

CELEBRATE LABOR DAY: HONOR VETERANS

UNIONS LAUNCH VETERANS BOOT CAMPS

Newcomers With Military Backgrounds Are a Good Fit for the Trades

BY AL STEWART

As part of an ongoing effort to prepare military veterans for a career in the Building Trades, two union locals launched pre-apprenticeship boot camps in July specifically for former service members. IBEW Local 11 and Heat & Frost Insulators Local 5 welcomed nearly 50 aspiring union members, and most are now working as apprentices.

"I'm getting letters from contractors," said Tom Gutierrez, Business Manager of Local 5. "They are impressed by what they see on the job from these guys."



Business Manager Tom Gutierrez, lower right, with recruits and instructors.

Heat & Frost Insulators Local 5

Instructors at boot camp at Heat & Frost Local 5's facility in Azusa say they usually begin by explaining the exact nature of work handled by their Trade and the role it plays in energy conservation.

"We have a tremendous experience with

vets so this is something we are trying," said Tom Gutierrez, Local 5 Business Manager and a Marine Corps veteran. "So many vets don't know what opportunities are out there. A lot of times they are just waiting to be called on to become a police

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Those on the frontlines preparing new recruits for joint labor-management apprenticeship programs agree that military veterans fit the Trades like a hand in a work glove. A proven work ethic, discipline, teamwork and the ability to follow directions to the letter give returning service members a big advantage in the classroom and at the job site.

The boot camps, created with the financial backing of contractors, contractors associations and government grants, strive to instill a sense of connection. The hope is that those enrolled will see it as a team effort, and be able to stick it out and encourage one another over a four-to-five-year apprenticeship.



Business Manager Marvin Kropke welcomes each veteran.

IBEW Local 11

Launched with 29 veterans, the boot camp held inside the Electrical Training Institute's sprawling facility in Commerce is in keeping with the union's longstanding commitment to recruit new members with a military background.

"This class is a culmination of our efforts over the last two years," explained apprenticeship coordinator Eric Brown. "We are taking people who were flipping burgers and giving them a shot at a career. We tell them exactly what to expect.

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HAPPY LABOR DAY



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"This is our first all-vet boot camp," Brown continued. "Unfortunately we have a lot of attrition, and one of our goals is to encourage them to see this as something they are doing as a team. We need them to commit to a four- or five-year apprenticeship that will lead to a career as a journeyman Electrician. We need to get them to understand that what they are doing now is going to lead to something very special."

The shared experience of military service creates an immediate bond between the participants, said Dick Reed, President of Local 11. "Having a class of just vets gives them a real sense that this is where they belong. Often they come to us after they have tried something else that was just a job, not a career. Maybe they are looking for an alternative to college. We tell them we pay for their training. There are no student loans to be paid."

Addressing participants during a lunch break, Local 11 Business Manager and Army veteran Marvin Kropke passed around a microphone and asked each trainee to stand up, introduce himself and say something about his background. "I believe we have responsibility to extend ourselves and reach out and bring you into what we believe is a good Trade," he told the students. After each pre-apprentice finished his brief introduction, Kropke commented, "We're glad you are here."

"And it is not just getting you into the program, it is retaining you," Kropke said. "If you have issues, I don't care what they are, you have someone here you can call."

In recognition of the need for more



"I worked in the mortgage industry. It was a suit and tie desk job and I was making good money, but I wasn't happy doing what I was doing every day. A buddy of mine told me about union jobs that offer good pay and benefits. Also the fact that they are willing to invest in your training says a lot. The work is much more interesting. When you do this kind of job, at the end of the day, you know you accomplished something. You don't get that with a lot of jobs. I am very excited about my future as a union Electrician."

Ryan Williams, 32,
Army

skilled Electricians, a substantial portion of the funding for the boot camp comes from National Electrical Contractors Association, which has about 1,300 students in four apprenticeship programs.

"We are making quite an effort to attract more vets to our Trades," said Brett Moss, ETI training director. "The work is picking up and the demand is there. The demand for skilled electricians is going to grow."

Instructor Thomas Warren said that the students are very attentive and cooperative.

"Vets generally have the discipline needed to complete a five-year apprentice pro-



"I was looking for work and I met Mike Kufchak at a job fair. He told me about this program. It is exactly what I am looking for. A lot of military training does not transfer to civilian life. But the training does teach you to be very organized and work as a team. Safety is also very important when you come out of a military background. This is a good program because it gives you an opportunity to show you can do the work."

Rathanak Ear, 30,
Air Force



"In the Marines, I was a crew chief for Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, what most people call drones. So I know a lot about electrical components and how to troubleshoot. I have a friend in the IBEW and he suggested that I apply. The money you can make is probably the number-one thing that attracted me to this, but I can see there is a real brotherhood. This is great to be working with other vets."

Cesar Miramontes, 26,
Marines



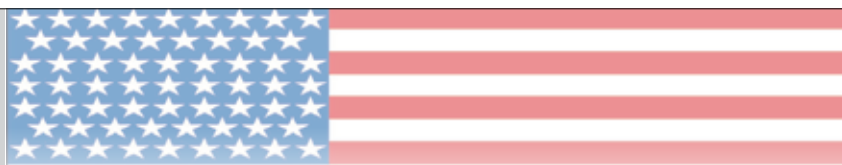
IBEW Local 11 President Dick Reed.



Apprenticeship coordinator Eric Brown.



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"I was actually taking a class in solar energy when I met someone who told me about this program. My father, uncle and brother-in-law are in IBEW so it is something I wanted to do. This lets me get into an apprentice program. It is a wonderful class. They got some real good people here so far. It has definitely met my expectations. My wife is eight months pregnant so I need something like this."

Colten Thompson, 22,
Navy



"I got out of the Army in 1989 and have been working different jobs all over the place. At one job the contractor ripped me off. A state inspector asked me if I knew what 'prevailing wage' meant. I said, 'What's that?' He told me if you get a union card you don't have to worry about someone ripping off your wages. A woman at the Veterans Administration told me about a program to get into the union so I thought I'd check it out. This is the best thing that has happened to me in a long time."

Keith Franklin, 49,
Army

gram," Warren said. "They also like that everyone here is treated equally. And when they come here, we don't need to teach them to how to take direction. When I say line up, they hit the wall."

Michael Kufchak, director of veteran affairs for Local 11, said the effort to lure veterans hinges on meeting with them face-to-face wherever they might be.

"We are going to military installations and we are casting a big net, far and wide to find vets for these programs," Kufchak said. "We'll keep looking for them and inviting them to join us. We are very happy with the results."



Byron Cabrera, left, who served in the Marines, and Robert Hernandez, a Navy veteran.



Training director Brett Moss.



Instructor Anchy Hadjimarkos, left, with Hao Hsieh, who served in the Army National Guard.



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Nicole Lavallee | nlavallee@bermandevalerio.com
Kevin Shelley | kshelley@bermandevalerio.com

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