SUCCESS STORY

Apprenticeship + College = Brighter Future

SNAPSHOT
Bette Feldeisen, a 46-year-old plumber from New Jersey, faced an uncertain future in 2008 when she was laid off from her job. The economy was bleak and Feldeisen was unsure when she would be able to get another position. “There were no jobs for trade people anywhere and there were no jobs coming” said Feldeisen. Looking for a better opportunity, she decided to enroll at Gloucester County College (now Rowan College at Gloucester County).

CHALLENGES
Feldeisen faced several challenges when she decided to attend college. “My biggest challenge was picking a school that was going to mesh with what I do. I wanted to pursue a construction-related type of degree.” Feldeisen chose Gloucester County College, a small school about an hour away from her home, because it had an Associate of Applied Science and Technical Studies degree. The school also offered night classes which appealed to Feldeisen in case she was called back to work.

She was also concerned about returning to an academic environment after such a long break. “I was 46, and hadn’t been going to college for a while. I took a few classes at Atlantic Community College many years ago and I took some classes with my union hall but that was a little different” explained Feldeisen.
SOLUTION
At her union hall, Feldeisen saw a poster for NJ Place, a statewide initiative that helps people apply their apprenticeship education towards a degree in college. Feldeisen completed a five year plumbing and pipe fitting apprenticeship and asked Gloucester County College if she could obtain credits through the NJ Place program. “At first they didn’t even know about the NJ Place,” recounted Feldeisen. “It was really new and relatively unheard of. But Gloucester County College did some research and made it happen for me”. She received 25 credits towards her degree for her apprenticeship training.

The credits helped Feldeisen financially. “The money I saved on those credits totaled well over $2500, not to mention the money saved in travel, books, and related expenses.”

Feldeisen’s advisor, Mr. Brown, also helped her transfer credits from her time at Atlantic Community College. The combined transfer and apprenticeship credits made returning to college “much less intimidating” for Feldeisen. And once she started classes, she “…got into the groove, really buckled down and enjoyed it.”

TAKEAWAY
After graduating from Gloucester County College in December 2010 with a 3.68 GPA, Feldeisen got a job as a crew supervisor for plumbers and pipefitters at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and has been working there ever since. Looking back on the experience, Feldeisen says it gave her a lot of confidence and a new perspective. “I think attending college and getting a degree is one of the best things that you can do. It opens up your mind.”

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