

If I had a hammer...

Young architects lay down their pencils and pick up a tool belt
by: Jennifer Gumpert-Boyle, NJCCT Program Coordinator

When architects complete their education and pass through the archways of graduation, they have visions of designing gleaming high-rise buildings, sports stadiums and chic restaurants. They are anxious to be the architect one day responsible for the next breakthrough in design – but can their visions be *built*?

The balance between architectural design and construction practicality is a difficult one, one that has beset the industry as a whole. During the month of August, 2006, the NJCCT-sponsored *Carpenter Internship Program* challenged six young architects to enter the Joseph D’Aries Carpenter Training Center and experience the life of a union carpenter in an effort to bridge the gap between their formal, theory-based education and the practical application of their designs.

“I thought I knew something,” says Francisco Lopez, an intern with Gensler Architects in Morristown, who spent his first day in the training center installing crown molding. “After five years in school you think you know it all... but then you come to this training center and realize – you still have a lot to learn.”

“This is so different from what we are exposed to on site visits,” explains Melissa Darmante, an intern with Ford 3 Architects in Princeton. “Here, you’re working when (the carpenters) are working. You are tired when they are tired. You wake up in the morning sore from doing concrete forms the day before and realize how hard it is to do this work.”

During the 30-hour program, interns were immersed in the areas of interior systems, concrete forms, finished carpentry and millshop. Throughout the week, interns learned construction theory from union carpenter instructors and worked in tandem with union carpenter apprentices to complete projects in each discipline.

“Students graduate with very little experience in the field,” states Phillip E. Cooney, Director of the New Jersey Carpenter Contractor Trust. “It’s important to the successful completion of construction projects that the architectural and construction communities understand each other’s language, goals and common practices. By bringing young architects through an intensive experience like the *Carpenter Internship Program*, they are able to make their designs a reality and learn the obstacles that come with constructing those designs.”

The *Carpenter Internship Program* is not the first time design professionals have entered Union Carpenter Training Facilities. The industry acclaimed *Carpenter Workshop* series has seen over 650 architects in its five-year history. The program, which brings manufacturers of carpenter-installed products into the centers for half-day seminars and hands-on demonstrations, provides coursework in six disciplines of carpentry. The success of *Carpenter Workshop* translated into a partnership with the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Each year, NJCCT extends a financial scholarship to one young architect and with it, the unique opportunity to participate in a weeklong carpenter shadowing experience. These two programs were the basis for the creation

of the *Carpenter Internship Program* and have resulted in the participation of such firms as Gensler, Ford 3 Architects, Schemata Architecture and Pallante Design, LLC.

“It is important architects understand every aspect of their design and consider the work of every person who contributes to the physical construction of a structure,” says Glenn Pellet, principal of Schemata Architecture in Summit, NJ. “Understanding the practices of the trades people responsible for building develops a well-rounded architect who can anticipate possible construction challenges.”

Joseph Pallante, principal of Pallante Design (Newark, NJ), and his intern, Dominick Termini, were impressed by the thorough training required by the Union Carpenters.

“When designers create a plan, it’s handed off and you hope that the trades on the job will know how to properly build your project,” says Pallante. “The professionalism extended to the training offered by the United Brotherhood of Carpenters translates to efficiency on a jobsite. Efficiency contributes to an accurate and conservative bottom line.”

“In the end, we are all working toward a common goal,” states Ford 3 intern Brian Koczan. “If general contractors, carpenters and designers can work *together*, we will *all* succeed. The *Carpenter Internship Program* creates an environment that encourages a working relationship between design and construction and I will highly recommend the program to other architects.” He adds, “This has been an experience I will never forget.”