



TRAINING news

UA Education and Training Department

September 2026 | Issue 51

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MESSAGE FROM RAYMOND W. BOYD DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING



BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

As the summer comes to an end, we celebrate another Instructor Training Program and our 41st United Association General Convention. There's truly a lot to be thankful for as the United Association continues to prosper. The amazing growth, reaching 410,000 UA members, gives us hope for the future. Reaching that milestone does not alleviate our organization's and the industry's manpower needs. Local unions and their training centers are getting more creative in how they train and educate our apprentices and journeymen.

We need to bring in more apprentices to meet the demand for the work ahead and open training centers for day and evening classes to train more of our members and prepare them for the work ahead. Providing educational opportunities on jobsites and

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offering accelerated programs will give us a chance to keep up with the calls for manpower.

The United Association is taking a hands-on approach, but we need your help. Business Managers, Business Agents, Training Directors and Coordinators, and instructors, please let us know the challenges you are facing when it comes to education and training and how the International Training Fund (ITF) can help.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the UA Education and Training Department is to equip United Association locals with educational resources for developing the skills of their apprentices and journeymen. By thus facilitating the training needs of the membership, we maximize their employability and prepare them for changes in the industry. We are committed to making training opportunities available across North America, allowing members to acquire new skills and remain competitive in the industry regardless of geography. In this way, we are determined to meet the needs of the piping industry and enhance employment opportunities for our members, while remaining fiscally responsible to the beneficiaries of the fund.



**INTERNATIONAL
TRAINING FUND**

*Three Park Place • Annapolis, Maryland 21401
Telephone (410) 269-2000 • Fax (410) 267-0382*

Let us all continue to be as creative as possible, utilizing the programs that have been put in place. Our apprentice selection process is steadily growing and allows locals to take an unbiased approach to selecting the best candidates for our program. Our ITF Future Instructors Program gives our apprentices who want to teach an opportunity to understand how to develop the skills to be a United Association instructor.

Our Veterans in Piping (VIP) program gives transitioning service members an opportunity to join our great organization. We have seen firsthand how the United Association benefits when those men and women become UA members.

The amount of work ahead of us, with the data center boom and the need to hold on to the market share we've worked so hard to establish, is significant. I believe it's clear that the future is here! ■

EPRI UPDATES

*Submitted by
Michael Galfano,
Assistant Director
of Education and
Training*



I hope this newsletter finds each of you well as summer winds down and we prepare for the fall training session. Thanks to our faculty, instructors, and WCC staff for an outstanding 2026 Instructor Training Program, which was a huge success. Congratulations to our International Apprentice Contest winners and contestants on a job well done.

I have mentioned in previous Training Newsletters that our EPRI program is undergoing significant changes. I thought this would be a good opportunity to revisit what EPRI does, our partnership, and current program updates.

Many of us see the EPRI abbreviation in various documents. Do we know what EPRI does and what value it brings to our UA members? EPRI is the Electric Power Research Institute. EPRI conducts research and development relating to the generation, delivery, and use of electricity for the benefit of the public. Through EPRI, the STE (Standard Task Evaluation) program was developed. The Standard Task Evaluations cover tasks performed by utility and supplemental workforces during outage work, including task analysis and objectives, written test items, and performance (practical evaluations). Through the STE process, personnel are evaluated on their ability to perform a given task in accordance with the standardized approach. Qualified utility and supplemental personnel are critical to a plant's ability to conduct maintenance tasks and help reduce the length of outages safely and effectively. EPRI has been providing third-party accreditation for our members since 2007. Our Industrial Rigging & Signaling, Instrumentation Technician, and Valve Technician programs all utilize EPRI's Standard Task Evaluations.

Our program is required to be audited by EPRI representatives every four years, conducting an STE for AP3 (Administration Protocol for Portable Practicals) compliance. Our next audit will be in May 2028.

UA locals currently request all EPRI exams and documentation through our UA Certification portal. All EPRI online exams are administered through Questionmark, and all completed documents are uploaded to our UA Certification Department, which forwards these documents to EPRI's portal. As previously mentioned, EPRI is implementing a new LMS (Learning Management System) utilizing Questionmark, which will require all local union exam requests to be processed through EPRI's dedicated portal. UA Registrar Carrie King and I have had monthly meetings with EPRI representatives. Their transition to their new LMS has been a slow process with many delays. Per our August meeting, EPRI provided these tentative updates:

- Migrate STE's (Standard Task Evaluations) into Questionmark (9/18/2026)
- Questionmark Integration/Beta Testing (Non-UA) (10/2/2026)
- Create/Implement User Training (10/30/2026)
- Implementation Coordination Meetings with Questionmark (12/20/2026)
- Begin Implementation of Questionmark (1/1/2027)
- Full Implementation of Questionmark (6/30/2027)

The UA will also provide training to our locals and EPRI administrators/proctors. We will send updates as they become available.

The ITF is also planning workshops with EPRI representatives at our upcoming Pipe Trades Training and Organizing Conference in February, 2027.

The UA started filming an EPRI promotional video at ITP this year. The purpose of this video will be explain to all of our existing and

new end-users and contractors the importance and benefits of our training and the value we provide when our members report to the jobsite with these important certifications.

I would encourage all our training directors and coordinators to make sure your EPRI exam administrators/proctors have access to the “Certifications” tab on UAnet.org. This page lists all pertinent, updated program information, bulletins, and program documentation, including program Quality System Manuals. With the proposed changes coming, this access will help our locals prepare for this important transition. Please contact Carrie King at carriek@uanet.org with questions about “Certifications” access. I would also suggest our exam administrators/proctors review the AP3 documentation. All of us have a responsibility to conduct and proctor exams to the highest professional standards and maintain credibility for our programs. This document is the foundation for AP3 compliance.

In closing, I want to thank you for your tireless work, dedication, professionalism, and commitment to training. I believe we are accomplishing our training goals and honoring the UA mission statement:

“The mission of the UA Education and Training Department is to equip United Association locals with educational resources for developing the skills of their apprentices and Journey workers. By thus facilitating the training needs of the membership, we maximize their employability and prepare them for changes in the industry. We are committed to making training opportunities available across North America, allowing members to acquire new skills and remain competitive in the industry regardless of geography. In this way, we are determined to meet the needs of the piping industry and enhance employment opportunities for our members, while remaining fiscally responsible to the beneficiaries of the fund.”

Please feel free to contact me with any questions and let me know if I can be of any assistance. mgalfano@uanet.org.

EPA 608 Testing Updates

Submitted by Rob Vilches, UA Training Specialist



The HVACR industry continues to evolve, especially with the refrigerants now used in the equipment we install and service. Because of these industry changes, the age of the current EPA 608 question bank, and growing exam security concerns, the EPA has updated the 608 exam.

The underlying law that governs the requirements for technicians, contractors, and end-users remains unchanged. However, the industry, equipment, refrigerants, and tools have changed significantly since the last update to the 608 exam. The new exam reflects those changes.

The EPA also updated the test bank because the current exam has been compromised over time, including through scanned questions, online prep tools, and artificial intelligence (AI) platforms. The EPA has made it clear that organizations are **prohibited** from loading exam questions into any AI tool.

The exam structure remains unchanged. Individuals will still need to pass four closed-book sections—Core, Type I, Type II, and Type III—with 25 questions each and a passing score of 70% on each section. These sections will continue to cover the same types of equipment, but with updated questions.

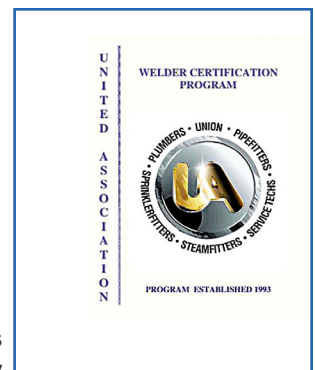
Beginning January 1, 2027, all exams will use the new questions. The ITF Certification Department has received the updated test bank and is working to load the new exam into our system. The current exam will remain available through December 31, 2026, giving locals that have already started teaching this material time to test apprentices and giving instructors time to review the updated instructional materials. Both exams will be clearly marked to help remove any confusion about which version to use.

Individuals who currently hold an EPA 608 card **do not need to retest**.

While the Certification Department updates the exam in our testing portal, the Training Department and ITF Bookstore are preparing updated prep manuals and PowerPoints for instructors and apprentices. The new materials will be available well before the end of the year. Once they are available for purchase, the Training Department will send a notice to all JATC leads.

AUTHORIZED TESTING REPRESENTATIVES INSTILL CONFIDENCE THROUGH INTEGRITY

*Submitted by Bob Derby,
UA Training Specialist*



All Authorized Testing Representatives (ATRs) who have not successfully completed Administration of a United Association Weld Test, Course 8000, since January 2024, are required to complete the course by October 31, 2027. Any current ATRs who have not met the above requirements will be removed from the dropdown menu on the UA database and will not be allowed to administer weld tests at an Authorized Testing Facility. Local training directors and

training coordinators are encouraged to check the transcripts of their Authorized Testing Representatives and enroll any individuals who are in jeopardy of falling out of compliance after the deadline. Course 39, Heads Up, explains the requirements to become and maintain ATR status in detail. If you have an ATR who is listed on the drop-down menu but is no longer active, please email the Certification Department at certifications@uanet.org with their name and card number so they can be removed.

Customers, contractors, and end-users choose to use the United Association labor force to meet scheduling demands and deadlines on piping projects. An influential element that is considered when making decisions to use UA labor is confidence. Confidence that consistency in quality and integrity can be expected when using UA piping professionals who are committed to meeting and exceeding expectations. The UA Welder Certification Program is a proven example of such excellence.

United Association apprentices and journeymen are trained and evaluated to standards that exceed the requirements of job specifications and construction codes. Piping professionals in the UA can confidently take pride in their accomplishments because they have demonstrated proficiency resulting in verified certifications.

In production, project specifications can supersede minimum code requirements so long as the specifications meet or exceed the requirements of applicable code(s). Similarly, the UAWelder Certification Program Quality System Manual and the UA Weld Test documents have requirements and acceptance criteria that supersede the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) B31 and Section IX code requirements. The elevated acceptance criteria are intended to show that the UA welder has proven a skill set and competency level, therefore giving the contractor and end-user confidence when selecting UA labor. It is essential that UA welding instructors train to the expected level that is established within the UA Welder Certification Program. It is also essential that UA Authorized Testing Representatives understand and adhere to the elevated acceptance criteria when administering UA welder performance testing.

With the amount of industrial and commercial welding work that is ahead of us, it is imperative that local training staff ensure that they are prepared with enough qualified ATRs to keep up with the expected demand for certified welders. Make sure existing ATRs are up to date. Take advantage of the remaining 2026 and 2027 Regional Courses and plan to enroll the members who have been identified as candidates to become Authorized Testing Representatives in Course 8000 and Course 8001. ■

ADVANCING THE PIPE TRADES THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

*Submitted by John Franke,
UA Training Specialist*



UA brothers and sisters, the tools of our trade have changed greatly since I first entered the industry, but the foundation of our success remains the same: skilled craftspeople, quality training, and a willingness to adapt. My career has taken me from the field to the classroom, into BIM/VDC leadership, and now into a new chapter with the ITF. Each step has reinforced my belief that technology is most valuable when it creates new opportunities for our members. I am humbled and excited to continue that work as the UA's newest Training Specialist focused on construction technology.



For those I have not had the opportunity to meet, my name is John Franke, and I am a fourth-generation pipefitter out of Local 533 in Kansas City, MO. My interest in the trades began as a child while working on small projects with my pipefitter grandfather and uncles. Those early experiences taught me the value of building with your hands and taking pride in your craftsmanship. I began my apprenticeship in 2009, expecting a career in the field without knowing just how many avenues the trade could open for me. During the fifth year of my apprenticeship, I began taking AutoCAD classes at the Local 533 Training Center. I had always enjoyed pencil drafting, design, and layout, so digital drafting felt like a natural progression. What began as an interest soon developed into a full-time opportunity as a VDC detailer with an area contractor.

Over the years, I continued developing my skills with the help of fellow UA members who were among the early adopters of Virtual Design and Construction. Their willingness to share their knowledge played an important part in my growth from detailer to lead detailer and eventually to VDC manager for a national mechanical contractor. In that role, I helped lead BIM coordination, fabrication detailing, prefabrication, and field-technology efforts on a wide range of projects, including pharmaceutical facilities, hyperscale data centers, hospitals, schools, and stadiums.

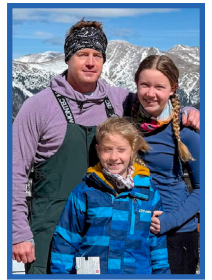
That work gave me the opportunity to implement and support technologies such as Revit, Navisworks, Revizto, Autodesk Construction Cloud (Forma), Stratus, robotic total station solutions,

laser scanning, and shop floor production systems. More importantly, it showed me that successful technology adoption depends on people. Even the most advanced software or equipment does little good unless our members understand why it matters, get practical training, and can apply their expertise on the projects we lead.

Hands-on skills training has been one of the most rewarding parts of my journey as a UA member. I began instructing at Local 533 in 2016 and became a UA instructor in 2023, teaching regional courses and participating in the Instructor Training Program (ITP). Every opportunity to teach, whether at my home local or elsewhere across the country, has left me wanting to do more. I always come away learning something from our members, and the exchange of ideas is one of the great strengths of the United Association.

In my new role, I will support construction technology across UA Training Centers by helping to develop and update BIM/VDC curriculum, evaluate training and software platforms, and facilitate grant requests. A central focus of mine will be listening to instructors, Training Coordinators, members, and contractors so that our programs keep pace with the changing needs of the industry.

One of my current priorities is the development of a pilot course for a UA Mechanical Drafter Qualification. The goal is to establish a consistent baseline for members entering detailing and VDC roles while helping connect qualified journeypersons with the growing number of contractors seeking full-time BIM/VDC talent. This qualification will provide the foundation for a more advanced Mechanical Drafter Certification in the future. Together, these programs will help the UA better support contractors facing increased requirements for BIM participation and prefabrication. As advanced manufacturing continues to reshape our industry, our training must help members succeed in these environments while preserving the trade knowledge and craftsmanship that set the UA apart.



Outside of work, I have been married to my incredibly supportive wife, Stephanie, for 17 years, and together we have three children: Hudson, Ella, and Reese. In my downtime, I enjoy bow hunting for whitetail, snowboarding, and helping my parents on their hobby farm, where we keep bees and chickens and maintain a large greenhouse.

I want to thank everyone at the ITF who has been so welcoming and generous with their time as I learn the ins and outs of this new role. I would also like to give a special shoutout to Ken Schneider for his mentorship and guidance throughout this transition. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve our membership, and I look forward to working with the most talented and hard-working folks in all the building trades. You can reach me any time at jfranke@uanet.org. ■

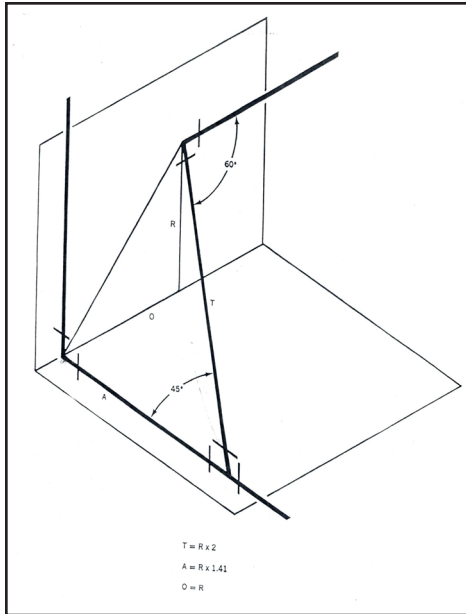
GALVANIZING CLASSROOM THEORY WITH HANDS-ON LEARNING

Submitted by Trent Mauk, UA Training Specialist

The debate between classroom knowledge and shop exercises is as old as our apprenticeships. For years, training centers have favored the classroom, prioritizing textbooks, PowerPoints, and standardized testing, while assuming that hands-on training was being received in the field. On the flip side, training centers that utilize shop-heavy curricula have suffered from the opposite, pushing students into the shop while treating classroom theory as an unnecessary formality.

The importance of both struck me one day while I was instructing a class of apprentices on how to calculate a rolling wye offset during a plumbing drainage exercise. I went through the formula and worked through the exercise on the board, explaining how many times it had saved me from unnecessary digging while working on undergrounds. The students worked through a twenty-question worksheet I had put together and did remarkably well, with the worst student scoring 90% on the exercise. Little did the students know that I had replicated the exercise in the shop by placing a branch pipe on a set of pipe stands 30" off the floor, with the main pipe 6" off the same surface, perpendicular to the branch.

We walked up to the exercise, and I was so excited to watch my students work through it that I could barely contain myself. I mean, it even looked like the drawing on the worksheet. As we stood there, they acted like they had no idea what it was or what new concept I was about to teach them. I could feel my excitement quickly draining as disbelief set in. I explained that we had just worked through this problem for the last half hour in the classroom and that everyone had aced it. Now, as we stood there looking at it, nobody knew what to do with their hands.



We began working through the practical exercise, and the light bulbs started to come on one by one. We continued until we had worked through it several times, varying the branch height each time. After class, I began putting everything away and thought about all the classroom instruction I had done in the past without shop reinforcement, and wondered how much my students were really learning. On paper, my students nailed the theory, and I could have used that as evidence of learning, but when it came to applying it, they couldn't even tie their shoes. This realization upended my entire thought process about our students and led us to adopt a more kinesthetic approach to instruction across all subject matters.

The blueprint for building a well-rounded tradesperson is never built on one job. While our classrooms provide the cognitive building blocks, the shop floor serves as the forge in which that knowledge is hardened into real jobsite skills. The classroom is where competence is born and where the essential “why” behind every action is provided. Without a solid framework of “why,” a student merely memorizes a sequence of physical tasks without grasping the essential principles. While in the classroom, students learn the physics of sling loading, the chemistry of welding, the laws

of thermodynamics, and the importance of code. This type of classroom environment promotes development, allowing mistakes to be worked out in class rather than wasting material or putting students in a dangerous position. Theory teaches students to anticipate outcomes, diagnose complex system failures, and cope with changing technologies. It transforms a student from a “worker bee” into a critical thinker who can stand on their own when standard procedures fail.

We have all witnessed the loss of classroom theory, which is why your shop is so important. Just as a grinder reshapes a bevel, so do our hands-on labs reshape our students. This training model also provides immediate feedback on your classroom instruction. It is the silo where knowledge transforms into muscle memory and spatial intelligence. Your students can memorize the torque specifications for a 12” weld neck flange with a spiral wound gasket a dozen times, but they will not truly comprehend the concept until they feel the click of the torque wrench in their hands. In the lab, mathematics becomes a measurement, and physical principles become a visible bead on two pieces of metal. If the theory is not understood, it will be immediately apparent in a shop exercise. This accountability strengthens comprehension and the regard for doing it right the first time. When classroom theory and shop reinforcement operate together, they create a highly effective, cohesive partnership.



You'll find that classroom instruction prepares your students, decreasing anxiety and social loafing when they step into the shop, as well. The artificial problems encountered in the shop promote recall of those classroom PowerPoints, giving students a personal context for the lesson. This one-two approach lends itself well to several learning styles, making sure that both auditory-visual and kinesthetic-tactile learners find a path to retaining our tribal knowledge. Furthermore, this combined model builds confidence. True expertise isn't just knowing a textbook definition, nor is it just blindly repeating physical motion. It is the intersection of both. When an apprentice or journeyman is immersed in this type of learning environment, they enter the workforce with both the theoretical vocabulary to communicate with engineers and the practical ability to perform the work, thus becoming an indispensable asset to our contractors. They carry themselves with the confidence of someone who understands both the details of their craft and the environment in which it operates.

Your classroom and the shop are two halves of one whole mechanical system. The classroom plants the seed of theory in the soil, and the shop provides the water for it to grow into a tree of knowledge and retention. By keeping a balance between the two, instructors do not just train apprentices and journeymen for today's tasks; they educate the adaptable, highly skilled problem-solvers of tomorrow. ■

HAPPY BIRTHDAY UAOLR

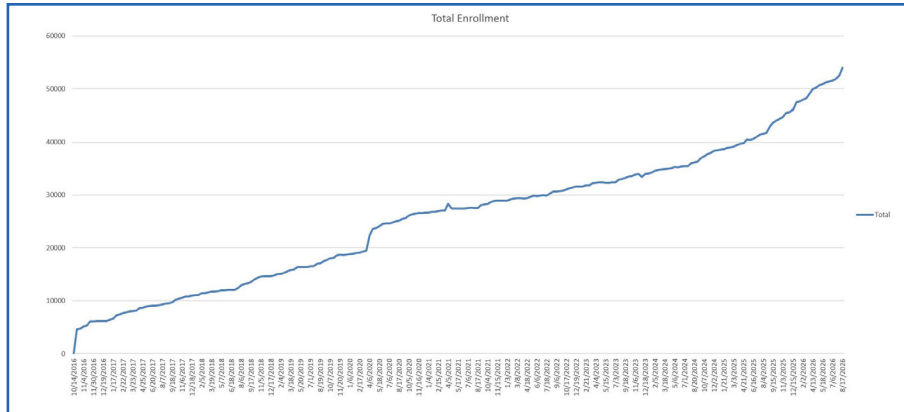
Submitted by Lauren Friedman, Instructional Technology Coordinator

The UAOLR opened for enrollment on October 14, 2016, which means that by the time you are reading this, we will be very close to celebrating 10 years of the UAOLR.

The OLR (Online Learning Resources) was a different animal when it began. In the beginning, we had 23 instructors and student resources. Today, we have 46. At launch, the system did not communicate with the membership directory the way it does now. Members had to be checked weekly against a “disabled members” report. There was also no way for admins to create or even see their instructor users. They had to reach out to get a report.

The OLR was always imagined as a hub, a place where instructors and learners would begin whatever their current educational quest was. And in the last 10 years, we’ve done a lot to honor that. While we are unable to connect to every system, many of our teaching and learning systems run through the OLR for verification, as do many of our partner companies who provide free or discounted materials to locals.

When we began, we had just 4,610 users in the system, 941 of whom were students. Today, we have 53,991 users in the system, 46,817 of whom are students. That represents a 1,071% increase in users over 10 years, and a 4,875% increase in student enrollment.



It took us approximately one year to reach our first major milestone—10,000 users. We hit that number on October 2, 2017. We wouldn’t hit 20,000 until the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020. Most recently, we surpassed 50,000 members on April 20, 2026. We still have weeks of negative growth, where more people are deactivated in the system than are created. But on average, over the last 10 years, we have had 1% growth every two weeks. The ideal annual growth rate for a niche solution such as ours is 10-20% a year, a number we are comfortably within.

Membership demand has always been our guiding star at the OLR. Resources such as UAally, the Variable Amperage Welding Activity, NFPA LiNK integration, and the Other Book Resources have come because of feedback we got from users.

There are several things we have yet to solve, such as how best to notify users when something new comes onto the UAOLR, or how to manage downloadable webbooks. There are constant conversations about how best to serve our membership. But we are incredibly proud of the way the OLR has evolved over the past decade, and we intend to continue changing, growing, and innovating for as long as the UAOLR stands. ■



2016 UAOLR AT LAUNCH



2026 UAOLR AT PRESENT

SAN DIEGO SERENADE

Submitted by Laura Ceja, Special Representative for Training and Outreach

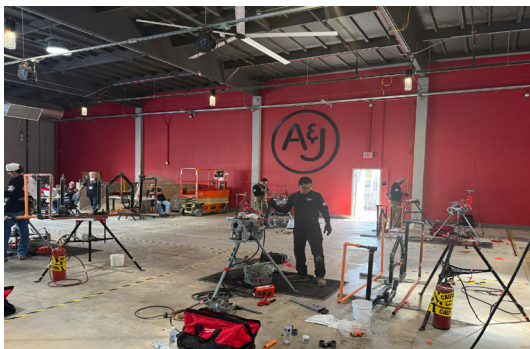
I can't believe we did it! The 41st United Association General Convention is finally behind us. Five years in the making, and it was an amazing event. Seeing so many of my UA brothers and sisters in one place was truly spectacular: reconnecting with old friends and making a whole bunch more. While it was a lot of hard work and everyone did their part, it was worth it. I have to personally thank all of my coworkers at the ITF who helped me set up and break down walls and did such an amazing job with the trade trailers and other displays. I am so proud to be a part of this wonderful team.

410,000 strong! San Diego saw firsthand the power of the union. The power of our numbers. I continue to go out and reach out to people who would probably never have thought about a career in the trades at the UA. In March, I was in Las Vegas for the HVAC Excellence conference. There I met a young lady who worked for the catering service at the event. She was dispensing popcorn to attendees. I had my handy wallet card brochure with all the information about the trades and how to join. The mother of two was very interested, not only for herself, but for her two sons. Before the end of the conference, she had already made an appointment at Local 525. Who knows, this could be the start of a new UA program:



POPCORN TO PIPE-WRENCHES

In May, I made my way to the brand-new El Monte Apprentice and Journeyman (A&J) Training Center for the 2026 California State Apprenticeship Contest. If you haven't been, you must go. This 9.5-acre, 200,000 square-foot campus rivals any traditional college campus.



A & J APPRENTICESHIP CONTEST

Apprentices are immersed in a professional training and educational environment. I was proud to be there, speak to the attendees, and present the winners with their awards. The A&J Training Center has come a long way from the old airplane hangar in Van Nuys where it was previously located many years ago.

But this is what the UA must do to recruit young people, so they know a career at the UA is a college education with a trade. Only by continuing to expand our outreach can we continue to grow. With training centers like these, 500,000 members could be right around the corner.

Recruitment is part of the answer to the UA's labor needs, but organizing is a must if we want to continue to grow. In May, I was in Utah at an organizing blitz in Salt Lake City. There I met a senior building inspector. Having held the same position at the City of Los Angeles for 10 years, we immediately hit it off. He then took us around town, and we were able to go to different jobsites and do some organizing. Cody Weaver, Salt Lake City organizer, was very appreciative of the contacts he made that day. Organizing is the way to go to get quality experienced members right away.



JASON POPE ON THE JOBSITE, SELLING THE UA



SKILLS USA

Of course, after the Utah organizing blitz, I went on a recruitment blitz of my own. I was at Skills USA, MCAA WiMi (Women in the Mechanical Industry), and Groundbreaking Women in Construction in June. In July, I was at the ASCA Conference with more than 5,000 school counselors, telling

them about the career opportunities for their students at the UA. But I have four more recruitment events this year, one of them being the **BIGGEST** of the year: Tradeswomen Build Nations (TWBN).

This year, TWBN will be held in Houston, TX. The UA is on track to once again have the largest delegation of members at the event. The UA has set records every year for attendance. And why is this important? Because this is the single largest recruitment and retention event of its kind for women in the world. When women see that women are a large and important part of this organization, it makes them want to join and stay. At Convention, our General President made it a point to emphasize the importance of TWBN. The UA had approximately 4,000 delegates at Convention. TWBN

will have more than 5,000 attendees from all trade unions, and close to 1,200 will be UA members. We have to reach out to the same women who saved this country during World War II. The same women who worked in the shipyards and factories. Why not get women out of the home again and into amazing careers?

These last six months have been a lot of work but well worth it. As I write this article, TWBN looms over me; it's like a second Convention and a second ITP week all rolled into one. I look forward to sharing the highlights of TWBN in the next newsletter, if I survive! Thanks again for all of your support. Please send as many representatives to TWBN as you can. It means a lot to the women of the UA, and it means a lot to the UA's future. ■

UA FABRICATION FACILITIES: GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY

Submitted by Justin Forni, UA Training Specialist



Brothers and sisters of the UA, first I want to recognize and congratulate all the 2026 ITP instructors and coordinators who graduated this year. Your hard work and dedication to training UA members is second to none.

The year 2026 has proven to be a historic time of growth and opportunity for UA members and UA signatory contractors. As training specialists, we travel all around the country to work with different local unions and training centers in different capacities. One area that has been consistently advancing is pipe fabrication and modular construction.

Industrial and Infrastructure Demand

Massive investments in power generation, water infrastructure, petrochemicals, and data center megaprojects require complex, high-precision piping assemblies. Off-site modular spooling is a fast-growing sector because it cuts on-site construction time, lowers labor costs, and improves safety.

To meet this high demand, we are seeing UA signatory contractors investing in new state-of-the-art fabrication facilities all over the country to support this long-term industrial boom. These new facilities are proving to be a great investment for the piping industry and the membership of the United Association. To be at the forefront of this major infrastructure demand, the members have opportunities to work consistently with new technology and equipment.

How does this growth line up with current training models being offered to the apprentices and journeymen? This is a good question that each training center should review if your jurisdiction is seeing this opportunity for increased pipe fabrication. As you look deeper into this question you will discover that pipe fabrication will require more Gas Metal Arc Welding (GMAW)/Flux Core Arc Welding (FCAW) qualifications. Paper blueprints are also being phased out and replaced with iPads that allow for digital spool sheet interaction with different companies that build this software. Welders are using modern welding technology with advanced waveform software to weld on multiple alloys. Pipe welding positioners are a must in the fabrication process to keep up with high productivity. Some of these examples are not new to us as an organization, but the large investment and long-term growth are new, so it is important to prepare our training centers to support this opportunity.

In summary, ensure your welding department has the GMAW/FCAW resources it needs, including curriculum, welding equipment, and up-to-date training. In 2026/2027, the ITF is offering different regional courses to assist welding instructors with basic to advanced training in these areas. Courses 8013 and 8091 are great places to start for welding instructors to build a foundation on all things wire-feed welding. Also, look at the UA ITF grant catalog as you prepare for a new build-out or new equipment. The grant catalog includes advanced equipment from welding machines to pipe welding positioners, such as current models being used in the industry. Please feel free to reach out to the ITF anytime for questions or general information that may help your training program.

I wish you all a blessed Fall season and thank you for all you do to represent UA training! ■

PREPARING MEMBERS TODAY FOR TOMORROW'S WORK

Submitted by Derek Miles, UA Training Specialist

As artificial intelligence, cloud computing, semiconductor manufacturing, and advanced automation continue to transform industry, the fire protection challenges associated with these facilities are evolving just as rapidly. Modern mission-critical facilities demand suppression systems that can quickly extinguish a fire while protecting sensitive equipment, minimizing downtime, and supporting sustainability goals.

Understanding these emerging technologies is becoming increasingly important. One system that is receiving considerable attention throughout the fire protection industry is the Viking Oxco

Inert Gas Fire Suppression System. As more data centers, cleanrooms, healthcare facilities, and manufacturing plants incorporate inert gas fire suppression into their designs, contractors will need trained professionals who understand how these systems operate, how they are installed, and how they are maintained.



Unlike traditional sprinkler systems that extinguish fires with water, inert gas systems suppress fires by reducing the oxygen concentration inside a protected enclosure. Naturally occurring gases such as nitrogen, argon, or a combination of the two are released into the protected space, lowering the oxygen concentration below the level required to sustain combustion.

This process extinguishes the fire without wetting equipment or leaving behind chemical residue. Once discharged, the gases simply return to the atmosphere, eliminating cleanup associated with many other suppression technologies.

Because inert gases are naturally occurring atmospheric gases, these systems have no ozone depletion potential (ODP) and no global warming potential (GWP) associated with the extinguishing agent itself. This has made inert gas systems an increasingly attractive option for owners looking for environmentally responsible fire protection solutions.

Many of today's most valuable facilities simply cannot afford extended downtime following a fire event. A traditional sprinkler system may successfully suppress a fire, but water damage to electronic equipment, manufacturing processes, or critical infrastructure can significantly increase recovery time and repair costs.

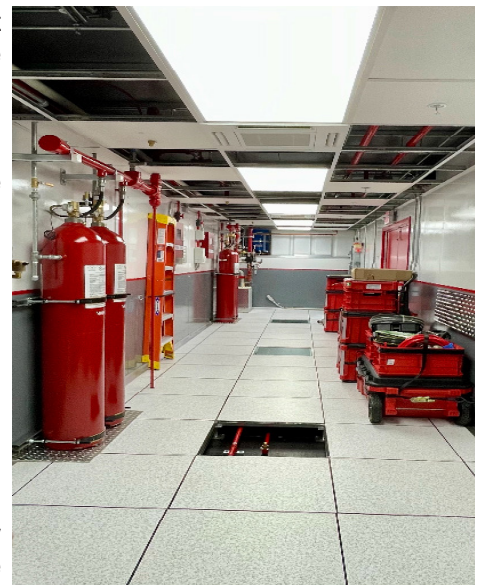
Inert gas systems provide an alternative solution for occupancies where maintaining operational continuity is a priority. Rather than introducing water into the protected space, the system suppresses the fire while leaving equipment clean and dry.

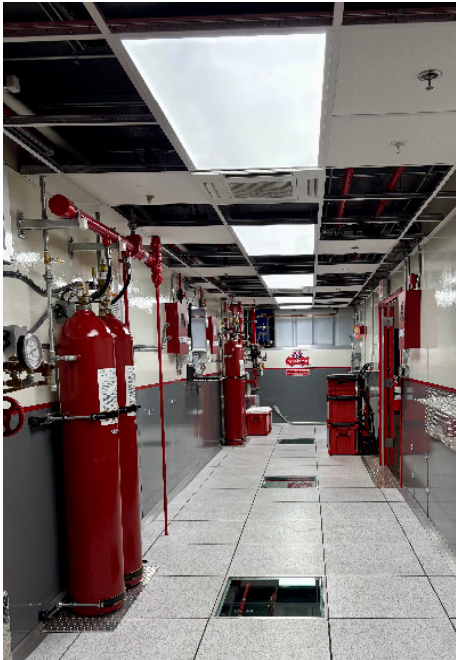
As construction of advanced technology facilities continues across North America, contractors are seeing increased opportunities to install specialized suppression systems alongside conventional sprinkler systems.

One of the most significant advancements incorporated into the Viking Oxeo platform is its Constant Flow technology. Traditional inert gas systems often require high-pressure piping throughout the distribution network due to the extremely high storage pressures within the cylinders.

The Constant Flow configuration regulates gas pressure at the cylinder valve assembly before it enters the distribution piping. By controlling the pressure early in the discharge process, engineers can utilize more conventional piping throughout much of the downstream distribution network.

The 7004 Inert Gas Fire Protection course provides sprinkler fitters with a comprehensive introduction to inert gas fire suppression systems used to protect mission-critical facilities and special hazard occupancies. Through a combination of classroom instruction and hands-on training, students gain an understanding of the principles of inert gas fire suppression, system components, detection and releasing sequences, cylinder storage, distribution piping, discharge nozzles, installation practices, acceptance testing, and inspection, testing, and maintenance requirements. The course also explores common applications, including data centers, telecommunications facilities, electrical equipment rooms, semiconductor manufacturing, and other environments where clean, residue-free fire suppression is essential. Upon completion, participants will have the knowledge and practical skills needed to safely install, commission, inspect, test and maintain inert gas fire suppression systems while applying the applicable National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards and manufacturer requirements.





The fire protection industry continues to evolve alongside advances in technology, manufacturing, and digital infrastructure. Facilities that power artificial intelligence, cloud computing, advanced manufacturing, and critical communications require suppression systems capable of protecting valuable assets without creating additional damage.

The Viking Oxexo Inert Gas Fire Suppression System represents one example of how modern engineering is addressing these challenges through environmentally responsible, residue-free fire suppression.

By introducing apprentices and journeymen to inert gas technology, training centers continue the United Association's long-standing commitment to providing industry-leading education and ensuring our members remain the most skilled and versatile fire protection professionals in the world.

Working in partnership with Viking Corporation, the ITF has secured special educational pricing for a new grant opportunity that will include a Viking Oxexo Constant Flow inert gas system. This grant will provide training centers with access to advanced special hazards fire suppression technology, allowing members and instructors to gain valuable hands-on experience with systems increasingly utilized in today's fire protection industry.



The grant will be available for training centers to apply for soon. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions regarding the Viking Oxexo grant or other equipment grant opportunities available through the ITF. ■

SUPPORT IS A VERB...

*Submitted by Micheal Hazard,
UA Training Specialist and
VIP Program Manager*



The United Association Veterans in Piping (VIP) program is the gold standard of active-duty military transition programs. Its success is the result of the collective efforts of every UA member. Since the program began in 2008, we have kept the promises we made to the military service members entering our ranks through the VIP program. We have shown the military community that, at the UA, supporting our troops isn't just a slogan—it's a verb!

While there are many people to thank and recognize for the creation and success of this program, the commitment started—and continues—from the top. Over the last 18 years, UA General Presidents Bill Hite and Mark McManus have purposefully built and grown VIP into a program designed to stand the test of time. From Day One, the membership of the UA has consistently supported the continuation and growth of the VIP program.

Why does the UA invest in a program like VIP? Hopefully, you have your own answer, but I want to share why our current and former General Presidents believe it is so important.

General President Emeritus Bill Hite says, "VIP is the right thing to do for our military service members who have sacrificed so much for our freedom and our way of life."

General President Mark McManus says, "VIP is about providing our military service members with the opportunity for a great career so they can live with the dignity they deserve in their post-military careers."

At the local level, that support also begins at the top. Our Business Managers and Training Coordinators are key to the VIP program's success. They are often the first people our VIPs speak with before joining our locals. Thanking them for their service, welcoming them into the local, and helping them understand what to expect when they arrive are crucial to avoiding surprises, ensuring a smooth transition, and setting them up for success.

That support becomes even more important when VIP graduates reach the jobsite. As members of the UA, it is our responsibility to welcome VIPs and other military veterans into our ranks and provide the mentorship and training they need to succeed in their apprenticeships and throughout their UA careers. When we do that well, we give our VIPs the best possible opportunity to remain in the UA, build successful careers, and become the next generation of leaders in our union.

Support is a verb — and it's what we do best in the UA.

I don't hesitate to say that no other labor organization has demonstrated the level of support for our military service members and their families than the UA has. Over the last 18 years, we have provided more than 3,800 military service members transitioning to the civilian workforce with free job-skills training and the opportunity for direct entry into UA apprenticeship programs.

But, like most great things in life, VIP wasn't an easy sell. In fact, it took a monumental fight to get the program authorized by the Department of Defense as a DoD-wide military transition program.

As General President McManus recently said at the 41st UA Constitutional Convention, "Before VIP became a program, it started as a fight. A fight to change the rules and to convince the Pentagon that letting active-duty service members train in a trade before they took off the uniform wasn't a distraction from their service. It was an investment in what came next. This fight had a name, and its name was Major General Matt Caulfield."

General President McManus then welcomed General Caulfield to the stage and said, "General, you took on the legislation, you took on the bureaucracy, and you didn't stop until active-duty service members could walk into a welding booth, an HVACR classroom, or a sprinkler fitter course while they were still serving this country. Because of you, thousands of veterans didn't have to choose between finishing their service and starting their career. They got both. Look at what that fight built. Veterans in Piping is one of the most successful programs this union has ever run, and it exists because you refused to take no for an answer."

Following remarks to the delegates by retired U.S. Marine Corps Major General Matthew P. Caulfield, General President McManus and General Secretary-Treasurer Derrick Kualapai presented Major General Caulfield with a Golden UA Lifetime Membership Card.

General President McManus stated, "On behalf of every UA member who came through that program, and everyone still to come, we thank you."

That's right, brothers and sisters: Major General Matt Caulfield is now our UA brother!

The standing ovation from the delegates on the Convention floor and the Officers on stage was an incredible display of gratitude, respect, and pride. It was also a fitting reminder of what the VIP program has represented for the past 18 years.

In the UA, support isn't just something we say. Support is, no doubt, a verb! ■

FROM CODE TO CRAFT: MAKING THE MOST OF NFPA LiNK

*Submitted by Kyle Spencer, Director
of NFPA LiNK, NFPA*



For skilled trades professionals, having the right information at the right time is critical. Codes and standards are an essential part of the work, but knowing where to find the applicable requirements—and quickly understand and apply them—is just as important.

NFPA LiNK® can help. Available through the UA's Online Learning Resources (OLR), NFPA LiNK brings National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) codes and standards insights, an AI-powered assistant (CASI™), and other supporting resources together on one digital platform. Whether you are preparing for training, building your technical knowledge, or looking for an answer on the jobsite, NFPA LiNK puts trusted information within reach.

FREE NFPA Link Access for ALL UA Members!



All UA members have access to **NFPA LiNK** at **no cost** through the UA Online Learning Resource (OLR). To access NFPA LiNK, simply log in to the UA OLR. If you need assistance registering your members or accessing the OLR, please contact Lauren Friedman at lfriedman@uanet.org for support.

A Resource for Learning — Before, During, and After Training

Training is most valuable when classroom learning connects to real-world applications. NFPA LiNK can support that connection by giving users direct access to NFPA content as they build and apply their skills.

Instead of turning to a code or standard only when a question arises, NFPA LiNK becomes part of workers' regular training routine.

Apprentices can use it to explore requirements discussed in class or dig deeper into topics encountered during hands-on training. Instructors can use it to develop lessons or point students to specific sections supporting an installation or system. Experienced professionals can use it to refresh their knowledge when encountering an unfamiliar application or requirement.

The goal is not simply to know where a requirement is located. Rather, it is to build the confidence to find, understand, and apply authoritative information when it matters.

Turning a Codebook into a Practical Field Tool

A digital resource can go where a printed reference cannot. NFPA LiNK gives users access to NFPA content from their preferred devices, whether they are in the classroom, training center, shop, or on the jobsite.

Consider a common field scenario: A question comes up about an installation, inspection, or maintenance requirement, and rather than relying on memory or searching through multiple publications, NFPA LiNK's search capabilities quickly surface relevant information.

That speed can make a difference. The value of a technical resource is not just how much information it contains, but how quickly you can find what you need and put it into practice.

NFPA LiNK also includes a Notebook feature that allows users to add personal notes directly to NFPA content. This can be useful for capturing observations, reminders, or additional context alongside a frequently referenced code section. Whether preparing for a class, working through a project, or documenting information to revisit later, the Notebook helps keep those insights connected to the NFPA content they relate to.

A few practical ways to use these tools include:

- **Apprentices:** Bookmark key requirements from training and build a personal reference library to revisit throughout your development.
- **Instructors:** Organize frequently used sections and resources around specific courses or lessons.
- **Journeyworkers and experienced professionals:** Save requirements you regularly reference for faster access on future projects.

Staying Current as Codes and Systems Evolve

As building systems continue to change and new technologies are introduced, requirements for installation, inspection, testing, and maintenance will evolve with them. Staying current is therefore part of doing quality work.

NFPA LiNK provides access to current NFPA codes and standards and tools that help users navigate changes between editions. When requirements change, the platform can help users understand what is different and where to find the applicable information.

Make checking current requirements part of your workflow. When starting a new project, encountering an unfamiliar system, or working under a newer edition of a standard, NFPA LiNK can confirm the requirements rather than relying solely on past experience.

The more familiar you become with navigating codes and standards, the easier it is to incorporate authoritative information into everyday decision-making.

Using CASI to Ask Better Questions

NFPA LiNK also includes CASI™, the platform's AI-powered assistant trained specifically on NFPA codes and standards, which can help users explore questions related to NFPA content, explain concepts, and direct users to applicable source material with citations.

CASI can be particularly useful when you know what you are trying to understand but are not sure where to start. A user might ask about a particular application, identify relevant sections, or clarify terminology used in a standard. CASI can help point toward the applicable NFPA content, which users can then review directly.

The key is to use CASI as a navigation and learning tool—not a replacement for the code or professional judgment. Always review the cited NFPA source material and consider applicable jurisdictional requirements and the specific circumstances of the work.

In other words, use CASI to help guide you to the right information faster, then use the underlying NFPA content to understand and apply the requirement.

Building a Habit of Continuous Learning

Perhaps the greatest opportunity is to think about NFPA LiNK not as a resource to use only when there is a problem, but as a tool for continuous learning. Before training, use it to review relevant requirements. During training, use it to investigate questions and connect lessons to the applicable code. On the job, use it to verify requirements when encountering an unfamiliar application. Afterward, bookmark useful sections so they are easy to find the next time you need them. This creates a simple cycle: learn, look it up, apply it, and keep building your knowledge.

Professional development does not end when a class or certification is complete. It continues with every new technology, project, code change, and field challenge. Having current, trusted information readily available makes it easier to keep learning while doing the work.

NFPA LiNK is designed to support that process by making codes, standards, and related resources easier to find, understand, and apply. With access available through the OLR, it can become a practical part of your existing training and work routine.

The next time you have a question about an NFPA requirement, start with NFPA LiNK. A few minutes spent finding and understanding the right information can help you make more informed decisions, stay current, and put your knowledge to work. ■



DRAIN CLEANING: THE GATEWAY FOR PLUMBING SERVICE

*Submitted by Joe Fernandez, Jr., UA Training
Specialist*

Drain cleaning is not the leftover work many plumbers treat it as. It is one of the highest-volume service calls in the plumbing trade, one of the lowest-material-cost services you can run, and it is the most reliable way to capture future business.

Drain work has a reputation problem. It is messy, and the average ticket looks small compared to other typical plumbing service invoices. Some journeymen consider it below their skill level and would rather have someone else do the work, and this is where they are wrong.

Customers already expect a plumbing company to clear drains. Turning those calls away hands the relationship that has been built with the customer and follow-up work to someone else.

A recent poll I conducted with several plumbing service contractors found that drain cleaning ranks number one as the most requested plumbing service, followed by leak repairs, toilet repairs, and water heater maintenance. Many of these contractors stated that they gained facility service contracts and future work from the initial call they received for a stopped-up drain line.

Now, drain cleaning covers a variety of options for both the customer and the service technicians. Along with the sewer machine or the “snake,” plumbers can use the sewer camera and locator to diagnose the cause or potential problems within the drain line. With the use of the sewer camera, the plumber can produce video documentation for the customer, which in turn can potentially turn into a larger project.

This diagnostic can prove tree roots entering at the joints, offset or separated joints, bellies or sags where debris settles and water stands, cracked, corroded, or collapsing pipe, foreign objects and poor original installation, just to name a few. Through diagnostics, we now can create options for the customer based on what we have found, from Hydro-Jetting, pipelining, and sectional repair to entire pipe replacement.

Several local union training centers have implemented drain cleaning within their plumbing service curriculum. Several have received grants through the ITF to acquire the Plumbing Service Drain Cleaning Package from manufacturer Milwaukee Tools to outfit their training center and offer training for apprentices and journeymen.



For a training center to receive this grant, they must have met the prerequisite by having an instructor attend ITP course 4009: Plumbing Service, Maintenance, and Repair, which is offered at ITP or at Regional Training annually.

We are constantly competing with the open shop, which is more than happy to take the work we deem as “not our work.” We need to stop this train of thought and keep the work that is, and always has been, ours. ■

DATES TO REMEMBER

Monday, October 19th
2027 Regional Registration

Monday, November 9th
2027 Pipe Trades Training and Organizing Conference
Registration
(Conference: February 1 - 4, 2027)

**IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW
NEEDS IMMEDIATE HELP, PLEASE CALL:**



National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

A free and confidential (U.S.) resource that connects individuals with skilled, trained counselors 24/7.
Call 988 or 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

Use the online [Lifeline Crisis Chat](#) or reach out to the Crisis Text Line by texting "HELLO" to 741741 to connect with a crisis counselor.

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CERTIFICATION/REGISTRATION DEPARTMENT

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