

## Sheet Metal Workers benefit from LEED certification

By Michael Moore

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ST. PAUL - Justin Brandt was sailing through his apprenticeship with Sheet Metal Workers Local 10. Having completed the union's introductory classes, he was well on his way to logging the 8,000 hours of on-the-job training needed to secure his journeyman's card.

But on Dec. 30 of last year, Brandt was laid off abruptly by his employer. At first, he figured another job would come along soon enough, but after months spent waiting for the phone to ring, Brandt began looking for trainings and classes he might take to add skills to his resume.

His local's training coordinator was pushing a new green-construction training program, which the local had developed with a grant from the state. Brandt enrolled.

"It sounded like something that certainly wouldn't hurt me," he said. "I didn't have to pay for anything, I just had to show up and put in a little study time. It seemed like the program everyone is excited about right now."

Weeks later, after completing the training program and doing some additional studying on his own, Brandt took the exam to become a "LEED green associate," an internationally recognized certification proving a high level of familiarity with the U.S. Green Building Council's standards of design and construction.

Brandt passed the test Nov. 18, and two weeks later he went back to work, landing a job with Harris Mechanical.

"It moved pretty quick," Brandt said. "I got the job before any other guy who's not working pretty much because I have the LEED certification."

Brandt's story, union agents and contractors agree, is one example of an emerging shift in hiring practices for green-construction projects.

LEED certification has long been an expectation of the so-called "white hard hats" on green construction projects, but it is increasingly becoming an expectation of all workers on the jobsite – making it a credential union workers can't afford to be without.

Ross Noak of Harris Mechanical said LEED certification – which stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design – is "working its way from the top down."

"When it first came out a few years ago, the company asked all of its project managers to get LEED certified," Noak said. "The majority of our executives, our vice presidents are LEED certified. Now it's trickling all the way down to the field people."

It was Noak who contacted Local 10 last month seeking LEED-certified workers. Noak said he had made previous requests in the past, and this marked the first time the local had been able to comply.

Buck Paulsrud, Local 10's training coordinator in the metro area, said the union is pushing its members to take advantage of a pair of free, grant-funded training programs designed to start workers on the path to LEED certification. They are:

- Green/LEED. The program Brandt completed this fall moves from general green-construction awareness – using the right caulk, recognizing different green-construction terms – to specifics of the LEED green associate credential.

Green/LEED is facilitated by the Local 10's apprenticeship and training program, in partnership with the sheet metal contractors' association and the Minnesota Building and Construction

Trades Council, with \$40,000 from the Minnesota State Energy Sector Partnership and the U.S. Department of Labor.

- GreenPOWER. Launched by the Blue Green Alliance in January, the 48-hour, six-day course is free of charge and open to both employed and unemployed workers in the metro area. It is tailored to workers looking to succeed in energy-efficient retrofitting, the renewable-energy industry or green manufacturing.

Both Green/LEED and GreenPOWER, Paulsrud said, equip his union's workers with the knowledge they need to begin the process of gaining LEED certification – the same certification that got Brandt off the bench and onto the jobsite.

"There are a lot of LEED-credentialed individuals amongst our contractors – the project managers, estimators, general managers, sales folks," Paulsrud said. "Now being LEED-credentialed is being driven into the boots on the ground. The regular Joes on these jobs are going to be credentialed as well.

"In today's world, it's what sheepskin you have on the wall, what badge you have on your left sleeve that means so much to our customers."

Brandt, who leapfrogged other out-of-work members on the hiring list because he invested in the green training, knows that better than anyone.

"This is going to be a huge thing, and it's something that those of us who have the time right now because we're not working should really consider taking advantage of because the money is there to do the training," Brandt said.

*Michael Moore edits The Union Advocate, the official publication of the St. Paul Regional Labor Federation.*