

BRICK by BRICK

by Jim Biros

Photos by Jed Carlson

The three owners of Lake Country Masonry help graduates of WITC's Bricklaying and Masonry program get started

It's a simple concept; one stone atop another. Yet the finished results of stacking one brick on top of another can produce astonishing results.

The same can be said for new students in WITC's Bricklaying and Masonry program as they learn basic techniques before going on to accomplish impressive feats.

Lake Country Masonry Inc., a four-year-old commercial union masonry contractor located in Superior, Wis., is just one example of what is possible afterwards.

With the ability to complete both large and small jobs, Lake Country Masonry has set itself apart from other firms. A day for the owners can vary from laying block and pouring footings from dawn to dusk, to reviewing blueprints and attending meetings.

The business was the idea of Paul Wells and brothers Brian and Rick Olson. Wells, a graduate of WITC's Bricklaying and Masonry Program, is just one of several graduates of the program working at Lake Country Masonry.



Lake Country Masonry Inc. worker Jared Lystig constructs a wall at the new Northwestern High School in Maple, Wis.

In the program, students learn quality building techniques such as spreading mortar; laying brick to a line; and building corners, arches, and fireplaces. Students also learn how to read prints and estimate supplies and materials.

"The course touches on a little bit of everything," Wells said. "It provides [the students] with an upper hand in grasping some of the techniques. We like having the grads because they know quite a bit more than somebody who's just coming off the street."

Having that advantage is something Lake Country Masonry looks for as it faces larger projects and shorter timelines. The company will complete an addition at Northwestern High School in Maple, Wis., this winter, which will end a nearly yearlong project.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, brickmasons, blockmasons, and stonemasons held 182,000 jobs in 2006. Jobs for brickmasons, blockmasons, and stonemasons are expected to increase 10 percent during



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the 2006-16 decade as population and business growth create a need for new houses, industrial facilities, schools, hospitals, offices, and other structures. Also stimulating demand for workers will be the need to restore a growing number of old brick buildings.

With a boom to the masonry industry, Lake County Masonry is thankful for the knowledge graduates of WITC’s Bricklaying and Masonry program bring to the job.

“They have a vast knowledge of what they have to do,” Wells said.

Having an understanding of a variety of different techniques is also a valuable asset.

Wells notes an advancement in materials and different equipment, which has helped construction projects become more efficient, while many methods continue to be time tested.

“It’s pretty old-school stuff,” Wells said. “There have been some changes, but it’s mainly in the applications that architects are coming up with. It’s definitely gotten a lot safer. It’s the same scope of work, but the materials have changed. It’s still hard work. There’s no doubt about that.” ■

— Jim Biros is a publication and Web communications technician at WITC’s administrative office

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Bricklaying and Masonry

- Technical Diploma (one-year)
- Offered at Rice Lake
- The Bricklaying and Masonry program prepares students for a career as a brick mason or block mason for both residential and commercial construction. Students learn quality building techniques such as spreading mortar; laying brick; and building corners, arches and fireplaces. The program also teaches students how to read prints, and estimate supplies and materials.