



Sparky's Current Events

Underestimating the Skilled Trades

The skilled trades are undervalued in Virginia and elsewhere. They are undervalued in the educational system which eliminated shop classes from high school curricula. They are undervalued in the collective consciousness of high school graduates, parents and school faculty that view them as lowly, “blue collar”, dirty, and unprofessional. But the funny thing is, there is one place where skilled trades are not undervalued, and that is in the **marketplace**, which has seen a greater and greater demand for the skilled tradesperson, be they a plumber, electrician, machinist, mechanic, and so on.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, skilled tradespeople became part of the many essential workers, along with nurses and doctors, that maintained their jobs and increased their income. When everyone was in lockdown, tradespeople still answered calls for broken pipes and no heat. The demand is ongoing.

The Associated Builders and Contractors predicts the shortage of construction tradespeople will grow to **ONE MILLION** workers in the next two years! In our area of Hampton Roads, contractors have been facing a shortage of skilled workers for the last 10 years!

Because of this high demand, skilled tradespeople have their choice of jobs, locations, and many earn a living wage that is **above** those of most college graduates and with little or no debt!! From the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2020, the average annual wage for an electrician is \$61,550; HVAC technician \$53,410; plumbers/pipefitters 56,330; building maintenance technician \$43,790.

It's time for high school counselors to stop pushing college to every kid without giving them a choice to go into a trade or vocation. Parents and counselors need to know that nationally at 2-year and 4-year institutions, the graduation rate is only 46%! In Virginia, the average graduation rate at 2-year institutions is 20.9%! For Virginian bachelor's degree seekers only 52.3% graduate with a degree.* We are setting up half our kids for failure!

Without early exposure to shop classes many kids are losing out on the opportunity to discover whether they like making things and working with their hands. While we cannot change the school curricula, we can let our kids know there are other options. Let's not underestimate the other half of our school kids! They can make a difference!

~ by *Talmadge E. Baggett Jr. and Ping Yip*

*From Education Data Initiative, updated August 9, 2021.



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Raffle Winner

VTA is pleased to announce the winner of the Holiday Food Drive Raffle is...Joana Velez!

Ms. Velez is a level 4 electrical student from Hampton, VA. She will be graduating this March and she plans to have her own electrical service business in the future! Congratulations!

And a big thank you to all who contributed to the Food Drive!



Cutting the prize off the tree.



Selecting a Klein Tools conduit stripper! Nice tool to have for an electrician!

Did You Know...

...you can use denatured alcohol to scrub away spilled paint on carpet? Just pour some denatured alcohol on a rag that's close in color to the carpet and scrub away.

...the self-cleaning cycle for you oven can reach temperatures over 1,000°F and can compromise major components of your oven, such as the door lock, thermostat, and probe?

Trial and Error

Definition from Oxford Languages: *“the process of experimenting with various methods of doing something until one finds the most successful.”*

What do you want to do when you grow up? This is the question asked of most kids. When it comes to their junior and senior year in high school, this question takes on more urgency. High school counselors typically give two career paths to students: college or military.

If the student is inclined to go into the military, there are six service branches to choose from: Air Force, Army, Marines, Navy, Space Force, or Coast Guard (which is in the Department of Homeland Security). Once enlisted, the next four years in the military is paid for by Uncle Sam. The service member will get training in many areas, with some choice of the type of training, to a certain point. The service member will get paid and, in some circumstances, get a stipend for housing. All very good for serving one's country. The trial and error in this case is not so bad. If the type of training received in the military is not really what a person wants to do in life after their service, then the G.I. Bill is available to get the training or education they desire. Still on Uncle Sam's bill.

The college path is a different story. To pay for college, the student's options are loans, grants, scholarships, parents, or self. From Education Data Initiative, the 2022 national average college tuition, including books, supplies and daily living expenses, is \$35,331 per year. If we take tuition alone, the average in-state tuition is \$9,349, and for out-of-state, it is \$27,023.

In the first year of college, students typically are required to take requisite English, math, and science courses toward his/her major. It is usually the second year before he/she will be taking classes in the chosen field of study. So, after the first year, the student is already \$10,000 to \$35,000 into this trial and error and he/she is yet to be exposed to the field of study enough to know whether this is what he/she wants to do! What is sad though is many students go all four years to a degree in a field they have no true interest in, whether because they feel they must finish just to finish, or everyone tells them a college degree will give them a good career, or to please their parents. Of course, the choice of a major can be changed, but unless the college expense is being funded by grants or scholarships, this can be an expensive trial and error for a family.

The career path with a college degree is often getting the education first, then get a job. If everything falls into place, this works out great and the graduate is happy. But as we know, many college graduates are not getting jobs in their fields either because the jobs are not there, or the pay may not be sufficient to provide the financial support they need. And, if they took out a loan for their education, they are thousands and thousands of dollars in the hole, starting life in the red, on a negative track.

What if we reverse this? Get a job, see if you like what you're doing, then get the training to do your job well and get ahead. This is what apprenticeships provide.

Instructor Highlight—John Marr

Most students who come through the full course programs at VTA know John Marr. He teaches the Core Curriculum, which includes the OSHA 10 Construction Safety Course. Mr. Marr is just the person to teach safety, too! He is a retired Fire Marshal, having spent over 30 years with the Newport News Fire Department. He knows a little something about keeping away from danger!

VTA students who have sat in on Mr. Marr's OSHA 10 course will tell you that he injects many true-life stories of things gone wrong and the deadly consequences. These stories come from his service in the fire department, witnessing human carelessness at its best.

Mr. Marr is an expert arson investigator, having worked on 1,000 cases determining the cause and origin of fires. He has also lectured on the prevention, inspection, and pre-planning of fire code enforcement.

At VTA, Mr. Marr's role is not only as an instructor, but he is also the school's Safety Officer, working directly with the President. Mr. Marr oversees the students' safety during the performance training labs, standing by, and observing that everyone is working safely and have their PPE on correctly.

During the coronavirus pandemic, Mr. Marr has kept up with the latest CDC guidelines and has made sure the school has everything it needs to comply. He personally installed all the hand sanitizer stations outside each classroom, researched, and obtained the appropriate disinfectants and cleaning supplies.

And Mr. Marr's other talent is playing Santa Claus at Christmas! Last December, dressed up in his very stylish Santa outfit, he visited the CARD Academy in Oyster Point to give hayrides and pass out candy canes.



At left, Mr. Marr as Santa Claus with Alex Houston. Above, Mr. Marr observing the students doing their performance tasks, ensuring proper techniques and safety. No one wants to get hurt!

Registered Apprenticeship as a Workforce Solution

The workforce landscape of 2022 is an intimidating place. Hiring employees with all the qualifications and skills needed has become a bidding war, and once you hire, there is no guarantee those you've brought on will stay. It has now become clear that it is going to be impossible for employers to pay their way out of the skills gap, but rather, they will need to train their way out.

In Virginia, the Division of Registered Apprenticeship has been helping employers develop their own customized programs since 1938. This model pairs structured *On the Job Training* and *Related Technical Instruction*, the theory which informs their work. Registered Apprenticeship provides employees with the unique ability to earn while they learn. The apprentice is guided by a seasoned mentor which enhances the hands-on learning experience and at the completion of their program, they receive a nationally recognized credential.

The structure of this model allows employers to have a wider, more diverse pool of individuals to choose from. No longer bound by experience or education limits, Registered Apprenticeship enables employers to choose individuals that have the aptitude and attitude and build their skills to make productive and engaged employees. There is no better return on investment. Studies show that Registered Apprenticeship programs have significantly increased retention rates, higher productivity and reduce long term training costs.

Visit WWW.DOLI.VIRGINIA.GOV/APPRENTICESHIP to get started on your Registered Apprenticeship journey today. Discover everything you need to know about participating employers in your area, program registration and supportive resources available.

Article contributed by Shannon Crooks, DOLI, VA

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And apprenticeships do not necessarily mean you have to belong to a labor union! Private contractors and companies provide apprenticeships these days.... because the demand is so high for skilled workers! You work and earn a wage and, in the evenings, go to classes for the related technical instruction, paid for by your company! After so many hours of class time, the student can sit for the journeyman's exam and get even better pay. All this with little debt!

But why are high school counselors not telling students about this option? One explanation may be this. Ever since the Higher Education Act (HEA) was signed into law in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the United States has poured millions, if not billions, of dollars toward postsecondary and higher education. This law has been reauthorized about 9 times since 1965 and has given federal money to colleges and universities, created grants, funded student loans, and created the National Teacher Corps among other things. The HEA document is 922 pages long. And if some members of Congress have their way, this HEA may be reauthorized to fund free college education for many Americans in the future!

But it appears the pendulum has swung so far onto this side that hardly anything is being done to help those who do not seek college or the military for a career, and this has caused a severe shortage of skilled workers in our country. This shortage affects all of us. We will be paying more for homes and services because of the lack of skilled tradespeople. If we could, we would be out-sourcing home construction! Maybe what we need to do is to bring the pendulum back towards the center to balance the workforce of this country! We need to give our high school students a balanced perspective of the choices available to them. There are very successful, satisfying careers in trades. There should be federal dollars to help shore up this side of the pendulum swing because smaller companies may not be able to pay for employee training or apprenticeships. Maybe tax credits can be given to smaller companies for this purpose. Maybe there should be grants available for trade schools!

What are your thoughts? Let's get the conversation going and maybe bend a politician's ear. The underdogs are our heroes!

Virginia Technical Academy was founded on the principle that every community needs a skilled and well-educated workforce. Our goal is to provide an environment that will exceed the educational requirements and needs of both future tradespeople and their employers.

MISSION STATEMENT

Virginia Technical Academy is dedicated to keeping our trades strong through education, validation, and professional

Upcoming Events

February 4: First Every Friday OPEN HOUSE from **9am-2pm!** Come visit us!

February 9: EPA-608 one-day course with exam, 8am-4pm

February 17: VTA to visit Peninsula Catholic H. S. Career Fair

February 28: **Major Appliance Class begins!**

March 12: Graduation

March 21: Spring Semester begins!



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