



# The Yacht Service Technician Apprenticeship Program- It Takes a Village

Florida's marine industry is responsible for nearly 300,000 jobs across Florida, with many of these roles consolidated in the South Florida region. Job opportunities are diverse, from sales and service to manufacturing, distribution and more. Yet our industry, like many others, faces a shortage of qualified individuals to fill technical roles.

This shortfall was the catalyst for the launch of the Yacht Service Technician Apprenticeship Program in 2020. A collaboration between the Marine Industries Association of South Florida (MIASF), the Florida Department of Education, and Atlantic Technical College, the program's goal is to provide apprentices with a basic set of shipyard skills to jump start a career in the marine industry.

Program qualifications are straightforward: candidates must be at least 18 years old and bring a positive attitude, aptitude, and willingness to learn. To participate, an apprentice must first be hired by one of the 33 companies engaged in the program. Once employed, they are formally enrolled and begin working full-time with their sponsoring company, gaining hands-on experience in the field while advancing through structured classroom instruction. Apprentices also participate in weekly, mandatory evening courses throughout the program's duration. This evening classroom offers deep dives into a variety of technical skills specific to the marine industry.

Graduates have the ability to earn competitive wages, often starting at levels that rival or exceed other skilled trades. According to Lori Wheeler, Vice President of MIASF, "This program offers you a 100% likelihood of employment upon successfully completing the course. In fact, we make sure every apprentice has a job secured before the program begins."



Photo provided by Marine Industries Association of South Florida

But none of this would be possible without the local marine businesses that employ apprentices during the program. Likewise, the marine industry leaders who share their subject matter expertise with course participants play a significant role in this success, too.

One of the marine businesses involved in the program since its inception is Bradford Marine, headquartered in Fort Lauderdale. Bradford employs apprentices full-time during the program and also leads one of the evening coursework series – the Finish Painting class, led by Bradford's own painting experts.

Bradford understands the value of a program like this to keep marine jobs filled by qualified individuals. Bradford actively recruits individuals who demonstrate interest in a marine industry career, introduces them to the apprenticeship program, then employs and supports them along the way. As Tom Krigger, Vice President and General Manager, notes, "As the participants move through the program, they are working full time with skilled

tradesmen, gaining valuable insight into the different skilled career paths available. As they spend time exploring the various areas available, they can discover where their interests and talents could best be applied for future success."

Another supporter and employer involved since the inception of the apprenticeship program is Frank & Jimmie's Propeller, also based in Fort Lauderdale. Experts in propulsion systems and running gear, Frank & Jimmie's program participation is especially important as no other trade schools in the region teach propeller repair.

Rafael Ramirez, General Manager, has personally taught the Propeller and Running Gear portion of the course for the past three years. He notes, "Our trade is a bit of dying art, and a true propeller technician is a jack of all trades. They need an understanding of metalsmithing, machining, welding, math, and software skills necessary for computerized propeller scanning, dynamic balancing, and 3D scanning and modeling."

Ramirez sees the program as vital to provide apprentices with not just real-world experiences and skills, but to foster a better understanding of the industry as a whole. Over the course of the full program, apprentices experience the diversity of roles within the service side of the marine industry. This helps them understand the interdependence of each discipline and tie it all together.

Advanced Mechanical Enterprises, another Fort Lauderdale business, also hires apprentices and teaches a portion of the evening coursework. All apprentices spend two weeknights training onsite to learn the importance of vibration analysis and learn how to measure torque and pitch using state-of-the-art equipment.

Teaching technical skills is just part of the program's success. There are also many marine industry experts who give their time to the program in other ways.

Kathleen Hagan of FHG Marine Engineering was recently a guest speaker and offered her insights into the soft skills required to enjoy career success. She covered topics like the seasonality of the marine industry, personal responsibility, and self-awareness of individual communication skills.

Other guest speakers have included Megan Lagasse, Marina Director of Pier 66, who discussed what it takes to operate a large, busy marina. Amie Nappi, Senior Yacht Support Manager at MarineMax, recently provided insights on running an active boat yard.

Now in its sixth year, the apprenticeship program is delivering results in other ways, too. Recent graduate Prem Lee Barbosa has become the new apprenticeship program coordinator. His appointment brings the apprenticeship program full-circle.