TRAINING

Our 2021 Under 30 All-Stars

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Meet some young people making careers for themselves in the skilled trades.

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Welcome once again to our Under 30 All-Stars, an annual feature we've been running for a few years now that showcases the younger generation just entering the trades.

Workforce development—getting enough trained people both to do the work you have and to enable your business to take on more work—always registers as a top concern on *CONTRACTOR*'s reader polls. Quality hires seem harder than ever to come by. Competition between competing shops in areas seeing a boom in construction can be fierce.

At the same time the older, experienced generation continues to retire (roughly 10,000 members of the Baby Boom generation retire *every day*). And every one of those old-timers that retires is not just one more set of hands you need to replace, it is a wealth of industry experience that will no longer be transmitted to that next generation.

Now, adding to all the old headaches comes COVID-19, making it even more difficult to find, recruit and train candidates. And I don't just mean the hassles of training via Zoom or maintaining social distance on the job site. As the American economy emerges from the pandemic, is suddenly seems like employers everywhere are feeling the same workforce crunch that the skilled trades have been feeling for years.

Is it that unemployment benefits have been too high? Is it that that some members of the workforce (mainly women, but not only women) are still unwilling to have their kids go back to school and choose to remain at home? Is it simply that the re-opening economy has made it a “seller’s market” when it comes to labor?

I think all those factors come into play, but I also think there’s something more. I believe a lot of people in the American workforce have taken the pandemic as an opportunity to re-think their fundamental relationship to work.

For younger people, I think that means investing in valuable skills and certifications that won’t leave them with years of debt. Skills that will keep an employer from seeing them as replaceable or disposable. Skills that are portable, since they’re still of an age that wants to travel places and see some of the world. Skills that are about solving problems and making a difference in people’s lives. Skills that can result in building something tangible in which they can take real pride.

Come meet a few young people who are already ahead of the curve, and on their way to bright futures in the trades.

Geordan Meub, Shop Manager, Nelson Mechanical Design, Inc.

28 Years Old

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Geordan Meub, Shop Manager.

MARTHA’S VINEYARD, MA — Raised in in Vermont, shortly after graduating high school, Geordan Meub decided to forego college and start immediately in the real world. “While the allure of college and education was interesting, and many of my friends were going, I found it hard to justify taking on so much debt and decide on a career when I was only 18,” says Meub.

Meub soon after moved from Vermont to Martha's Vineyard with his brother to start anew. From that point, Geordan’s entire working career until about a year ago had been as a butcher. He started out as simple deli clerk, but working under a knowledgeable and skilled meat cutter, Geordan quickly assumed more responsibility. “While I enjoyed the work, it quickly became apparent that I needed a career path with a higher ceiling,” said Meub.

After weighing his options, Meub contacted David Sprague, co-owner of Nelson Mechanical Design, whom he knew outside of work, simply to ask what trade schools he would recommend.

“I was surprised and intrigued to find out that most of their employees were trained and brought up within the company. Knowing that, and seeing the success of the company from the outside, I couldn't say no, and as cliche as it may sound, it was the best career decision I ever made,” says Meub.

Geordan now has control over his career path as far as gaining knowledge from the company and being proactive about obtaining certifications that will improve his skill set, the things that both owners Brian Nelson and David Sprague are passionate about, says Meub.

“My current role of shop manager allows me to be consistently ordering, receiving and stocking massive amounts of shop stock and job materials. Not having any background in tools and fittings, this exponentially accelerated my knowledge on parts and materials. This, combined with being in the field after my shop duties are fulfilled for the day, has been the most effective way I could have possibly started in the trades,” says Meub.

Recently completing his universal-type EPA training,
Meub is currently finishing up his Hot Works and OSHA 10 certifications. Geordan’s plans for the future include obtaining, at the very least, his journeyman’s license in either sheet metal or plumbing. The company will abet any requests to sign up for, or pursue any of the courses, and course material needed.

“The next step in my training would be to move from my apprenticeship to a journeyman with the help of the company. This will include completing the first tiers of the course material and accruing any other certifications, whether they be state/federal required courses, or voluntary training courses, like Mitsubishi and any other companies that offer equipment and technology,” says Meub.

Meub says he would like to own his own business one day, yet there is a certain level of security working for a company like Nelson Mechanical Design that still makes it a lucrative career path without having to branch off on your own.

Moreover, while the clientele on the island can lend itself to achieving success through good work and reliability, the cost of property and other business expenses on the island are heightened and potentially cost-prohibitive—compared to just being on the mainland; it can be much more expensive to run day-to-day operations. Also, the requirement of having a Master Plumber’s license to own a business would require further education. But at 28, Meub has time to ponder that future scenario.

In conclusion, when Geordan was in high school, he
thought to himself, “Trade school? No, that’s just for people aren’t smart enough to go to college.” The older Geordan gets, he now realizes, “Those people were the smartest ones in the room! I wish I could go back and do exactly that, attend a vocational school or tech program that many high schools, including mine, offered. Understanding that taking debt on through college isn’t always the best thing. Even with a college education, it can be years until you even

start to make what you would make right out of trade school," says Meub.

Jessica McCool, Apprentice Plumber, E.M. Duggan

26 Years Old

Jessica McCool, Apprentice Plumber

BOSTON, MA — Employed by E.M. Duggan since 2017, Jessica (Jessy) McCool is a plumber for Boston Local 12, and she also serves as a Sergeant in the U.S. Army. After attending high school—in a plumbing shop—McCool joined the U.S. Army Reserves.

Until she applied to the union, her first job after high school was in residential plumbing. Being in the union is a brother/sisterhood that would become a very important part of her life, says McCool. "I finished my required schooling through Local 12 while working for E.M. Duggan, for which I still work today. I am very lucky to work for a company that has supported my plumbing career, as well as support of my military career, including my recent yearlong deployment to Afghanistan," says McCool.

Growing up as the daughter of a union carpenter, Jessica always had respect for the trades. "I started plumbing in 2013 while attending a vocational high school. In 2014, I got my first co-op plumbing job, and in my senior year I was awarded the PHCC all-star at my school," says McCool.

What does Jessica love most about her job? "Pushing myself out of my comfort zone is something I really enjoy, and I love a challenge. Plumbing is not a skill everyone has, and no matter how long you've been in the trade, you can always learn something new," says McCool.

Because of McCool's military service and working three years without an apprentice card in high school, she has not had the opportunity to finish her required hours for the Massachusetts State Plumbing License. "Completing my hours is my immediate next step, and once I acquire my Journeyman's and Master's license, I would like to continue my welding classes," says McCool.

Jessica keeps an open mind when it comes to her future. "I want to experience all levels of employment, and at this point, I'm taking one day at a time to see where this takes me. However, I look forward to climbing the ladder in this profession. Since I am very personable and hardworking, I believe I would excel in owning a business one day," says McCool.

In the end, McCool says that promoting and supporting technical high schools is very important, especially with young women. "Although I had a good experience attending a technical high school, I didn't feel it was totally equipped to make sure I was on the right track to achieving my license. I would love to see a mentorship program for young aspiring female plumbers," says McCool.