



Meet Andy Toft

Training Director

South Central MN Electrical Apprenticeship

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) - Local 343

SE MN Workforce Development Board (WDB) Member since 2014



Why did you decide on a career in the electrical industry and who/what influenced you to decide on this career?

After a year of college in a pre-architectural program and not being accepted into the 5-year School of Architecture Program, which would mean another year in the pre-architecture program, I looked at the cost and explored other options. My father was a licensed electrician and had been an electrical contractor, so I looked at attending a 2-year Construction Electrician Program. At the end of school, I was accepted into the SE MN Electrical Apprenticeship Program and went to work in Rochester for an electrical contractor. I went on to pass the Minnesota Class A Journeyman and Class A Master Electrical licenses. The wages, benefits, and having a lifelong skill were some of the influences in my decisions.

What is the IBEW?

The IBEW stands for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. It is the largest parent electrical union in the world, and I am a member of the Local Union 343 charter that covers southern Minnesota.

Does your organization offer apprenticeship and/or scholarship opportunities? And what are the requirements to enter an apprenticeship program?

I work for the South Central Minnesota Electrical Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee, which parent organizations are the IBEW Local 343 and NECA (National Electrical Contractors Association of Mpls. and Southern MN).

The SCMNJATC offers Electrical Apprenticeship Programs. The application process includes an application with high school, GED, or college transcripts; followed by an aptitude test on algebra and reading comprehension. A passing score will lead to an interview that will place you on the eligibility list that we hire from.

What does an apprenticeship program consist of?

This program is an 8,000 hour on-the-job training (OJT) program working for electrical contractors, along with attending our day school. Our classes are 1 day every other week for 21 days per year for 5 years. It will take 8,000 hours of OJT to qualify to take the Minnesota State Electrical Licensing Exam to become a Licensed Class A Journeyman Electrician. All the homework is a blended learning approach and is

done online, to be completed by the next class day. Class will cover the lesson plans assigned, new lesson material, and a hands on labs for part of the day. We do not charge tuition for our classes; however students do pay the cost of the books and online courses.

Do apprentices at your organization receive a wage while in the apprenticeship program?

When applicants are selected from the list and brought into the program, they are placed with a contractor and will receive wages and benefits as soon as they go to work. They will advance through 6 wage and benefit increases as they complete work hours and school. Wages start at \$18.87 an hour plus benefits. Benefits include a pension, family health insurance, vacation holiday pay, and an annuity. Package rate, which includes wages and benefits for a 1st period, comes to about \$30.07 an hour.



What different types of electricians are employers looking for and what general tasks to electricians perform?

The type of work an apprentice and Journey person will do is as varied as the electrical industry itself. Anything electrical is installed and worked on by electricians. The type of electrical work does depend on what type of project the contractor is doing. Some of the different jobs electricians are working on are solar farms, wind farms, traffic lights, street lighting, hospitals, schools, multifamily residential mixed use buildings, high rise buildings, power houses, data, communications, and fire alarm systems. The work varies in different stages of the building process. It may start with the underground services in trenches for new buildings, to installing wiring in the walls as they are built, to installing lighting and electrical systems as the building is enclosed, to completing with a finished building where everything is operational.

Is there currently a demand for electricians and what do you predict in terms of the demand in the future?

As long as we use electricity there will be a demand for Electricians. Buildings are built, maintained, remodeled and at the end of their life are replaced. We do more work nowadays with fewer electricians because of technology and materials that constantly change and improve our production.

In what has traditionally been a male-dominated, nontraditional career field, what advice do you have for females considering careers as electricians?

This trade is still a non-traditional career but we are seeing more diversity and opportunities available for women in construction. We currently have 8 female apprentices in our program, and they are doing very well. Some of the recommendations would be: expect to work in varied weather conditions inside and outside year round. It is typically new construction and you will usually be working alongside other trades. The jobs typically have relatively rigid work hours usually a 7am start and a 3:30pm end, with a half hour for lunch and a couple of breaks during the day. If you like to stay active throughout the day, work with your hands and build things, there are some great opportunities to be had in the trades. Anyone is more than welcome to talk with our apprentices about their careers for the pros and cons of what we do.

This is a licensed skilled profession that has many avenues of opportunity. Give us a look as we are always looking for good candidates that want to build a career for life.