

Lakeita Wright, Graduate
KentuckianaWorks Welding Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program
Speech given at the graduation event for the program

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Lakeita Wright, a proud student of the first UA/KentuckianaWorks Welding Pre-Apprenticeship Program Class of 2011.

Completing this 16-week program has been a rewarding accomplishment for our entire class.

Most of the graduates of this program are official metal trade apprentices of the Local 502 and will soon be starting great careers in our designated trade now that we have graduated.

I am a former supervisor at Faurecia Exhaust System here in Louisville. The facility manufactured exhaust systems for Ford, GM and Chrysler. I was a supervisor there for five years. When I was laid off due to automotive cutbacks, my salary was \$52,000 a year. The good thing about that job, I was able to obtain some MIG and TIG welding experience.

I later pursued a seasonal position as a production supervisor at GSI Commerce.

But, I was searching for a stable career that offered me job protection and the opportunity to further my education.

I applied to the construction training program as an eligible candidate with previous welding experience and having participated in the Women in Highway Construction Program, sponsored by the Community Action Agency. I felt it was my destiny to pursue a career in the construction field.

While I attended the program I learned about the 16 different types of trades available to us. It was an easy decision to choose pipefitting as my trade. It fits my tenacity.

Yes, I knew as a woman it would be challenging to compete in a male-dominated trade. And, as a black African-American woman, I would need to be more competitive to prove myself through my abilities and the perfection of my skills to become a proud member of the best.

I applied to the Local 502 Pipefitters' apprenticeship program in November 2010 and was selected as a candidate for the KentuckianaWorks Welding Pre-Apprenticeship Program.

This 16-week program has been a life-changing experience for me. I've had the opportunity to be challenged to meet expected deadlines, to do it right the first time, to

solve problems and to correct and learn from my mistakes. I've learned that practice makes perfection. I've learned to take pride in my work.

Our great instructor has taught us all the meaning of collaboration and the difference with the positions of currents, lengths, angles, motions and speed in the most uncomfortable welding positions.

As a student, I would take advantage of extra, unpaid practice time by attending 34 extra welding classes, or many 13-hour days, just to better my welding skills or to achieve the required deadline to advance to the next process. It was hard work, but very worthwhile!

I hope there will be funding available for future welding classes and programs for other trades because it offers hope of a career for people. This program has opened a door that many of us never thought would be open to minorities and women. It has given women, like me, the opportunity to prove that I can be just as competitive in this field as anyone and that I belong in the best trade.