

Anatomy of an Experienced UBC Millwright

By David Park, Business Representative
Local 1554

Meet **Clyde S. Tyree**: *Apprentice, journeyman, Executive Board member, training coordinator, fund trustee, training trust board member and company owner. Mr. Tyree has been a member of Millwright Local 1554 in Nashville, Tennessee since entering the apprenticeship program in 1979. This is the story of a true millwright with 33 years of experience to his name. Mr. Tyree is married with three daughters and lives in Murfreesboro. I had an opportunity to sit down with Clyde and reflect over the last 33 years as a UBC Millwright. This is the story he told:*

"I LEARNED ABOUT THE MILLWRIGHT TRADE FROM TWO BROTHERS. I grew up in a small suburb of Nashville. They had joined the local after a variety of jobs after high school. Their uncle was a charter member of the original Local 1544. While I had had a variety of jobs, some of which could have been a career, their work experience appealed to me enough to follow their lead a couple of years later.

Learning a valuable skill and the union principles became a way of life that I knew would be my future. Regular attendance at union meetings and activities led to holding office as Warden and eventually Nashville Carpenters and Millwrights Apprenticeship Coordinator.

The apprenticeship I entered over 30 years ago was much like other millwright and carpenter programs across the country. With the exception of only a few industrial areas with strong union representation, most programs were underfunded. While the instructors deserved credit for sharing their knowledge, resources were very limited.

I learned to weld in a damp basement welding shop in the oldest high school in town with rods donated by the U.S. Army from some leftover provisions from some unnamed war or project. Classroom lessons were a product of the instructor's creativity and effort instead of a developed curriculum.

The percentage of millwright skills adequately taught in class was minimal.

Fortunately, the work experience portion of apprenticeship was very good to me. Jobs that afforded the most education for me included projects in paper mills, printing, rubber, auto industry, chemical and power generation.



While this variety of jobs proved to be very interesting, the most valuable part of my experience was the journeymen and senior apprentices I was fortunate to work with.

The first few jobs I worked gave me the impression that half of the millwrights in the local were at least 60 years old. One of the best "indicator men" that helped fine-tune my coupling alignment skills was 75 years old. In reflection, I do not know if these elders and other journeymen I worked with enjoyed teaching apprentices or if my real interest and desire to learn inspired them to share their knowledge. Whatever the reason, by the time

my four-year apprenticeship was complete, I was accepting foreman responsibilities and even a general foreman job the first year as a journeyman. Another reason for my early foreman experiences was not my knowledge and skill, but the unwillingness of so many capable journeymen to accept the responsibility.

Our Local had enough skilled craftsmen to accomplish any construction projects that came into the jurisdiction, but I felt the new members were in need of more training. Some voluntary visits to assist in apprentice classes resulted in an offer to become the millwright instructor.

Again, this proved to be a great experience for me. One thing that became obvious to me was how much I could learn in trying to prepare lessons to teach. The most satisfying effect in the first few years of teaching was an increase in the number of apprentice graduates that were accepting of foreman responsibilities.

When the Carpenters and Millwrights Apprenticeship Training Fund became more solvent, I accepted the position of apprenticeship coordinator. This was a whole new world of experiences, dealing with the Department of Labor, JATC, public school adult education programs, and other administrative duties. The program was in need of as much re-building as we could afford. Unfortunately, this was again an effort that could not be financially sustained for long.

Going back to work with my tools led me to supervising machine installations in an expansion for Bridgestone Tire. In 1990, I was able to continue this job in a new plant in Warren County, where I still work today. In the 22 years of relationship with this customer, the opportunity to start a business resulted in becoming President of Millwright Services, Inc. The success of this company has greatly impacted my family's standard of living and afforded me opportunities I never would have imagined in 1979. The employer role allowed another satisfying experience. Accepting the responsibilities of management trustee on the health and welfare fund, the pension fund and the training fund capped off everything I advocated through the years.

Many changes have developed in the past 33 years of my millwright experience:

- **The Nashville Local with maybe 75 active members is now a union with jurisdiction covering all of Tennessee and a few counties in neighboring states.**
- **A pension plan that at one time had no one receiving even \$100 monthly benefit is now a retirement that surpasses many big corporations.**
- **The health insurance that didn't exist until the middle 1980s is now almost taken for granted.**
- **The apprenticeship program that barely functioned is now the Mid-South Carpenters and Millwrights Training Trust.**

Probably the most amazing transformation over the years is the transformation from the classes I experienced as an apprentice, to a program with several modern training facilities for apprentices and journeymen in Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi and Florida. The local training, with the support of the UBC and the Carpenters International Training Center in Las Vegas, has developed curriculum that has greatly enhanced member's education opportunities.

The improvements made and developments that are in progress are taking this program to a level unmatched by any other skilled labor training. Methods of performing our tasks are more modern with tools that didn't even exist in the 1970's. Like any other technology, new skills will continue to be required of our craft.

The one thing that never changes is that the millwright trade is made of incredibly dedicated brothers and sisters who choose to do the hard work involved in this craft that others won't, or can't, do. The original members who chartered the millwright Locals had a pride in their special skills and a drive to have an identity separate from their carpenter brothers. I believe they wanted to inject that pride along with those skills to new members. That same attitude is what motivates Local union officers, organizers, and especially the training instructors and coordinators today.

In our line of work, there should be a work ethic that makes every employee an asset to their employer. No one in our membership has a right to be a liability on the job. In reality, that is a liability to every brother and sister on that job, every member in the Local, and ultimately nationwide.

I take much pride in watching a good crew accomplish a tough job. Anyone who has worked a shutdown at Bridgestone Tire in Warren County will tell you, working with the employees of Millwright Services is a good experience. The positive attitude and coordinated effort makes any difficult job run smoothly and safe. There are varied degrees of abilities and skills in any group of millwrights, but the best millwrights (without exception), have a real passion for their craft.

Business Representative Updates

Local 1554

By Tim Brown, Business Representative



SOMETIMES, A COMPANY'S MISFORTUNE becomes an opportunity for us. Because this area is blessed with such a variety of different

types of manufacturing, the bulk of man-hours generated in Southeast Tennessee & the Tri-State Area (Northwest GA, Northeast AL, and Southeast TN areas) are from our local contractors. In the past year, several misfortunate opportunities, shutdowns and expansions contributed to an accelerated amount of man-hours for us.

Early this year, our biggest contractor worked with a chemical and absorbent material manufacturer to close that plant and move its operation to a mother plant in Texas. We all thought this was going to be just another plant that leaves Chattanooga behind. However, the Japanese plant that supplied the U.S. mother plant with a chemical required for production had a serious accident and was unable to provide the chemical. Our contractor answered the call, and solved the problem by quickly and correctly reinstalling equipment and doing periodic maintenance to get the Chattanooga plant producing that much needed chemical again.

Another chemical company that produced products for the textile industry had two shutdowns this year related to equipment malfunctions and system contaminations. This allowed a different contractor to capture man-hours by working two 12-hour shifts for several weeks.

It was the industry's good fortune that there was a good, responsible & very qualified contractor able to answer such calls to action, because all of our good contractors understand that we are all servants to this industry. What separates our contractors from other options for customers or clients is the dedication of these contractors, the relationship between the contractors, our training centers and the union men & women who are devoted to being highly trained and committed to this industry as well.

Several of our local contractors cater to what we call "General Industry." The General Industry of the Chattanooga & Tri-State Vicinity, and parts of Northeast TN, consist of an assortment of manufacturers:

- **Soft Drinks** (Coca-Cola and Double Cola)
- **Snack Foods** (McKee Bakery, makers of Little Debbie Snacks; Chattanooga Bakery, makers of Moon Pies; Wrigley Co.; makers of Life Savers, Altoids and Wrigley Gum; and Turnbull Cone, which makes ice cream cones)
- **Power Plant Components** (Alstom Power, now producing & maintaining steam and gas turbine components)
- **Chemical Companies** (W.R.Grace, Chattem, BASF, Dupont, Invista, Kordsa and Alco Chemicals)
- **Paper Products** (Rock Tenn Paper Mill and folding carton division, Chattanooga Paperboard)
- **Automobiles** (Volkswagen and supporting suppliers)
- **Asphalt and Road Paving Equipment** (Astec Ind., Roadtec and Heatec.)
- **Earth Moving Equipment** (Komatsu)
- **Steel** (Hudson Steel Co., LJTube Co.)
- **Water and Chemical Absorbent Products** (N.A. Industries)
- **Cast Iron Cookware** (Lodge Cookware)
- **Cooking Appliances** (Magic Chef, Roper Ind., Whirlpool)
- **Industrial Valves and Hydrants** (Mueller Foundry Co.)
- **Tires** (Bridgestone/Firestone producing truck tires)

All of these businesses and many more are serviced by our local contractors on a daily basis. We are very thankful for these contractors because they have been major contributors to our Locals' man-hours for many years.

Most of our local contractors have long been affiliated with the local millwright union because some of the owners and their parents before them worked at the trade, and so the heritage lives on. Other owners came from a different union craft. But regardless of their origin, our contractors and owners know that they have more internal expertise to put on project when they partner with the union, our membership and our training centers, to build one of the best partnerships that this Brotherhood could ask for.