

APPRENTICESHIP WORKS

ISSUE NO. 51 | SPRING 2025

SHARE THE BENEFITS OF APPRENTICESHIP

Know someone interested in becoming an apprentice? Or an employer who wants to start an apprenticeship program? Information and resources are available at apprenticeship.mn.gov.

RECRUITMENT AND OUTREACH RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR APPRENTICESHIP SPONSORS

These sponsor-focused lists of organizations, nonprofits and jobs and training services are available to registered apprenticeship program sponsors to expand their outreach and recruitment networks across Minnesota.

The lists are separated by geographic region and available on Apprenticeship Minnesota's [program sponsor webpage](#) and below:

FEATURED STORIES



2 BUS OPERATOR APPRENTICESHIP DRIVES SUCCESS



6 ANNUAL PIPE TRADES COMPETITION

[Central Minnesota](#)

[Metro area](#)

[Northeast Minnesota](#)

[Northwest Minnesota](#)

[Southeast Minnesota](#)

[Southwest Minnesota](#)



If you would like to include your organization as an outreach resource, contact vicky.castorena@state.mn.us.

m APPRENTICESHIP MINNESOTA

APPRENTICESHIP BETTER PREPARES NEW OPERATORS, HELPS THEM ADAPT TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Vanessa L'Esperance is the second generation in her family to help Twin Cities residents get where they need to be. That might mean driving them to work, home, the grocery store, seeing the doctor or enjoying a night out.

She and close to 1,200 other bus operators at Metro Transit work hard to smoothly navigate traffic and weather conditions to keep everyone comfortable, safe and on time.

"The days of thinking of this as a low-skill job are over," Alec Johnson told a group of 30 graduates of the Metro Transit's Bus Operator Apprenticeship Program. "We all know how hard this job is."

Inspired by construction-trade apprenticeship programs, Johnson helped launch the MetroTransit Bus Operator Apprenticeship Program five years ago and turned the program over to L'Esperance in 2023. The training program, which combines hands-on driving experience, classroom training and on-the-job training is designed to give new drivers a thorough and supportive introduction to the trade.

The two-year apprenticeship program includes ride-along guidance and designated mentors who are vital for helping with everything from scheduling support and specific bus operation to handling traffic pileups and construction and interacting with riders who may be struggling.



From left, Vanessa L'Esperance and bus operator apprentice Bekele Bayisa.

"[Mentorship] is the heart of the apprenticeship program," said L'Esperance. "It really helps the operators in their day-to-day work, as well as their work-life balance. Not everything can be written down or taught in the classroom."

While the structured in-depth apprenticeship training didn't exist when she joined Metro Transit in 2013, she did have seven years of experience as a school bus driver. She also could talk to her parents. Her mom was with Metro Transit for 15 years, her dad for 34 years.

"I've been driving for almost two decades now," she said.

Many new bus operators come to Metro Transit without this driving experience, yet bring great communication and compassion. These skills make them great candidates for the apprenticeship program

"They just love working with the public," L'Esperance said. Bus operators come from and work with a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures (hers includes North Dakota's Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe) which is an asset as well. "Our operators are just as diverse as the communities we serve."

| 'Bus' continues on page 3

‘Bus’ continued from page 2

Apprenticeship pay starts at \$28.84/hour with increases for working the first shift (done by 8 a.m.) or the nighttime third shift, along with medical and dental benefits and a pension. Veterans can also use the G.I. Bill benefits to help off-set living expenses while they’re starting the apprenticeship.

Extra training also is offered for different buses, including coach buses, 60-foot articulated buses and battery electric buses that can feel a lot different than diesel-powered buses. These electric buses bring new benefits as well as challenges, requiring different skills to operate.

As of Spring 2025, 297 apprentices have graduated from the program and achieved journeyworker status, which offers better pay, more schedule choices and the opportunity to mentor new drivers.

Learn more about Metro Transit at metrotransit.org/drive.



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– Vanessa L’Esperance

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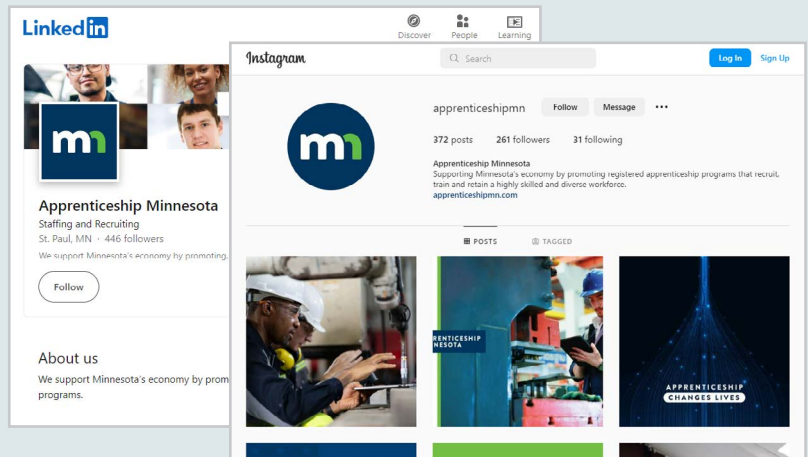
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SIGN UP TO ATTEND AN APPRENTICESHIP MINNESOTA EVENT

See what’s coming up and register for events on our [events webpage](#).



RECOGNIZED APPRENTICESHIP PREPARATION PROGRAMS

The Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry recently created a voluntary process to become a Recognized Apprenticeship Preparation Program. Qualifying programs prepare individuals to gain the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to enter a registered apprenticeship program and succeed.

Using guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship, qualifying programs must include:

- Training and curriculum aligned with the skills and competencies, including meaningful hands-on training, needed to meet minimum selection criteria for entry into approved registered apprenticeship programs in Minnesota.
- Access to supportive services to assist individuals with entry into a registered apprenticeship program and retain employment.
- Opportunities to attain at least one industry-recognized credential during the preparation program.
- A documented partnership with one or more registered apprenticeship programs indicating their support for the apprenticeship preparation program.
- An outreach strategy to increase opportunities for all populations to participate in a registered apprenticeship program

Although applying to have your program recognized is not mandatory, we encourage any organization that provides pre-apprenticeship training to consider having their program recognized. Once an organization's program is recognized, their information will be posted on DLI's website. This will allow employment seekers to research preparation programs to decide which is the best fit for them.

[Learn more about Recognized Apprenticeship Preparation Programs and complete an application.](#)

CONGRATULATIONS TO MINNESOTA'S NEWEST REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

New apprenticeship programs recently registered in Minnesota include:

- KMC Electric LLC, Hopkins – electrician
- Minnesota Rural Electric Association, Maple Grove – line worker
- Polar Semiconductor, Minneapolis – equipment maintenance technician apprentice
- Qualus Services, Brooklyn Park LLC – relay technician



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www.dli.mn.gov/about-department/news-and-media/sign-news-department-labor-and-industry

LIUNA CELEBRATES GRADUATES; HOSTS SAFETY AWARDS

The Apprenticeship Minnesota team kicked-off graduation season at the Laborers' Training Center in Lino Lakes celebrating the graduation of LiUNA Minnesota's 2024 class of apprentices.

Nearly 400 laborers graduated the apprenticeship program in 2024, and on March 13, 2025, the new journeyworkers were celebrated for their achievements.

Safety Awards

On March 14, the Laborers hosted their Contractor Open House and Safety Awards event. This annual event includes a safety seminar that highlights employee resources provided by the union and lessons about construction ergonomics.



LiUNA graduates.

The event concluded with a prize giveaway where one laborer won a new all-terrain vehicle as a part of Minnesota Laborers Employers Cooperation and Education Trust (LECET)'s Safety Driven Program. Journeyworkers and apprentices were entered in the giveaway by employers who recognize their commitment to safety on the jobsite. [Learn more about LiUNA Minnesota and North Dakota and how to become a laborer.](#)



Left to right, laborers with giveaway prizes, the winner of an all-terrain vehicle and attendees of the contractor open house.

APPRENTICESHIP MINNESOTA BY-THE-NUMBERS

Apprentices, as of March 25, 2025	
Total	10,824
Women	907
People of Color	2,802
Veterans	581
Disability	194
Apprentices by age	
18-24 years old	48%
25-34 years old	32%
35 years old and over	19%

Jan.	Feb.	March
New apprentices by month		
156	190	163
Completions by month		
113	131	66

Sponsors, as of March 25, 2025	
Active sponsors	192
New sponsors	4
Participating employers	5,075

Apprentice participation by race/ethnic group	
American Indian/Alaska Native	3%
Asian	3%
Black/African American	8%
Hispanic	12%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<0.5%
Multiple race	2%
White	70%
Did not self-identify	15%

This newsletter was funded as part of a \$3.3 million grant through the U.S. Department of Labor to support the expansion of registered apprenticeship in Minnesota.

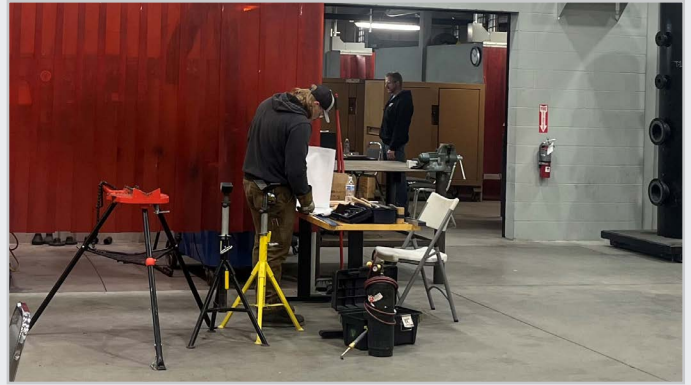
APPRENTICES TEST SKILLS AT PIPE TRADES COMPETITION

March 19 and 20, 2025, apprentices from Minnesota plumber, pipefitter, sheetmetal worker and sprinklerfitter programs participated in the 2025 Minnesota Pipe Trades Competition.

This two-day event, hosted by the Local 455 St. Paul Pipefitters JATC, consisted of five categories: welding, pipefitting, HVAC service, plumbing and sprinklerfitting.

Instructors and journeymen from across the state created challenges for apprentices to solve in each category. Apprentices were given set times to build, fix and weld to score enough points to move further on in the competition. Eight Minnesota union locals competed and the winner from each category will move on to the district competition in Des Moines, Iowa.

Learn more about registered apprenticeship opportunities for pipefitters, sprinklerfitters and sheetmetal workers in the [Registered Apprenticeship Program Application Directory](#).



Above, an apprentice participates in the 2025 Minnesota Pipe Trades Competition.

At right, left to right, Jeremy McConckey, St. Paul Pipefitters Local 455, Jeremy Thompson, Southeast Minnesota Plumbers and Steamfitters Local 6, and Jeremy Parker, Apprenticeship Minnesota.



G.I. BILL BENEFITS CAN BE USED FOR APPRENTICESHIP

In addition to helping with costs related to attending college, G.I. Bill benefits can be used while training in a registered apprenticeship or other on-the-job training.

The G.I. Bill offers veterans up to \$10,000 to use while in school or training and businesses can receive up to \$2,000 as an incentive to hire veterans. Benefits can also be used for licensing and certification, including fees for required continuing education and others related to maintaining employment.

More information

dli.mn.gov/business/workforce/gi-bill-benefits-and-apprenticeship



FREE APPRENTICESHIP MATERIALS

Apprenticeship Minnesota has free registered apprenticeship outreach materials available including informational brochures, frequently asked question handouts and wall posters.

[Complete a request form](#) to let us know which registered apprenticeship materials you'd like to receive.

