

Apprenticeship

Working toward a better future

Working part of the year in a motorcycle shop and drawing UIC for the winter is a thing of the past for Gary Cormier, now that he has become a licensed motor vehicle mechanic.

"I was surviving but I wasn't able to get ahead at all, being on UIC part of the year," he said.

He has finished his apprenticeship and is now working full-time with Canadian Tire in West Saint John, earning \$14.25 per hour.

Two years ago, Statistics Canada found there were 300,000 jobs across the country unfilled because job-seekers didn't have the required skills. Many were in the 290 trades covered under Canada's apprenticeship programs.

In New Brunswick, there are more than 60 trades under the Apprenticeship and Occupational Certification Board, ranging from barbers to bricklayers, cabinet makers, electrical mechanics, plumbers and welders.

The apprenticeship program is a combination of work and classroom experience, said John Kelly, training officer with the Department of Advanced Education and Labor.

In the Saint John district, there are more than 1,300 people registered in programs which have them returning to the classroom each year for six-week sessions. Some trade papers can be written after two years, while others take up to five years to complete.

"The most difficult part is getting in the door of a company," Kelly said. "But once you get to that stage and prove to be an acceptable employee, the company is usually interested in having you in the apprenticeship program."

Pre-employment programs at community colleges offer another way into apprenticeship programs. That was the route for Cormier.

"Working on motorcycles didn't count as experience towards becoming a mechanic, so I went to manpower (Canada Employment and Immigration) to see about going back to school," he said.

Cormier, who was 25 years-old at the time, was put on a waiting list, but eventually got into community college and was allowed to remain on UIC while at school.

After completing the 40-week program, he found a job with Canadian Tire and was signed on as an apprentice. Last year, five years after he started, he wrote his trade papers and passed with a mark of 75 per cent.

Cormier and his girlfriend recently bought a house — a dream which a few years ago would have been out of reach. Some trades have interprovincial papers, which means training in one province is recognized in another. Anyone

making over 70 per cent gets a red seal. Cormier has one on his licence, so his training is recognized in other provinces.

William Belding, who now works for the Canadian Coast Guard as an electrician, didn't want to wait to get into the pre-employment program. After finishing high school, he worked for a few years as a laborer. He had enjoyed the electrical course in high school so he decided to get his papers. Belding couldn't find anyone to take him on as an apprentice so he decided to enter the 40-week pre-employment program. When he discovered he would have to wait for several months on UIC to get into community college through Employment and Immigration Canada, he decided to pay his own way. After passing his first year, he found a job with a contractor working in the Pennfield area. That lasted for six months and then he found temporary work at the coast guard. After that finished, he got on at Saint John Shipbuilding Ltd.

He eventually returned to the coast guard and is now employed as a marine aids technician, looking after lighthouses and other navigational aids.

"We cover the Bay of Fundy around as far as St. Mary's Bay beyond Digby Neck," he said.

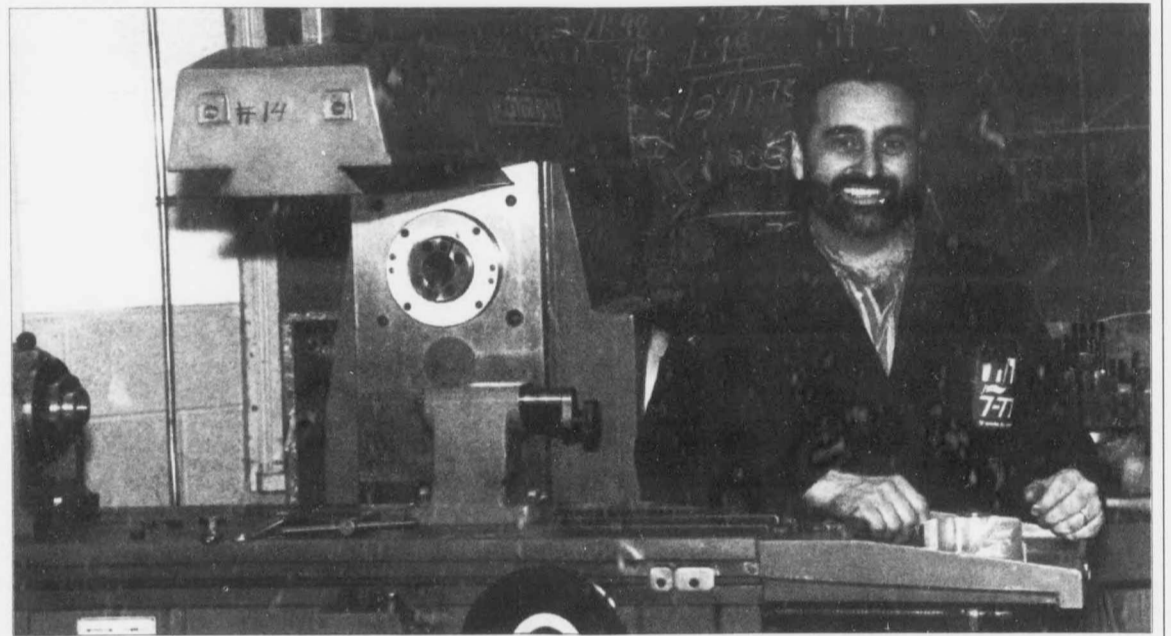
Doing the scheduled maintenance on the lights involves a fair bit of travel, he said. Most is done by van and ferry, but in an emergency, when an important light goes out, the coast guard sends them out by helicopter.

Once a person gets into the apprenticeship program wages range from 50 per cent of what a licensed person earns to 80 or 85 per cent. Some employers pay the apprentice for the six weeks they are away on course each year. Those not paid by their employers are allowed to collect UIC.

Brian Rignanesi, an instructor in the metals department at the Saint John community college, says the yearly training courses for apprentices are scheduled to try to fit the needs of employers.

Apprentices going through his program need four years of work and school before they can write papers to become industrial mechanics. Each year, he teaches six of the six-week blocks at any of the four levels for the course. Those in the program learn to do maintenance on big machinery found in power plants, refineries, pulp mills and food processing plants.

"We teach the basics about machinery, not machine specific information," he said. "They get their



Brian Rignanesi, an instructor in the metals department at the Saint John community college, teaches the basics about heavy machinery. Apprentices finish their training on the job.

specific information about the machinery they deal with on the job." Last year, salaries in New Brun-

wick for qualified trades people ranged from \$12 to \$20 per hour. Anyone interested in becoming an

apprentice should contact the apprenticeship office at the nearest community college.

Apprenticeship questions and answers

WHAT IS AN APPRENTICE?

An apprentice is an employee who is learning the skills of an occupation while working with a journeyman of that occupation.

HOW CAN I BECOME AN APPRENTICE?

You must be employed by an employer who is a journeyman or who has a journeyman on staff.

You must be at least 16 years of age, meet the educational requirements described for the specific trade and have the physical development required to perform the physical duties of the occupation in which you wish to work.

You may be requested to submit an official school transcript at the discretion of the director.

Contact the nearest community college (see page 28 for listing). A training officer will assist you.

WILL MY PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE COUNT TOWARDS MY APPRENTICESHIP?

Some of your previous trade-related work experience may count towards your apprenticeship. You must submit a letter or a trade verification form from each of your employers, stating how many hours you worked and what kind of work you did. Your current employer and the apprenticeship branch will determine how much time credit will be granted.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO COMPLETE MY APPRENTICESHIP?

Depending on the occupation you choose, it will take approximately one to five years of registered full-time work. Your actual requirement will be determined at

the time your apprenticeship contract is signed, based on any previous experience or training that might shorten your apprenticeship requirement.

HOW MUCH CAN I EARN AS AN APPRENTICE?

That depends on several things: the occupation you choose, the level of apprenticeship you are in, and the rate at which the Journeyman in your shop are paid. In general, apprentices are paid a minimum percentage of the certified rate, according to the following list:

- First year apprentice - 50-55%
- Second year apprentice - 60-65%
- Third year apprentice - 70-75%
- Fourth year apprentice - 80-85%

DOES IN-SCHOOL TRAINING COUNT TOWARDS MY APPRENTICESHIP?

Yes. Each time you attend training, you are credited with forty hours per week of in-school training.

WHERE DO I GO TO SCHOOL?

That depends on the occupation you choose. Most day classes are offered as a full-time block release program at various New Brunswick community colleges. These last from five to six weeks, depending on the occupation involved.

IS THERE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FOR IN-SCHOOL TRAINING?

Yes. You may be eligible for U.I.C. benefits or a Government of Canada training allowance while attending school. Some labor organizations and employers offer additional benefits.

DO I HAVE TO ATTEND IN-SCHOOL TRAINING AT THE TIME IT IS OFFERED OR DO I HAVE A CHOICE?

The Apprenticeship Branch will give you and your employer a number of dates to choose from. Apprentices are advised to attend in-school training as regularly as possible. Long periods between training could jeopardize completing your apprenticeship in a reasonable time frame.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I CHANGE EMPLOYERS?

Your apprenticeship contract can be transferred to another employer within the same occupation upon approval of the Apprenticeship office. A formal transfer of occupation will be negotiated. Your new employer will have the same obligation to you as your former employer.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I DISAGREE WITH AN EMPLOYER'S EVALUATION OF MY APPRENTICESHIP PERFORMANCE?

An industrial training officer will meet with you and your employer to go over the evaluation. Most problems are resolved through this process.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I DECIDE TO TAKE A YEAR OR TWO OFF FROM MY APPRENTICESHIP?

If you are not trade employed after a certain period of time, your registration may be cancelled. If it is, any theory marks obtained during your apprenticeship will remain valid for a period of three years after cancellation.