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STANDARD FOR EXCELLENCE

March 1, 2022

My name is Aaron Plikat, and I am from Anchorage, Alaska. I am a 25-year member of the United Association of Journeyman and Apprentices of the Plumbing & Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada Local 367 (UA Local 367). I currently serve as Business Manager / Financial Secretary Treasurer of our Local and Chairman of the Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee (JATC) which is our Local's training center.

UA Local 367 was established in 1938 to support military construction and a young growing city. There were originally 15 plumbers and gasfitters who sent a request to the United Association's general office for recognition of a Local chapter. Since that time, UA Local 367 has grown and invested in workforce development to create a membership of over 800 today. One of the ways this was done was by creating our local apprenticeship program in 1956 with contributions from members' wages of \$0.01 from all hours worked by our membership. Today this contribution rate has grown to \$1.55 per hour worked and has allowed us to train hundreds of qualified and licensed Plumbers, Steamfitters, Welders, and HVACR Technicians. These members have played a role in most of the major construction projects in our State, from the Trans Alaska Pipeline to all the major hospitals, power production facilities, refineries, large commercial buildings, and public schools.

The United Association's apprenticeship program requires 5 years and 10,000 hours to complete. All apprentices are required to obtain 240 hours per year of classroom study and the rest of the year is hands-on training under the supervision of our journey person members and signatory employers with the Alaska Mechanical Contractors Association. Apprentices begin at 50% of a journey person's wage, which is \$20.50/hour, and progress with 10% wage increases every 2000 hours until they reach journey worker status. Currently we have 57 apprentices in our program, but our historical average is 75, depending on the employment need of our contractors.

Over the past several years, workforce development has been stalled due to a lack of overall building in new construction or large-scale construction which typically puts large numbers of folks to work. Many of our members over the last few years have had to leave Alaska to work elsewhere due to our slow economy. With this, we have also seen the highest dropout rate among apprentices between their 2nd and 4th year due to low hours of work available and not being able to make ends meet while waiting for the next project. It has been increasingly difficult to attract and retain apprentices. In fact, we have an apprentice application opening right now that currently has 24 interested applicants. In 2010, this number was nearly 200 applicants.

The influx of the American Infrastructure Act dollars will hopefully get projects moving across the State for several years. This creates a major workforce development opportunity that we have never seen before. UA Local 367 is ready to meet the challenge to recruit and train Alaskans from across the State to meet the needs of our employers and clients. For many years UA Local 367 and its parent organization, the United Association, have worked to develop relationships with partner organizations such as Helmets to Hardhats, Alaska Works Partnership, AVTECH, UAA, and King Career Center. In 2010, the United Association created the Veterans in Piping (VIP) program to work with transitioning soldiers. These soldiers attend 16-week intensive training, while still on active duty, and are then directly entered into individual UA Locals around the country. In January of 2018, the UA had 1,600 VIP graduates that have found careers in the Pipe Trades.

While we continue to work with these long-time partners in our traditional venues, we have also made a commitment at Local 367 to bring a full Pipe Trades Apprenticeship to rural Alaska. We are looking to start with training in Bethel later this summer. While we have seen some occasional work in this region in the past, there is a great deal of work coming to the greater Yukon-Kuskokwim area over the next 5-10 years. This summer, we will be starting with a hotel project in the area and are looking to recruit 10-20 apprentices. In the past, we have worked with many folks from rural portions of the State with very few finding success in the trades. We feel, in large part, this is because we have required all apprentices to attend training in Anchorage for several weeks to months at a time and to also work throughout the road system when needed. It's our hope that by training in the local area and having work opportunities in the local area we will find better success for them and help to expand workforce development. We are currently talking with stakeholders in the community and hope to continue to learn from them on what they feel will work best to recruit, train, and work in the region. We are planning now to make a trip to Bethel in early March to meet with folks and iron out more of the details. We believe this model has a potential to be replicated in other areas of the State such as Nome and Dillingham.

For this to work, a cohesive approach is required from the training programs, the Department of Labor, clients and end users, local community leadership, contractors, and employers. It is imperative that we take this opportunity to build up our Alaska workforce instead of relying on folks from outside our state to take these jobs. We ask for you to consider a couple of things you can do to help. First, keep as much as possible in the Dept. of Labor budget to assist training programs across the state through STEP and similar grant funding. These types of funds allow for us to move forward with new training and advancements, and training for longtime workers looking to update and acquire new skills.

Second, consideration of mandatory apprenticeship utilization for all major construction projects funded through the infrastructure act. We feel that setting the bar for all projects over one-million dollars in value should require that 10% of the hours worked, per craft, be done by apprentices enrolled in bona fide apprenticeship programs approved by the Federal Bureau of Apprenticeship Training. This will ensure we not just train people for jobs, but they actually go to work and acquire the lifetime skills that can be passed down through generations, as we have done on the road system for years.

Thank you very much for your time and attention today. I'm happy to answer any questions you have.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Aaron Plikat', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Aaron Plikat
UA Local 367 Business Manager