting my time. He said, "Join the millwrights and get yourself a career."

Q: How did you know how to work on pumps and motors?

A: By watching our maintenance people, paying attention to what they were doing. I've always been mechanically inclined. I worked on my own vehicles growing up.

Q: So did you apply to become a millwright after the conversation with your friend's dad?

A: The day I was supposed to apply, I had been called in early to help fix some equipment. After I got home, I was going to lay down and take a nap, and my wife said, "Aren't you going to apply today? And I said, "I'm probably going to lay down and take a nap." She said, "Okay, if you do that, I don't want to hear you complaining about how much you don't like your job anymore."

Q: You must have decided to apply. How did things go after that?

A: I came into the millwrights at age 38. I was learning and actually felt like I started earning what I was worth. With Winn Dixie, I was making \$550 a week as a salaried supervisor and putting in 60 hours a week. My first job as a millwright was night shift in a phosphate mine. I got filthy dirty and was worn out. Every day, my wife would ask me what I thought, and I said, "I might have made a mistake." And then I got my first paycheck. It was \$1,786, and I immediately felt better. I told the foreman, "Do you need help next week? Because I'll come back and do this every week."

I enjoy the work. I love to take things apart, and I love to see how things work. And there's so much that I learned in my apprenticeship. I hated math. My instructor was Jimmie Jordan, who is now our statewide training director for the millwrights, carpenters, and pile drivers. He was the one who helped me understand math and how I could use it, whereas in high school, it was, "just take math." He made it make sense. And now I teach a math class and a rigging class.

Q: Tell me what types of work you've done as a millwright and where you've worked.

A: I never left the state of Florida. I worked in phosphate mines and nuclear plants, I worked on rock crushers, bulk conveyors, acid pumps, sulfur pumps, steam turbines, and gas turbines, I did new construction in a glass plant, putting in all the ovens and conveyors, I cleaned oil tanks – whatever they called me for. In my four years of apprenticeship, I never turned down a single job. I went everywhere I was sent.

At first, I thought the business agent was just shuffling me from contractor to contractor because I'd get a good reputation with one and he move me to another one. And then about my fourth year, I realized what he was doing. He was making me a well-rounded millwright. I was exposed to everything.

Q: Tell me about how you got into the training side of things.

A: Around 2011, they asked me if I would be able to give a hand with a few classes, and I was a little unsure about that. But I found it wasn't as hard as I thought to teach it because I already knew the material. And seeing the apprentices learning over the course of that summer was something I enjoyed. The next summer they asked me to come back again. And then in 2013, I was offered a full-time position as an instructor.

Q: Was deciding whether to take the position difficult?

A: In the training department, we make less than we would make with overtime if we were in the field. But I have not regretted that decision since. It was an easy call because I really enjoy training people. And our training staff here at Local 1000 is exceptional, and I enjoy working with them as well.

Q: What do you like best about teaching?

A: That moment when you see the light come on in their eyes because they understand something. And also, I've had to people say, "I remember taking my first class here and now I'm taking a top-out test. And then they come back a year later and say, "I'm running work and I'm a foreman," and it just makes me feel good to know that we had some kind of influence on who they are and what they became. Because this is not just a job, it's a life."

Q: What exactly do you mean when you say it's not just a job?

A: It's not an eight-to-five-then-walk-away-and-forget-about-it job. It's a skill set that you learn that no one can ever take away from you. It transfers over into a lot of stuff – home repairs, working on your own vehicle – because it's mechanic work on a large, industrial scale.

Q: What are your plans for the rest of your career?

A: I didn't know I wanted to do this. I actually enjoy being a training coordinator and working with these guys and developing new instructors. I enjoy everything I do right now. If I didn't like it, I wouldn't be here. That's a fact. I promised myself when I left Winn Dixie, I'd never do anything I didn't enjoy again.

Q: I understand you kept working through a cancer diagnosis and treatment.

A: Yes, I was diagnosed with throat cancer in 2018. It was in my left tonsil and had spread to a few lymph nodes.

Two years before I was diagnosed, we had lost a member to throat cancer. I had to go see him on his deathbed because he didn't have his beneficiary paperwork filled out. So I had that memory, and one of our other members, about the same time, was also going through throat cancer, and he survived it. So I saw both ends of the spectrum.

I had to have 35 rounds of radiation and seven rounds chemo. I had to lay on a table at 6:30 every morning for 15 minutes for radiation treatments. I did that five days a week for seven weeks. And then every Monday was chemo day. I would go get my radiation in the morning, then come to work.

I could not have asked for better treatment at work. My co-workers were all extremely supportive. They were amazing. Had I been at Winn Dixie, I probably wouldn't have been able to work.

Q: What is the status now?

A: I am cancer free. There's a 5% chance of it ever coming back, and it drops 1% every year. So, from here, it's a 3% chance of it ever coming back. Once a year, I go for a scan.

Having cancer was actually a good thing. It brought my family closer together. It strips away everything from you, and you have to decide what's important and what's not. It made me reprioritize my entire life. Every day I wake up is just another blessing. You learn to appreciate life a lot more after you face death.

Q: Tell me about your family.

A: My wife, Melinda Carter, is the reason I'm in the millwrights. She made me get up that day rather than take a nap. I have three daughters, all grown now, but they were very supportive when I was going through everything. Ashley is 36, Kaelie is 29, and Kelli is 20.

Q: Are you involved in recruiting apprentices?

A: I wish I had gotten into millwrighting when I was 18. As a coordinator, we go to schools and job fairs. College isn't an option for everyone. It wasn't for me. So, when we go talk to kids in the schools, I ask, "How many of you are going to college?" A handful raise their hands. I say, "great, pursue that, give it everything you got." Then I ask, "How many of you are not going to college?" and I raise my hand, and a bunch of them do, too. I say, "I make a good living doing what I do. I work with my hands; I work with my head and my heart. Don't think because you're not going to college, you can't have a career."

Q: What leadership roles do you hold?

A: I'm a delegate of the Southern States Millwright Regional Council, and I'm president of Local 1000.

Q: What leadership classes have you taken with our parent organization, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters?

A: I went to the Third Year class when I was an apprentice, and I went through the Heavy Hitters program. I've been to the International Training Center for I can't tell you how many classes. Everything I can take just makes me more valuable. Our apprentices are seeing that now, too. The more you know and the more skills you have, the more valuable you are to a contractor.

Q: Is there any other advice you'd like to share?

A: People in the trades travel a lot, we are away from home, working all hours. We don't eat healthy. We don't take care of ourselves. We ignore the aches and pains of underlying medical conditions, and you can't just go get a doctor appointment when you're working out of town. So, a lot of times we miss the high blood pressure, the diabetes, or the lump on your neck that doesn't go away that turns out to be throat cancer. I really preach, go to the damn doctor. Don't wait. If you wait too long, then you're scared to go. At a minimum, get that yearly physical.