INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF BOILERMAKERS LODGE 128

PRESSURE POINT

Boilermakers need mathematics, strength and a cool head in close quarters

Boilermakers are vital to society's infrastructure. Trained craftspeople, boilermakers erect and repair pressure vessels, air pollution equipment, blast furnaces, water treatment plants, storage and process tanks, stacks and liners. They also install giant superheater sections in large utility boilers, erect water storage tanks, build and repair nuclear power plant reactors and construct components on hydroelectric power stations.

There are three areas of expertise in the boilermaker trade—welding, rigging and fitting—all of which are apprenticed and tested as part of the industry's Red Seal exam.

The welder's job is to join different types of steel or other alloys, using procedures approved by the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA) or the Canadian Welding Bureau (CWB). Riggers put components into place using cranes, slings, shackles and chain falls. They must possess strong math skills, so they can gauge how heavy an object is in order to determine the appropriate rigging hardware to use. Fitters lay out and prepare the components to be joined together by bolt-up, welding or other methods. Math aptitude is also important for fitters, as is blueprint reading.

TRAINING

Boilermaking is a highly skilled profession with a strong future in Canada. "You can send overseas for parts, but you can't get properly trained labour that way," explains Ed Frerotte, an apprenticeship and training coordinator for the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Lodge 128. "China can make widgets, but they can't come in to build nuclear reactors."

The apprenticeship program at the boilermakers local takes four to five years to complete and requires 6,600 hours of on-the-job experience, which includes 700 to 800 hours of in-school technical training.

Part of the screening process at Lodge 128, which recruits 100 applicants a year, is the aptitude test. "Strong math skills and the ability to communicate in English are important," says Frerotte, who notes that the job appeals to people with an affinity for technology. "It's also physically demanding, and in some cases you need to be able to work in close quarters, such as crawling in a tight manway or getting inside a small pressure vessel."

LOCAL LODGE 128

On May 19, 1947, Local Lodge 128 received its charter as a construction lodge in Ontario. Membership has grown over the years, from 47 listed on that chart document to approximately 2,000. More than two-thirds are construction members and the rest are shop members. Lodge 128 is now one of the largest locals in the International Brotherhood.

FUTURE

A union that prides itself on expertise, diligence and workmanship has a fighting chance in the current environment, notes Frerotte.

"We have a good market share, but with the turndown in the economy we could be affected," he says. "[However] because we are a highly skilled trade, [we] should be stronger than industrial sectors that require people with less training. Our union is intent on keeping up with the latest technology, so our people have the best training and can be relied upon for quality. The future looks stable."

UNITY, PROGRESS, PROTECTION

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UNITY PROGRESS & PROTECTION

Unionized construction workers in Ontario benefit from collective bargaining. A journeyman boilermaker can earn up to $49.68 an hour (total package) from fair unionized contractors.

Unionized construction boilermakers benefit from on-the-job and localized training paid for by the Boilermaker Contractors Association (BCA). This keeps them more employable and highly skilled, and benefits not only the member/worker but also the contractor, the owner/client and the general public.

Unionized boilermakers benefit from representation under the Occupational Health and Safety Act as well as the union's own health and safety department.