

High-Tech Training

As the communications technology industry continues on a path of rapid growth and fast-paced change, the IBEW is succeeding in its strategy to pursue this huge market and meet the industry's enormous demand for skilled high-tech workers.

International President J. J. Barry and International Secretary-Treasurer Edwin D. Hill have spoken many times about the importance of the voice-data-video market, and of the IBEW's emphasis on organizing this sector and providing state-of-the-art training for members. Many IBEW locals in the United States and Canada are making great strides in this arena. In this article, we highlight just a few of these successes, with a look at notable achievements by IBEW locals in Northern California and St. Louis, Missouri. As previously reported in the *IBEW Journal*, Local 164 (Jersey City, New Jersey) provides another great example of tremendous success in teledata organizing and training [See *IBEW Journal*, "Organizing Wire," January/February 2000.]

San Jose Local 332, is one of the leading IBEW/NECA apprenticeship training programs in the country. The state-of-the-art classroom is equipped with \$100,000 of equipment to train S&C workers.



Keeps IBEW Wired


A Milestone In St. Louis

Local 1, St. Louis, Missouri, reached a milestone in 1999 as a major area provider of skilled craftsmen in the rapidly growing voice-data-video (VDV) field. "IBEW Local 1 journeyman electricians and communications technicians, working for union electrical contractors, completed more than 1 million man-hours of VDV work in 1999," Business Manager Robert G. Miller reported at the 1st Annual Voice-Data-Video Expo held in Las Vegas May 22, 2000. "Our high tech work was performed across all industries, including Internet/telephone, banking, computer, manufacturing, healthcare, tele-marketing, utilities and others."

Skilled, high-tech IBEW members in St. Louis have worked on VDV projects for such companies as: A.G. Edwards and Sons Inc., Allegiance Telecom Inc., Anheuser-Busch Companies Inc., Bank of America Corp., BJC Health System, Black Box Technologies, Bridge Information Systems Inc., DaimlerChrysler, General Motors Corp., IBM Corp, Level III Communications, Lucent Technologies, MasterCard Inc, WorldCom Inc., Primary Network, Qwest Communications International Inc., Safeco Insurance Co. of America, Sprint Corp., Williams Communications and others.

"Voice-data-video work... is the fastest-growing category in the electrical field, expanding at about four-times the rate of traditional electrical work," noted Douglas R. Martin, executive vice president of the St. Louis Chapter, National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA). "Our contractors are making substantial investments in people and technology to stay ahead of the curve in this fast-changing field. Our industry is funding expanded training to ensure IBEW electricians pos-

(Continued on next page)



Local 1, St. Louis, Missouri, apprentices Sean Kelson (left) and Ty McCart use a voltage tester to check fuses in the control and instrumentation lab at the IBEW Local 1-NECA Electrical Industry Training Center.

Wired

(Continued from previous page)

Russ Serenka (right), an instructor at the San Jose Local 332 JATC works with a student in the new state-of-the-art lab.

Instructor Ty McKinney (far left) oversees a practice session with students at the Local 595, Dublin, California, JATC facility.

sess the knowledge and hands-on skills needed by our customers.”

IBEW Local 1 and signatory contractors, including members of the St. Louis Chapter, NECA, provide training to more than 1,000 Local 1 members annually. “Our ongoing focus on training makes the union electrical industry the only reliable single source for meeting buyers’ total electrical needs in construction, maintenance and service,” Business Manager Miller said.

Under the auspices of its labor-management partnership (the St. Louis Electrical Connection), Local 1 and signatory contractors work cooperatively to sustain the skilled work force needed to install, service and maintain: voice and data systems; audiovisual networks; electronic security and life safety systems; limited energy systems; fiber networks, including LAN, WAN and premise wiring; building

automation controls; lighting and power; residential wiring; process controls and instrumentation; wireless communications systems; television distribution systems; closed circuit television; and signage, including neon and fiber optic.

Fast Track In California

The growth of the Sound and Communications (or voice-data-video) industry in Northern California is explosive. This surge is fueled by the red-hot economy in Silicon Valley and the astounding rise of the Internet and dot-com companies. With the industry’s unprecedented expansion, IBEW telecommunications workers are also on a fast track, logging more man-hours and organizing more members than ever before.

Some 1,600 IBEW Sound and Communications (S&C) members now work in Northern California, as the hot economy and the quality of union training spurs organizing success. Not too many years ago, there were only 300 IBEW S&C workers in Northern California. The number of signatory contractors has also increased from 74 contractors in 1994 to 119 today.



IBEW S&C man-hours in Northern California have almost doubled in the past year alone. Over 3.1 million hours were logged in 1999, according to the Santa Clara Valley NECA. That's an increase of 42 percent from the 2.6 million man-hours logged in 1998.

"The Northern California region is fast setting the industry standard," said Terry Tanner, business manager of IBEW Local 332, San Jose. "If the prosperity in this region is any indication, the growth of the new economy could spur high demand for S&C workers in other areas of the United States."

Vincent J. Cosentino, S&C regional training director for the IBEW/NECA Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee (JATC), has documented the strong growth of the industry. "In Northern California alone, the S&C industry has increased 900 percent in five years," said Cosentino. "It grew from \$16.5 million in 1994 to \$150 million in 1999. Cosentino estimates that the market in Northern California, at its present rate of growth, will reach \$1 billion by the year 2003. He said approximately 60 percent of the market is

in voice/data, with the remaining 40 percent distributed among audio/video and presentation systems, security and card access, Internet and e-commerce, fire systems and educational technology systems.

Like the industry itself, the need for training has skyrocketed, as workers strive to keep pace with rapidly changing technology. Constant and ongoing training has become the standard in Northern California. Over 500 apprentices are now enrolled in the Northern California JATC three-year telecommunications curriculum, hosted in six locations throughout the region. Currently 30 cents per man-hour is distributed to the local JATCs for training the work force. In 1999 the IBEW and signatory contractors spent \$805,000 for training in the region.

"As the telecommunications marketplace continues to heat up, the JATC and the IBEW are where the best workers will be," said Aaron Colton, president of Ceitronics, Inc., a signatory contractor in San Jose. "Only a well-trained work force can keep up with the growth and the complexity now taking place around us. Many contractors tell me that other

regions in the country duplicate what occurs in Northern California."

Apprentices complete 150 hours of classroom training at the JATC each year. Entry level applicants must pass an exam in one of five areas, including pro audio/video, data phone, asset protection (fire, burglar alarms), CCTV and security, and basic knowledge.

To keep up with technology, a new state-of-the-art JATC in San Jose includes a classroom specially outfitted with \$100,000 of equipment to train S&C workers for certification. The new classroom/lab, which opened in October 1999, is the brainchild of trustees who decided in 1998 to offer it as a training track.

The San Jose JATC is one of a handful of locations on the West Coast where Sound and Communications workers can learn on a variety of manufacturers' equipment. There, S&C workers practice on telecom racks, patch panels and communications closets built especially for the lab. Three other IBEW locals in Northern California will soon install such classroom/labs—Local 6, San Francisco; Local 595, Dublin; and Local 340, Sacramento.

"The classroom has training components that feature mock areas to simulate real-world situations," said Frank Garcia, S&C coordinator at the Local 332 San Jose JATC. "It mimics the on-site job environment." In the 31 years Garcia has been in the industry, the number of workers in the field has increased substantially. "I can testify to the growth firsthand, since I was the first S&C instructor to be hired at the San Jose center in 1992," the 13-year IBEW member said. "We now have eight instructors—that's how large it's grown. We've been on the cutting edge, and the growth is tremendous. We've definitely stepped ahead, even in our ability to train apprentices."

"We need to invest our dollars to compete and deliver. Workers who receive good training in the basics maximize management's ability to deliver. And that's what we're doing in Northern California," says Ceitronics' Colton. ☐

[Editors Note: The Journal invites other IBEW local unions to tell us their stories of efforts in this arena so we can share the information with readers.]

