

Local apprenticeship programs going strong

*Last week marked 2nd annual National
Apprenticeship Week*

Alyx Arnett

Dec 1, 2016



Fourth-year apprentice Matthew Keisling reviews an assignment with Joe Scribner, classroom instructor.

As Matthew Keisling sat in class last week, he said he could see the light. Four years down, one to go.

It's been a long four years for Keisling. The electrician has spent those years going from work to class twice a week to complete the IBEW apprenticeship program at Ivy Tech's Kokomo Region.

"It's a challenge going to school and managing a family," said the husband and father of three. "My wife has been a blessing, and she helps. My parents help with traveling the kids around and everything else."

With the busy schedule, he had to step down from being a football coach to a practice football coach and forego some of his kids' games. However, he said his wife regularly reminds him it will be worth it.

At the end of the program, Keisling will be an IBEW journeyman and receive the highest pay tier. More than that, he'll have the experience to complete some of the most complicated jobs and have a handle on the safety aspect the program strongly emphasizes.

Mike Mills, training director for the Marion-Kokomo Joint Apprentice and Training Committee, said if electricians can't complete the job without risking their lives, they're doing everyone a disservice.

"Job-site safety is the most important part of it all because you can go work anywhere and feed your family. The idea is to be able to be home with that family. If you're going to go out there and be in danger every day, you're going to pick something a lot safer.

"There's no sense in performing a trade that's going to be dangerous. So you try to make everything safe so everyone can enjoy the 40-hour work week, weekends with your kids and your family—the American dream," he said.

IBEW's program has been ongoing since 1945. In the last eight to 10 years, Mills said the program has remained strong. With Baby Boomers nearing retirement, Mills expects that to only increase in the coming years, as the need for skilled workers will grow. In the six-district region Mills oversees, more than 50 percent of the membership is above age 50.

"There's going to be a big demand. With all these people getting ready to retire and the prospect of actually needing more than we currently have, it's really got some people scrambling, saying 'You need to start feeding the pot,'" he said.

IBEW is partnered with Ivy Tech's Kokomo Region to offer the program. In addition, Ivy Tech also works with other trades to offer additional apprenticeship programs.

Steven Waddel, apprenticeship coordinator for Ivy Tech's Kokomo Region, said the programs are designed to allow students to "earn and learn" with the goal of producing skilled workers for the area's employers.

"The goal of the program is to maintain quality employees, and with the schooling we do, we want to supplement that on-the-job training with an understanding of what you're doing and why you're doing it. I think that's key in the training, and we have excellent instructors who are able to do that," Waddel said.

IBEW currently is taking applications for its apprenticeship program on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Marion-Kokomo Joint Apprenticeship and Training, located at 2739 N. 50 E., Kokomo. To learn more about apprenticeship programs at Ivy Tech, contact Waddel at swaddel@ivytech.edu or at 765-252-5545.