

Everyone Wins with Ironworker Training

JLG Industries and Ahern Rentals of Northern California recently conducted a three-day JLG Operator train-the-trainer course for Ironworker Coordinators and Instructors at the California Regional Training Center in Benicia, CA.

It all started when Dick Zampa, Director of Apprenticeship and Training, California District Council and Director of the California Regional Training Center for Ironworkers met Jeff Ford, JLG Product Champion, during a one-day operator training session Ford conducted at the 22nd annual Ironworkers training meeting in San Diego. Both Zampa and Ford realized that a one-day session was not enough to meet all the needs of the workers, but it was only the amount of time that was available. A better solution was to organize a three-day JLG Train-the-Trainer session at the Union's regional center in Oakland, California.

The Union encompasses bridge, structural, reinforcing and ornamental ironworkers. Almost all of the jobs involving bridge and structural erection require the use of aerial work platforms and telehandlers at some point during their construction, so training in the safe operation of this equipment is important to everyone.

JLG is the leading manufacturer of aerial work platforms and telehandlers, and training is big business with them. The company not only offers Train-the-Trainer classes (fourteen were conducted over the past 12 months) but also has operator training

courses such as the one Ford conducted, and classes in efficient parts purchasing, and a variety of equipment service schools.

Ahern Rentals is a JLG dealer with 29 outlets in the Western states that specialize in the rental of aerial work platforms and telehandlers. Operator training is also a significant part of their business because the company wants rental customers that know how to operate the equipment safely and efficiently.

It is important to know that simply taking an operator training class does not qualify an instructor to teach operator safety classes. A comprehensive Train-the-Trainer class is required to qualify the individual to conduct operator training applicable to aerial work platforms or telehandler products. Re-certification is required every five years to maintain qualifications.

Jim Smith, a JLG Operator Training Specialist, traveled to Oakland to conduct the training, which used a JLG boom lift, scissor lift and telehandler provided by Ahern Rentals. JLG offers the JLG Train-the-Trainer course at the McConnellsburg, Pennsylvania factory, in Las Vegas and on location. In this instance, there were 12 students from all over California that attended the three-day Train-the-Trainer course covering both aerial work platforms and telehandlers.

A single product category such as telehandlers can be covered in two days with one day devoted to how to be an effective trainer and equipment inspection with day two

finishing the inspection portion and concluding with hands-on operation of the equipment.

At the Ironworkers Training Center, Smith devoted the first day of the Train the Trainer program to teaching training methods and how to conduct machine inspections. Day two concluded inspections training and started the hands-on machine operations portion. The third day was devoted to written tests on the material that had been presented during the first two days and evaluations of the operators' use of the equipment.

Smith's training classes were not a holiday for the ironworkers. By the time they had finished, they had ten measurements of their learning progress. Smith gave them three written tests, had them demonstrate their operational skills on three pieces of equipment - a boom lift, a scissor lift and a telehandler and arranged for three evaluations of their role as a coach. In addition, there was a final oral evaluation of the students' knowledge of safety and equipment.

The students themselves conducted the operational skills and coaching portions of the testing. They took turns acting as coaches and operating the equipment and then evaluated each other's performance.

Smith said that the twelve ironworkers that took his course "Did great!" He added, "These guys were highly motivated to master the material. They know that there are

OSHA-enforced regulations that require operators of aerial work platforms and telehandlers be trained. They also know that the people that are responsible for teaching need to be proficient and safe operators of the equipment — not only for themselves, but also for all the others on the job site.”

Zampa summarized the training experience as a “win, win, win” for everyone involved. Ahern introduced themselves to a new group of customers that are now familiar with the JLG equipment the dealer represents. JLG was able to educate more workers in the safe operation of aerial work platforms and telehandlers, and had the opportunity to demonstrate their brands of equipment to a group of qualified end users. The Ironworkers benefited by gaining knowledgeable trainers among their ranks that can pass on the proper skills of machine operation to their fellow workers.

“Future employers of ironworkers benefit too.” added Zampa. “By hiring union ironworkers, they’re getting workers that are properly trained in the safe operation of aerial work platforms and telehandlers and meet OSHA enforced standards for training. It makes for a safer work site. I guess if you add the employers to the mix, it’s a win, win, win situation, and you can’t get much better than that.”