

Trade schools, career centers, and companies doing everything they can to train HVAC technicians amid 'massive' shortage

CLEVELAND — The dog days of summer have many Ohioans retreating into their air conditioning but if that system were to need repairs, it could take weeks or months to get the proper repairs.

Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) technicians are in high demand and contractors say there is plenty of work to keep them busy, forcing trade schools, career centers, and HVAC companies to do as much as possible to train up as many technicians as they can.



Becoming a Residential HVAC Installer made a lot more sense to Ivan Motylinski than taking on debt to go to college. He says he might go back for an engineering degree after working for a few years, giving himself financial stability and independence.

His brother is an electrician and introduced him to the idea of pursuing a career in HVAC.

“I figured, why not do it and do the best I can and it turns out it really worked out for me,” said Motylinski.

His schedule at The K Company in Akron is busy and he started off already making good money with the chance for significant raises every year.

That’s because HVAC companies tell News 5 there’s a massive shortage of HVAC workers like Motylinski. Tim Winkler is The K Company’s Lead Installer and he’s been working in the HVAC industry for 26 years.

“It’s kind of a dying trade, with all the trades,” said Winkler. “It seems like most kids now, they want to go to college and do something else.”



“I can’t find anybody, especially this younger generation, that wants to work and actually get their hands dirty,” said Lewis.

The Cause

Lewis Fletcher has been around the HVAC industry for 45 years, now working as a state inspector and training new HVAC workers at [Remington College](#). He says the industry expanded during his career, requiring more formal training, but also creating more

positions for HVAC technicians in large organizations like hospitals and universities on top of independent companies of all sizes.

“You have a lot of people who have retired over the years and those retirees have left the market and no one was able to fill those needs,” said Fletcher.

Years of high school students being directed to college meant there were fewer young people training to go into the trades in general and HVAC specifically.



The Problem

That shortage means if you need help with your air conditioning this summer, don't hold your breath. Contractors and big companies might be able to handle small jobs quickly but larger installations and jobs could take months to schedule.

“The rates are going to start skyrocketing for labor because of the limited amount of people working in the field,” said Lewis.

COVID-related material shortages only add to the growing costs and delays.

Fixing the shortage

Technician shortages are inspiring trade schools, career centers, and even companies themselves to take matters into their own hands.

The [Medina County Career Center](#) takes in both adults and current high school students, helping them complete their high school degrees while also training for a wide variety of careers.

Motylinki graduated recently and already found a job at The K Company. The Career Center's Principal Tresa Goodwin says that's pretty common.

“We turn out about 23 HVAC technicians every two years and the difficulty is they get jobs so fast with internships and externships that we can't seem to keep all of the in-county employers satisfied,” said Goodwin. “You just can't get past the need that people want people who know how to work and have some skill at working.”

At night, adults come to the Medina County Career Center to be part of Director of Adult Education Peggy Reves' program. It involves night classes for four hours a night, four nights a week.

“We've on our way to having three consecutive years of a waiting list for the program,” said Reves.

That's part of the reason why the Medina County Career Center is doing large renovations every year over the course of a decade to upgrade all of its facilities. The hope is that the increased space and newer space will encourage more people to keep training to enter the HVAC field.

“You can tell them, “Hey listen, if you can finish this, we know we can put you to work,” said Reves.

The K Company hires Medina County Career Center graduates like Motylinski, but it has also built its own training center so it can train new employees with limited-to-no experience, or give industry veterans a chance to retrain on the latest equipment.

“When the guys are out in the field, they actually know what they’re working on and working with,” said Winkler.

That can save time for his 40 service technicians who are already booked through August on projects all over Northeast Ohio.

“You get to learn all about the new technologies and how to work on them so it always keeps the job interesting,” said Motylinski.

Two women who completed Remington College’s HVAC program are still looking for jobs in the industry.

Dion Bailey completed her training days before COVID shutdown the nation, making it a challenge to get her foot in the door at potential employers.

“I even tried to reach out to people that do heated floors and heated pools, because that’s still HVAC,” said Bailey.

Even though the earning potential in HVAC long-term is relatively high, the job she has at Amazon offers her better pay in the short run while she tries to find an entry-level HVAC position.

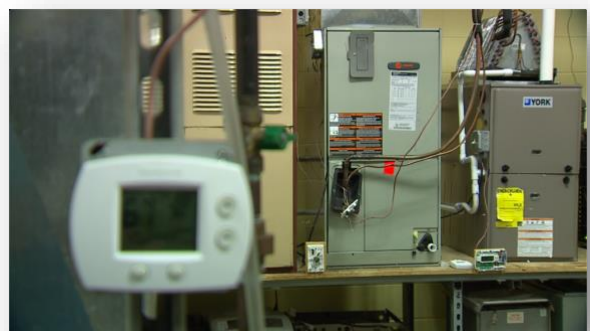
Britne Banks is pulling her resume together now after graduating from Remington College in June 2021. She originally got into HVAC as a way to help her eventually flip houses after she trains under a more traditional HVAC company.

“It’s Cleveland, Ohio,” said Banks. “You’re going to need heating, you’re going to need cooling all year round.”

Earning potential

The K Company starts its employees at \$15 per hour, coming out to about \$30,000 a year. Winkler says new hires are re-evaluated after 90 days and every employee is re-evaluated every year, with salary increases on the table for workers who earn it.

Winkler says its not uncommon for a recent high school graduate like Motylinski to jump from \$15 per hour to \$30 per hour or more in just a few years.



Tresa Goodwin understands that first hand because her husband is a master automotive technician placing the vocational career right next to a career in education and higher learning.

“Until a year before he retired after 39 years, he made more money than I did with my multiple degrees,” said Goodwin.

She says it takes hard work and time to earn the proper certifications, but, “the acceleration of your career and the amount of salary you can achieve [in vocational trades] is exponentially faster than a four-year or a six-year college prep program,” said Goodwin.

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