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# Celebrating 50 Years of Educational Excellence

## On track with the Construction Sector

According to the Growth Partnership Dashboard, construction trades employ 6.5 percent of Ashtabula County's workforce, whereas construction is 5.1 percent of Ohio's workforce. From building new homes and offices to rehabilitating the county's aging housing stock, there is a constant demand for workers who possess entry-level skills to work as helpers and as construction-crew members.

**ACJVS first offered its quartet of building trades programs in 1974.** Carpentry, Electricity, Cement Trades and Brick Mason covered the gamut of residential and most commercial construction. These are timeless trades that address the basic human need for safe and comfortable shelter. A-Tech students emerge from these programs with a solid foundation in both the basic skills and current practices that graduates will encounter at the jobsite.

"Carpentry doesn't change that much," admits A-Tech instructor Mathew Polta. "But the tools we have here at the school are very up to date. Everything is new as can be, and every year we replace worn tools with the latest ones. They are getting tools that they will be using in the field."

Polta says that the power tools used by carpenters today make for a much safer working environment because they are powered by robust battery packs rather than a web of extension cords. "Twenty-five years ago, everything was corded," he says. "Now, you are able to keep a cleaner workplace, with less clutter. And that makes for a safer workplace."

It also makes for a safer, more efficient classroom. Ray Platt, a 1976 Carpentry Program graduate, had the opportunity to compare the 2019 A-Tech classroom to the one from his generation.

"It's just awesome to see how the classroom has evolved compared to what we had back then," he said during a tour. "Safety is probably the number one thing we learn," Polta says. "The first three weeks are spent on safety and tools. ... It takes them the better part of the first year to get really proficient with their tools. And the second year you add to that knowledge. It really does take them some time."

Polta says all aspects of framing are taught in the program's junior year: building layout; concrete foundation and flatwork; floor, wall and roof framing; siding; roofing; and stairs. In the second year, the students tackle door and window installation, remodeling, drywall, flooring, painting and cabinetry/trim.

Additionally, carpentry students receive 10 hours of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training as part of the curriculum. Polta says that's training that most employers require. The instruction includes setting up and working from scaffolds.



The Carpentry program was first offered in 1974. 1976 grad George Parks kept the toolbox he used as a student that year. In 2018, he brought it to campus to show Superintendent, Dr. Jerome R. Brockway.

A-Tech recently adopted a new textbook series for the program, one that Polta heartily endorses. The three-book "Career Connections" course prepares students for union membership and apprenticeship. The material is presented in a visually engaging, modern style geared toward the teenage student.

"The books were developed by the carpenters' union," Polta says. "It's a lot easier for a student to understand than the previous books were."

Carpentry skills are acquired in real-world tasks completed off campus as a public service. In the fall of 2018, students constructed a pavilion at the Pierpont

Township shooting range used by the Ashtabula County Sheriff's Department. Using A-Tech students for the labor saved the department between \$2,000 and \$3,000 while giving students hands-on experience in everything from footers to siding. A prior project saved Saybrook Township's taxpayers more than \$10,000 in labor costs on a storage building for road salt.

Makayla Joles of Jefferson says watching her father work on projects around the house inspired her to try the program. "I loved it from the second I started," she says. "It's the best decision I ever made in my life."

Polta says both **hard work and good wages await these students**, who have jobs waiting for them right out of school. Typical entry-level positions for graduates include framing, roofing, dry wall, concrete or siding crews. Starting wages range from \$15 to \$20 an hour for those willing to work hard. Every spring, Polta receives calls from contractors looking for graduates to join these crews.

"There is plenty of work out there and the money is there for those willing to do it," Polta says.

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Meets 3rd Monday each month at 6:30 p.m.  
Those wishing to attend should contact the Superintendent's office to verify meeting times, 440-576-6015

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