

"TRAINING MILLENNIALS FOR CAREERS IN THE TRADES," BY CLAYTON DEKORNE (ONLINE, 2/5/15)

Conrad vonBlankenburg: There was a time in this country when the school system (starting at about the seventh grade) gave students two parallel paths to choose from. The students were tested for aptitude and interest, and then counseled to follow a college-prep or a trade/industrial arts path. Both offered unlimited opportunity for anyone who wanted to work hard and get ahead.

The trade path can continue in several directions after the work is mastered. But the education mafia killed the trade path because it did not put money in the fraud called education today.

Ask yourself why construction defects are out of control today. Why does it take 10 people six months to build the same house that two highly trained men could build in 12 weeks in the 1960s and '70s?

Saw Dust CEO: It might become a issue of supply and demand. The contractors I see out in the field are aging; as they leave the field, they need to be replaced with the next generation's skilled worker. Money is an issue in the lack of interest in staying at a trade job—or for that matter, entering the industry. It's great that there are construction management degrees, but we need production field people to make money. We need to raise the pay scale for skilled workers. I think this would attract a larger pool of talent or at least create interest in learning and choosing a career in the trades. If there is going to be a high demand for skilled workers, someone is going to have to pay, whether it's the taxpayer—for schools to educate and train—or the homeowner who needs something built or repaired.

Shawn McCadden: This message needs to get to politicians from those of us in the industry who vote, as well as the trade associations. I suggest we be loud and diligent about bringing this up to them until they have no choice but to address this concern. There are so many good reasons to do it.

Norman Palmer: Paid internships from a custom home builder or design-build remodeler to first- and second-year architectural students could be a convincing factor for some to forgo formal education, and instead learn to build and create and design on the fly. This is not a total solution, but more than likely the student will be interested in learning and being productive ... just one avenue to consider as part of many solutions.

Bruce Bergen: I teach psychology at both a univer-

sity and a community college. I find that many of my students would be far better served in one of the college's excellent trade programs, not because they are any less intelligent but because so many of them will only complete two years of college and end up only qualified to work in a call-center cubicle for little more than minimum wage. Matthew B. Crawford has written about this perception and the problem in our schools, both in an article, "Shop Class as Soulcraft," at thenewatlantis.com and in a book with the same title. The antiquated idea that "blue collar" work is somehow for the less intelligent simply does not square with the multiple intelligences required of a skilled craftsman.

Mike Moore: Isn't it ironic that we, as a society, have fostered the illusion that marching two by two into a cubicle farm is somehow for the smart kids that are "good at school," while construction, which touches many aspects of S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math—the cool education buzzword of today), is somehow seen as the leftovers for those who aren't perfectly suited to college? Where did we go so wrong?

Anonymous. It is very difficult in general to attract young potential talent. I do not know how things work in markets outside the Chicago/Milwaukee areas, but around here it is hard to attract young persons when the wages are suppressed, given what is expected out of workers. I work as a subcontractor for many area contractors, and I am always squeezed by them to lower my rates and that goes directly to addressing wages and a greatly slimmed-down profit line. All the semi-skilled guys I have had in the last 10 years quit after six months because they did not see enough reward for the amount of effort that was required ... that is a hard fact, and something that is not talked about widely. Gone are the days when you start an apprentice-level guy at, say, 12 bucks an hour and he is happy with that for six months ... believe me, it is not going to happen when he needs to physically work hard for it and simultaneously have a hardened skin for the pressure he is put under. Every single young guy that I have trained has expressed this way of thinking, and in today's world they have a point. Given the relative costs of everything today, they cannot make do ... but it is what I and other small contractors like me can afford to pay and still keep the doors open and make a living.

Gil Paben: I graduated May 24, 1966, from Nebraska Tech, in Building Construction Technology. I know it's the best thing I ever did. I worked for a custom builder

and a tract builder before going out on my own (with a partner). I also took some evening business classes about the same time. Glad I did that, too! The knowledge I learned at tech school had me working beside the older carpenters and [eventually] being able to do more than what I had learned in class. I could lay out rafters, lay out the floor system, do material estimating, even sharpen tools like chisels, handsaws, and circular saw blades, which some could not do and still can't. There were also some tips and tricks I learned that I shared with older carpenters, trying not to be too assertive, as I was then still considered "wet behind the ears."

All-in-all, it worked out well, and I've enjoyed training new employees through the years (two of which are in business for themselves now). You are always learning in this industry, but having had two years at tech school made all the difference. My partner retired four years ago, but I'm still at it and happy to have my son (graduate of the Construction Management program at C.S.U.) working with me. Been in business for 38 years now, loving it, and still going. Wishing good luck to our industry!

"SLIDESHOW: ON SITE WITH DIAMOND PIER," BY MIKE HORGAN (ONLINE, 1/26/15)

Dustin Lema: Any information about the costs, delivery times, and the like?

Mike Horgan responds: We get these—the DP75, spec'd for size here by our structural engineer—for \$175 each. That includes all the hardware you could need: the 4-foot-long pins (they also come in longer lengths for different situations); anchor bolts that come pre-installed in the pier; pointed end-caps for the entry end of the pins; and heavy plastic caps for covering the exposed end of the pins (which the inspector just pops off so he can check the depth at the same time he does the frame inspection). They are stocked at our local supplier, so we get them dropped off at site within an hour, usually, of a phone call. The hammer rental costs \$50 for an entire day, but you can also install them with a sledge hammer, which we tried and it worked just fine, though the machine makes much easier work of it.

Now, someone will surely say, a Sonotube

only costs \$25 to \$30. But that is, in reality, only one very small aspect of the entire process. We had 16 tubes spec'd altogether here. Total time of install for all 16 of these diamond piers was less than 2 hours, from pre-install-stake-out to we-started-framing. And it took only one person—me—to do the entire install of the Diamond Piers while the other guys kept working on a different aspect of the job. No two guys digging holes 4 feet deep and 3 feet wide, no moving parts to balance, no waiting for inspection, no waiting for concrete delivery or mixing and lumping bags, no waiting for concrete to cure, no cutting off the j-bolt you installed that sits juuuuust a little too proud of your concrete that sank overnight in the tube so you can't install your post base properly—none of that. In less than two days, we finished framing on a 70-by-20-foot deck, start-to-finish, and called for footing and framing inspection simultaneously. I'm skeptical of most fancy building materials by nature, but these things are great. For total efficiency, they're a no-brainer. Unless you're trying to pound into rocks ... then you're SOL.

"MAINE ISLAND HOUSE MAKE-OVER," BY TED CUSHMAN (ONLINE, 12/8/14)

Eric Tavitian: I cut my teeth on similar houses in the Boston inner city and suburbs back in the early '70s. Now I run a small general construction company in the Ventura, Calif., area. I gained most of my knowledge of Cal. Codes from having begun here in the San Fernando Valley suburb area of Los Angeles. The requirements for insulation aren't as intense here as in Maine, but we still do quite a lot of retrofitting to make things more efficient. I really dislike having to tear a structure down if it can be saved. If people continually tear things down to make way for the new, then we lose sight of our past. Even though this is only sunny Southern California, and houses date back only to the late 19th century, it is still this area's history, and in many ways that history is very rich. Some of it should be preserved. So retrofit works for me.

Published letters and comments may be edited for length and clarity.

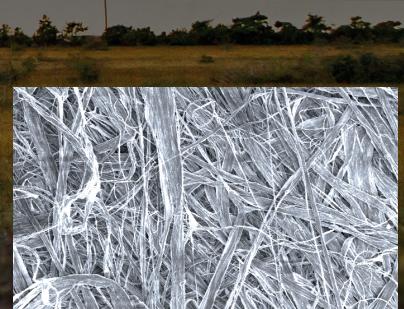


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