

# Training for the future

On-the-job training offers solution to province wide shortage of skilled workers

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Apprentice Robert Vandenberg (left) and Schleese Saddlery Service general manager Earl Rothery demonstrate the traditional European craft of saddlery. Vandenberg finished his three-year apprenticeship at the end of February 2001.

From the moment students enter high school, emphasis is placed on achieving high grades to prepare for post-secondary education. The reality is only 18 per cent of students, less than one in five, who enter Grade 9 will go on to study at a post-secondary level. The remaining 82 per cent are often ignored in terms of training programs available and, according to the Ministry of Labour, Ontario's workforce is starting to realize the consequences. A 1998 survey predicted in the next five years, Ontario will experience a province wide shortage of skilled labourers in all trades -- from precision metal cutting to the automotive industry. As the need continues to grow, private industry and even self-employed tradespeople are starting to see the importance of training apprentices to pass their knowledge on to the next generation of workers.

Apprenticeship training provides access to well-paying jobs that demand a high level of skill, judgment and creativity. The demand for skilled workers continues to increase, with top performers in some skilled trades earning more than \$40,000 a year. Many use their skills and experience as stepping-stones toward careers in management, while others go into business for themselves.

## Unique Experience as an Apprentice Saddler

When one mentions apprenticeships, most immediately think of the construction industry, machinists or tool and die making. But a less traditional, yet highly lucrative, apprenticeship opportunity can be found with **Schleese Saddlery Service** in Holland Landing. The **three-year certified saddler course** is recognized by the Ministry of Skills Development and its structure is based on ministry guidelines.

Jochen Schleese, master saddler and president of Schleese Saddlery Service, began his career as an apprentice with Passier & Sohn in Germany. He immigrated to Canada in 1985 where he was named official saddler for the 1986 world dressage championships. In 1990, he established the three-year apprenticeship program in conjunction with the government of Ontario to have saddlery recognized as a registered trade.

"Saddlery has traditionally been a European trade," said Earl Rothery, general manager of Schleese Saddlery Service. "We couldn't get good people in North America, so we figured the best way to solve the problem was to train our own. Typically, the people applying for the one apprenticeship position offered each year are 'horse people' or have backgrounds in leatherwork,

Rothery said. Younger candidates are preferred. Usually, we look for people in their mid to late 20s. We want to start them young so we have them with us for a long time."

### **Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)**

The skilled trade dilemma is not going unnoticed by government or the education system. To combat the problem, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has teamed up with school boards to offer the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program. OYAP currently runs 62 programs across Ontario, with more than 4,300 registered apprentices in the workplace. Students 16 years or older earn credits toward an OSSD, while hours worked on the job are applied to journeyperson certification.

"We have employers coming to us every day and saying they need the best we've got," said Howard Mooney, OYAP program coordinator. "There seems to be the misconception young people who go into skilled trades just weren't smart enough to go to university, but that isn't the case. These workers need to be capable of university-level learning but have chosen not to go that route."

The long-term goal of the program is to encourage young people to get involved in skilled trades and not feel post-secondary education is their only option. With continued support and funding from the Ministry, OYAP hopes to help fill the void in today's workplace. "We'll never catch up with the demand for skilled workers," Mooney said. "Skilled trades are always expanding, so we may reorganize our focus, but we won't ever catch up. The need will never disappear - it will just evolve."