

# North Carolina Apprenticeships – A Career Strategy That Works!



From an early age, students are programmed to believe that they must earn a bachelor's degree to obtain a high-paying job, but only 33 percent of jobs in North Carolina actually require a four-year college degree.

That's a statistic James Horne wishes he had known before enrolling at East Carolina University following high school graduation. After failing out twice because "his heart wasn't in it," Horne knew he had to find a different way. He found it

through the North Carolina Department of Commerce's NCWorks Apprenticeship Program.

"I wish I had heard about this in pre-k," said Horne with a laugh. He is enrolled in Davidson County Community College's applied engineering and maintenance program and has worked as a maintenance technician apprentice at Kurz Transfer Products for the past seven months. "When I graduated high school, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I wish I had known a program like this existed. I learn better in a hands-on environment, so this has been such a phenomenal opportunity for me."

"This has probably been the best seven months of my entire life. I am extremely happy with where I am at," he added.

Horne was one of the panelists to share his perspective on the value of apprenticeships during an Apprenticeship Summit at DCCC on March 10th. More than 100 business representatives, educators, and students gathered to hear more about the merits of the NCWorks Apprenticeship Program.

Through the apprenticeship program, apprentices train for an industry by receiving a combination of classroom instruction and on-the-job training. Participants are paid for their work, and their wages will increase as they progress in the program. Apprentices work as they complete their classes and their work schedule is determined by their respective employers. When they graduate, apprentices receive a Certificate of Completion and will have earned the highly skilled "journeyworker" designation. The program can last one to five years, depending on the occupation. In addition to manufacturing, there are apprenticeship opportunities in business, accounting, hospitality and health-related fields.

According to Dr. Pam Howse, Executive Director of Work-based Learning for the NC Department of Commerce, there are currently 5,335 apprentices in the program, double the number enrolled two years ago, but she would like to see that number continue to grow. Her challenge is educating both young people and businesses about the rewards they could receive by participating in the apprenticeship program.

## **Students are completing apprenticeships with a career, a good income, and no college debt.**

Dr. Howse shared stories of a 22-year-old who owned his car and had just bought his first house and of a young woman who completed her program with a starting salary of \$37,500.

"We know statistically that 45% of all jobs over the next decade will be in the middle skills occupations which require more than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor's degree," said Howse. "More than 50% of companies report plans to increase US-based production by at least 5% in the next five years."

“Nationwide we have a skills gap, particularly in the areas of business, manufacturing, computers and information sciences, engineering, technology, repair and transportation,” Howse said. “We know that in North Carolina today there are 12,000 unfilled IT jobs. These are jobs that pay very well, \$50,000 a year or greater. If you are in a cyber security field, that’s well over a 6 figure job. We know that a lot of young people don’t know what those jobs look like.”

“We are shoving everybody down this one path to go to Chapel Hill or NC State and we know statistically that not all are going to do well. There is a very high failure rate for many college freshmen who enter into the university system because they are not prepared for college,” she added. “If North Carolina industry is to be globally competitive, students must graduate from high school career or college ready. We need to shift our thinking about how we prepare our students for work.”

That shift will require a shift in the way both students and parents think as well. For many, the idea of an apprenticeship conjures up thoughts of a dark, dirty, dangerous place with low-paying jobs. According to Lisa Hawk, Business Services Coordinator of the Northwest Piedmont Workforce Development Board, that is simply not the truth.

Hawk has taken students and parents on tours of manufacturing sites to show them how clean and well-maintained they are, while 2013 statistics from the US Department of Labor indicate average starting wages for Registered Apprentices at \$16.50 per hour with graduates earning an average of \$59,900 per year.

North Carolina apprenticeships are a career strategy that works! To find out more about apprenticeships in North Carolina, go to <https://www.nccommerce.com/wf/job-seekers/apprenticeships>.