



New Skill Builders Success Story: John Ivy

For the last five years, John Ivy, a resident of the 9th Ward's West Pullman neighborhood, provided for his wife and family by putting up drywall, remodeling kitchens, bathrooms and basements, and installing ceramic tiles. He says he had enjoyed the work, but he also wanted to increase his income and security for his family.

About a year and a half ago, Ivy, who is African American, began considering a career in the trades.

Around that time, his brother-in-law told him about New Skill Builders, a 13-week apprenticeship preparation program operated under the direction of Chicago's Mayor's Office of Workforce Development. As part of Mayor Daley's WorkNet Chicago, the program – which is aimed at helping minorities and women enter the trades – meets two weekday evenings and Saturdays at Ace Tech High School, a Chicago Public Schools charter school located at 5410 S. State St..

Besides completing hands-on projects that reinforced basic construction skills and preparing for tests in geometry, algebra, mechanical reasoning and spatial relations, Ivy and the 21 other New Skill Builders students met with visiting construction trades representatives – electricians, pipe fitters, plumbers, carpenters and engineers – to find out about what it was like to actually work in the trades.

"This was excellent preparation," Ivy said. "It really mirrored what was expected for work in the trades. We even did exercises and stretching to keep us in shape."

The New Skill Builders program required that Ivy and the other students be at least 18 years old, have a high school diploma or GED, be a city of Chicago resident, have a valid drivers license, score 9.0 in reading and 8.0 in math on the TABE test, pass a physical examination, and provide copies of his birth certificates, high school transcripts and social security card. Meeting these

requirements prepared Ivy for assembling the paperwork needed for apprenticeship applications.

Ivy opted to become an electrician. "I've always worked hard," he says. "I liked the fact that this work requires a lot of thought, and I liked that it requires physical activity. I wasn't looking for a desk job."

Ivy scored 29th out of the 1,400 applicants who tested for Electrical Joint Apprenticeship program sponsored by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), Local Union No. 134 and the Electrical Contractor's Association of the City of Chicago.

In January 2007, Ivy began his first year of the five-year apprenticeship program at Westside Technical Institute, 2800 S. Western Ave.

For 11 weeks, he will attend classes on weekdays from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The classes include: Technical Math, Print Reading, Construction Technology and Electrical Circuitry and Conduit Bending.

So far, Ivy has received A's in the math class, and he's begun to master the art of bending conduit, the metal tubing that bundles wires together in buildings. That's important because conduit bending is estimated to be 80 percent of an electrician's job.

Following successful completion of those first-year classes, Ivy will work with a union electrical contractor for nine months and be paid wages equal to 40 percent those made by a journeyman wireman, or \$14.52 an hour to start. Also important, Ivy will begin receiving medical benefits for himself, his wife, daughter and two young sons.

During Ivy's second year, he will be expected to attend nine weeks of classroom instruction at the main IBEW-NECA Technical Institute, 6201 W. 115th, Alsip. Upon completion of that instruction, he will work for a union contractor and his wages will increase to 50 percent of the journeyman wireman's rate, or \$18.15.

Each succeeding year, Ivy is expected to complete instruction and receive additional pay increases until he reaches the full wage for a journeyman wireman, which is now \$36.30 an hour.

Ivy's immediate goal is to complete his certifications and work as an electrician. Beyond that, this first generation tradesman aspires to one day operate an electrical contracting business.

"I would like to see sons do this," he says. "There's a lot of pride in the local. The people who train you are the best. They train you to be the best."