

Cleveland Partners Elevate Training

By Steve Grieco

NOT LONG AGO, A TRADESMAN WAS BEGINNING HIS DAY by moving a scissor lift at a Cleveland, Ohio, job site. He didn't notice the lug nuts on one wheel had come loose. Fortunately, the lift was not extended, so the machine only tipped a few inches when the wheel fell off.

Nobody was hurt, but it was clearly a safety violation that could have had serious consequences.

"Inspecting lug nuts is part of the required pre-task analysis," says Pat Butterfield, superintendent for Rudolph Libbe, the Toledo-based general contractor that hired the subcontractor. The worker, who was not in the sheet metal industry, was given time off for not following proper procedures.

John Nesta, training coordinator for Cleveland's local 33 Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee, has been working hard to ensure the same circumstance won't happen on a sheet metal job site.

He heads a team of trainers who recently received international recognition for work to keep SMART members safe when using aerial/power lift equipment. In just one year, they licensed 25 percent of their members through American Work Platform Training (AWPT)—a rigorous safety program developed by the International Powered Access Federation (IPAF).

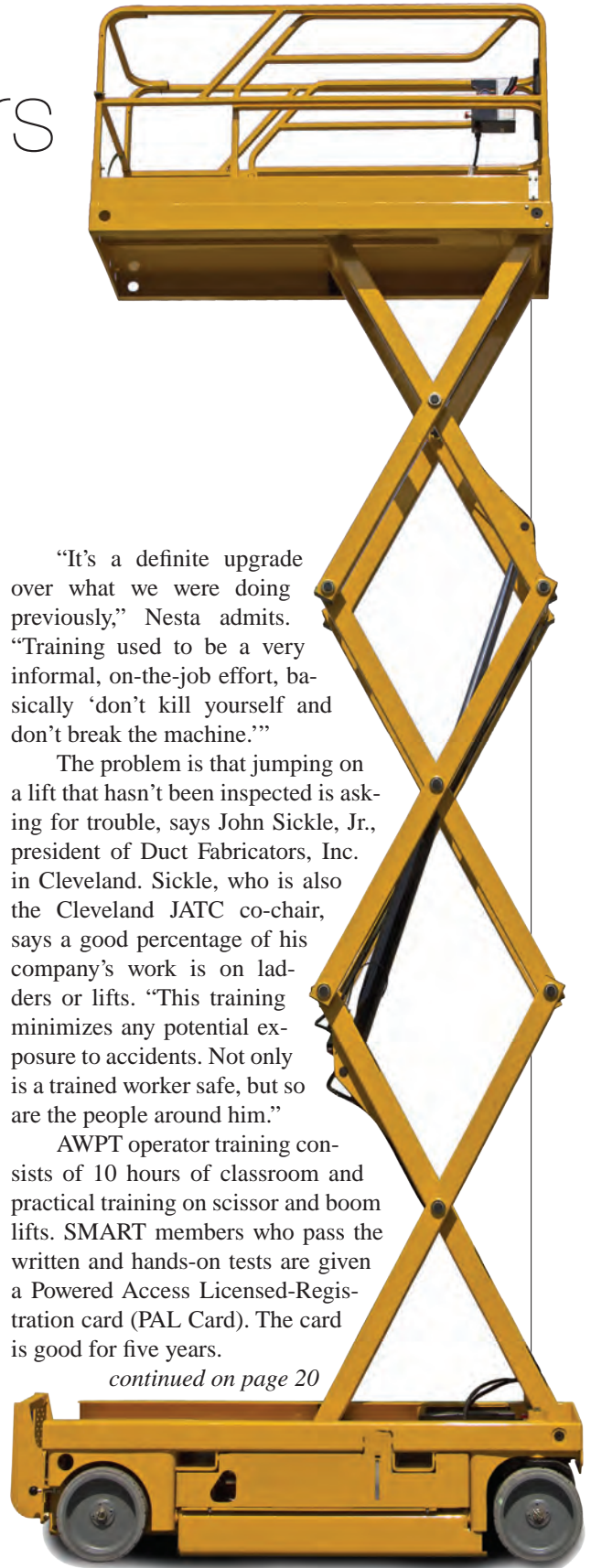
At the time of the award, the only SMART/SMACNA organizations approved to offer AWPT operator training were local 33 training centers in Cleveland and Toledo and the local 73 training center in Chicago. AWPT's comprehensive curriculum meets standards and requirements for both American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

"It's a definite upgrade over what we were doing previously," Nesta admits. "Training used to be a very informal, on-the-job effort, basically 'don't kill yourself and don't break the machine.'"

The problem is that jumping on a lift that hasn't been inspected is asking for trouble, says John Sickle, Jr., president of Duct Fabricators, Inc. in Cleveland. Sickle, who is also the Cleveland JATC co-chair, says a good percentage of his company's work is on ladders or lifts. "This training minimizes any potential exposure to accidents. Not only is a trained worker safe, but so are the people around him."

AWPT operator training consists of 10 hours of classroom and practical training on scissor and boom lifts. SMART members who pass the written and hands-on tests are given a Powered Access Licensed-Registration card (PAL Card). The card is good for five years.

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By providing AWPT operator training, the JATCs in Toledo, Cleveland, and Chicago are offering their SMART members and SMACNA contractors another measure of safety and quality that separates the organized sheet metal industry from its non-union competitors. It is also positions these organizations at the leading edge of safety standards that are increasingly being required by general contractors and corporate clients.

Nesta says he first heard about AWPT at the Eastern Regional Apprenticeship Conference. “After we were trained and approved as instructors, we were all amazed at what we thought we knew and didn’t know,” Toth says. “When they started talking about how wind speed can affect power lift operations, for example, we all had that deer-in-the-headlights look.”

Cleveland JATC initially trained local 33 journeypersons and later made the program available to apprentices. AWPT is now required for all second year apprentices.

“Feedback from our early training exposed a number of information gaps about the safe and proper use of aerial lifts,” Nesta says. “We know we can reduce—and, hopefully, eliminate—these gaps through AWPT.”

Nesta is extremely enthusiastic about AWPT, and he’s been sharing his excitement with other JATCs, such as local 137 in Long Island, N.Y., which does a lot of elevated work in New York City. Pete Scaglione, financial secretary-treasurer and training coordinator for local 137, says he immediately saw the value in working with AWPT and IPAF.

“AWPT is the best aerial training I’ve ever seen, and it’s a great addition to what we’ve been offering our members and apprentices,” Scaglione says. He expects to begin offering AWPT operator training in 2014.

Butterfield says Rudolph Libbe requires all subcontractors to submit proof of aerial lift training. “We don’t work with companies that have a poor safety record,” he says. Better-trained subcontractors are more competitive in the bidding process.”

More and more clients are developing increasingly stringent safety requirements. The Cleveland Clinic, for example, demands a 100 percent safe environment. To win work at the Clinic—Cleveland’s largest employer—“you have to be on top of your safety game,” Sickles says.



When training began, members who have been operating various lifts—scissor lifts, extension booms, articulated lifts—for many years were skeptical. But even they have been impressed with AWPT.

“I was a skeptic, but now I would recommend it to other members,” says Tom Kall, a local 33 member who works as a foreman for Castle Heating and Air. “It’s a good mix of practical knowledge and theory that makes you more marketable.”

Something he was surprised to learn was the importance of model-specific familiarization as a supplement to operator training. “I had no idea that the guys dropping off a machine from a rental company were supposed to offer familiarization,” he says. “I probably never had familiarization, even though I’ve accepted machines dozens of times.”

Kall, who has been using power lifts for about 20 years, is a big believer in taking advantage of training opportunities. “Training and knowledge makes us better,” he says. “It separates us from other contractors.”

Sickle agrees. “We don’t want to do just the minimum. We want to far exceed the minimum to deliver a top-quality and put our general contractors’ and owners’ minds at ease.” ■

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