PHTA “DIVES IN” TO GROWING THE WORKFORCE

Pool Professionals Pipeline is a robust jobseeker education program to attract new talent to the aquatics industry

The Pool & Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA) announced at the November International Pool | Spa | Patio Expo, co-located with Deck Expo (PSP/Deck Expo), that it has officially jumped into the waters of workforce development with its Pool Professionals Pipeline, a new program designed to help its members find workers, drive awareness amongst today’s jobseekers, and foster long-term career progression in the pool, hot tub, spa, and aquatics industry.

In a release issued last month, PHTA CEO Sabeena Hickman said it is stepping in to answer the direct call of its members. “It is no secret that many industries and businesses today are struggling to find and retain employees, and this is particularly true in trades such as ours. PHTA members are looking to our organization to help fill that gap, and we are ready for the challenge. We are incredibly excited to share this new program with our membership and give them the tools they will need to compete in today’s labor market while working to attract a skilled, diversified, and thriving workforce.”

This program, powered by PHTA, will benefit the industry and its members as it works to effectively recruit and retain skilled labor, while also helping to offset the challenges the market is facing in finding and hiring qualified employees. While it focuses on the entire aquatics industry and a variety of sectors, such as building, maintenance, retail, distribution, manufacturing, swim instruction and more, PHTA shared that it is going to be laser-focused in this first year on driving labor into the industry for its pool and hot tub members.

Underneath the PHTA’s Pool Professionals Pipeline workforce development umbrella is its external industry awareness campaign and jobseeker website, Work in Aquatics and workinaquatics.com, launching in 2023. Work in Aquatics will advocate for trade professions by highlighting the numerous advantages, training, and apprenticeship opportunities, job openings, and potential career progression tracks that are available working in this industry.

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From construction labor to lifeguards, sales representatives, engineers, designers, warehouse workers, fleet drivers and even entrepreneurs, there are many industry sectors and paths along the way that PHTA is hoping jobseekers will explore. PHTA is in the process of building WorkinAquatics.com, which will house the industry’s only dedicated job board exclusive to PHTA members. It will also be launching its social media presence across various platforms and embarking on public relations, marketing and advertising campaigns next Spring.

PHTA Chairman Charlie Claffy, owner of Claffey Pools, is excited for what this can do for the industry and urges members to get involved from the beginning. “This program is a game-changer for our industry as it works to drive qualified talent to our respective businesses and our industry as a whole. To be successful, we are going to need everyone on board as we work to put the industry on the radar of those searching for an alternative path to college; a rewarding career in a healthy lifestyle environment; the ability to work away from a desk; creative freedom through modern design; and lifesaving skills through swim instruction. The possibilities that exist in the aquatics industry are endless and once you begin in this line of work, you will never want to walk away. Let’s share that passion with the next generation of workers.”

The PHTA Board of Directors officially decided to launch a workforce program in April 2022, answering requests from its members and partners, citing the labor shortage as the main reason for the program, among others. Employers in the United States cite labor shortages as a top threat to their businesses with many trade industries being most heavily impacted. The slow-down in immigration and pandemic-related travel restrictions, coupled with millions of baby boomers on the brink of retirement, has compacted the hiring process, as reported by Axios. The pressures of the Coronavirus pandemic also made many question their current careers, resulting in some seeking entirely new lines of work. PHTA seeks to attract these individuals and those from other industries looking for something new.

In a PHTA member survey conducted late last year, 63% of respondents cited finding qualified employees as a top concern for their business. Aside from creating awareness, PHTA is positioning itself as an industry ambassador, responsible for driving talent and filling the pipeline of skilled workers to benefit its members while attracting a diversified, inclusive workforce.

The program will enable PHTA members to be their very own advocates, helping others to understand the value and vast range of work the industry does, including how rewarding it is to provide safe and enjoyable aquatic experiences to customers. In addition, program participants can share personal and employee successes, experiences, and achievements to further illustrate the opportunities the aquatics industry offers.

Job satisfaction in the skilled trades is high, with 83% of tradespeople satisfied in their choice of work, according to business-to-consumer platform Angi’s second annual Skilled Trades in America Report. While that may seem promising for trade industries, there is a significant labor gap needing to be filled, with more than three-quarters of tradespeople, 77%, viewing it as a problem that has worsened over the last year.

Although many industries and organizations have developed apprenticeship programs specific to their industries, like the PHTA Registered Pool Maintenance and Service Technician Apprenticeship Program, drawing attention to the many opportunities the trade industries offer continues to be a challenge. Work in Aquatics seeks to promote the industry while serving as a resource for members to both recruit and retain highly skilled individuals.

Results from the 2022 PHTA Market Report indicate that builders specifically found that because of the increased demand for pools created by the pandemic, there was not enough skilled labor to meet new pool construction requirements. While skilled labor has always been at a premium, builders realized the overwhelming importance of keeping qualified staff and subcontracting crews loyal and focused on their projects. Two-thirds of builders surveyed indicated that access to appropriate labor significantly impacted their ability to construct new pools.

Many industries are giving the labor issue their full attention. In fact, the current administration announced it is stepping in with the Biden Administration’s Culmination of Talent Pipeline Challenge to ensure that potential tradespeople are provided with the training and opportunity to take advantage of the millions of available jobs in various trades. In addition to the training, the Challenge will help ensure a diverse set of workers have an equal opportunity to apply for and obtain the jobs created.

According to PHTA, the time to act is now. “This is a long-term game plan. We are fully committed to building our workforce and increasing support for this critical program, so we can provide relief to our members and ultimately continue to grow this incredible industry,” says Hickman.

2023 will be a big year for PHTA as it officially launches its program to jobseekers. There will also be other ongoing benefits available to all PHTA members such as an Employer-Profile and one free job posting that renews each year, select recruiting materials, program updates, hiring tips and more.

Members, partners, and others interested in becoming involved in the PHTA Pool Professionals Pipeline and being featured on its new jobseeker being featured on its new jobseeker website and job board should contact Seth Ewing, PHTA senior director of Member Programs & Services, at sewing@phta.org.