

Upgrade Training:

A Simple Truth: More Skills, More Work

While it's true that all UBC members are skilled and productive, it's equally true that some are better than others. We've all had the pleasure of working with someone who was a notch above the rest, whose abilities on the job shone with greater experience or knowledge.

The UBC makes sure that all members have every opportunity to gain those new skills and add that knowledge through upgrade training—free to every member.

The members profiled here all have used our free UBC training to add skills and become even more valuable to employers. They've taken courses during layoffs or on weekends, and those courses have led straight to more hours, steadier work, and better careers.

Take their words for it. Then call your local training center to get busy upgrading your own career.



Larry Lombardi

“I saw a growing need for certification and specialized skills.”

Local 230, Bethel Park, Pennsylvania
Greater Pennsylvania Regional Council of Carpenters

Larry Lombardi went to college fresh out of high school and emerged four years later with a degree in business management. During the summers, he did construction work. His time on the jobsites stole his interest and, after graduation, the suburban Pittsburgh carpenter became a union apprentice.

Thirty-four years later, Lombardi is a key superintendent for one of the region's top construction firms, often being tapped for the most complex and challenging projects. Lombardi credits his focus on training for his career success.

“I've always kept up on training. I respect the value of education, but I also saw a growing need for certification and specialized skills. I believe that the more certified and skilled you are, the more marketable you are for work.”

Working by day and training at night and on weekends, Lombardi consistently enrolls in and completes training courses. One direction that he continues to focus on is safety. He is qualified or certified in courses such as Best Practices in Healthcare Construction, Blood-Borne Pathogens, CPR, OSHA, and others.

“Safety is never the other guy's responsibility. It's always your own. The safer you work, the less your employer has to spend on insurance.”

Now a fulltime superintendent, Lombardi has been working on challenging healthcare jobsites, where the project owner requires the utmost in safe, specialized construction practices.

“All of my training has come in handy at different times, but my safety training is valuable all the time.”



Victor Maga

“If I was between jobs, I would be at the training center.”

Local 922, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania
Greater Pennsylvania Regional Council

“In my military career, I was with special ops units and cross-trained in combat engineering. I learned how to destroy things very efficiently. When I got out, I really wanted to rebuild things.”

Victor Maga is in his second decade as a union carpenter. His military service training helped him test in as a second-year apprentice. “But it's the skill enhancement training. That's the whole reason why I am where I am. That's why I was asked to run work as a super as a fourth-year apprentice. I continually took classes.”

As a superintendent for Mosites Construction, Maga was chosen to run a very special project: a UBC training center. “To be the super for the new training center itself—for my own union—well, it was hard to top that.”

Maga has trained in all scaffolding, welding, total station, layout, Osha 30, and other courses “which enabled me to be the competent person on the jobsite. That's what opened the door for me to run and supervise work.

“Additional training hours mean steadier work. I absolutely equate my work and my training. It felt like there wasn't a day that I didn't work, because if I was between jobs, I would be at the training center.”

Maga also credits skill enhancement training with getting his own company, Spartan Construction Service, up and running successfully. Now, he hires union carpenters—who are also well-trained.

David Goetz

“I’m living proof that training can pay dividends.”

Local 1596, St. Louis, Missouri
St. Louis Carpenters District Council

Since 2009, David Goetz has logged more than 500 hours of skill-upgrade training. The 34-year carpenter and safety director has 20 safety certificates and four technical certificates.

It was during a 2009 layoff that Goetz embraced training. He took courses including Ingersoll Rand, the (DHI) door hardware, electrified hardware, aerial lift, fork truck, best practices in health care construction, firestop, OSHA 30 and 500, LLRP, lead safety, and mold awareness.

In late 2010, Goetz was hired for one of the largest construction jobs in St. Louis; during the peak of the recession, he worked 14 straight months, with overtime.

“The hiring boss was very impressed with my upgrade training. I’m living proof that training can pay dividends.

“The easiest thing to do when you are laid off is host a pity party for yourself. I refuse to accept that. We are fortunate to belong to a union that is proactive in offering such excellent training at no cost to the members.

“All it takes is your time. You may be on the sidelines, but you will be better prepared when work picks up. While training may not guarantee you a job, it will make you more marketable.

“For me it’s been time well spent. In order to be the workers of choice, we need to be the safest, highly skilled, and most productive workers on the job.”



Dan Koehler

“I took whatever I thought would help get me work.”

Local 1889, Downers Grove, Illinois
Chicago Regional Council of Carpenters

Former non-union homebuilder Dan Koehler joined the Chicago Regional Council of Carpenters to provide for his family with what he

knew were unbeatable wages as a union carpenter.

He was working a project at a local university, where he noticed the Key Control office. “It was part of the carpenter shop. I had never really thought about keys and locks relating to carpenters other than installing doors and hardware in residential homes.”

Koehler started getting as much training as possible: locks 14, doors, frames and hardware, metal studs, acoustical ceilings, OSHA 30, scaffolding, aerial lift, and others.

“I took whatever I thought would help get me work as an in-house carpenter at a university. I eventually got an interview at Southern Illinois University. Koehler was offered the post of Key Control Carpenter.

“I manage 26 Master key systems and almost 426,000 codes, about half of which date back to 1957—and most of the rest from 1991. We have in the neighborhood of 4,000 openings on three campuses and 129 buildings with a total of 2,453,932 square feet.

“I never thought I’d have a job like this. I love my job and look forward to work. I would not have received a job offer solely on the basis of my residential experience. My training in locks created an opportunity to get a good job that I otherwise would not have received.”



Charlene “Moana” Newell

“Training equals more work. I want to learn.”

Local 745, Kenwick, Washington
Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters

Charlene “Moana” Newell remembers her father supporting five children with a career in construction and knew being a union carpenter would give her the same ability. So, 24 years ago, she became an apprentice for the Hawaii Carpenters Union. Today, the mother of seven supports her family in the Pacific Northwest.

When not working, and on many weekends, Moana logs training hours. Through a steady regimen of upgrade training, Moana is certified or qualified in programs including scaffolding, aerial lift, fall protection, and Osha 10 and 30. She is focusing on rigging next.

Just as she learned from her dad, she now learns from her Brothers and Sisters, saying she finds learning from those with more experience in the given subject matter especially helpful.

“Training equals more work. I set goals for myself and I want to learn and bring back something for my kids. It’s great that the training is out there for people like me.

Moana keeps her skills from safety training at the top of her mind at home, too. “I teach my kids about safety techniques all the time. I ask them, would you rather take a couple seconds to do it right or spend two hours in an ER?

“The important part is to not ever stop learning.”



Sammy Stricklin

“Training opens you up to have a better life.”

Local 1263, Trion, Georgia
Southern States Millwright Regional Council

When it comes to training for his craft, Sammy Stricklin is all business. The 23-year veteran millwright has worked across the south on projects from nuclear plants to turbine maintenance.

He knows that his steady work—and resulting good quality of life for his wife and two children—is a direct result of his being ready when a job becomes available.

In fact, it was being bypassed for a job he wanted that brought home the importance of training. “I wanted to go on a job in North Carolina, but I didn’t have my rigging card. I realized then that training was serious stuff.”

Stricklin estimates he has about 20 qualification and certification cards. He is a regular at his local training center and is due to attend the journeyman leadership course at the International Training Center.

“If I was hiring, I’d want to go with the guy who was interested in training more than someone who just wants to get by. My advice to a young millwright is, if you don’t take training seriously, you probably aren’t going to make it more than a year.

“Plus, training opens you up to have a better life. It’s about being the best you can be for your family, and to set an example for the young kids who are just growing up now.”