



STLJOBWATCH
STEVE GIEGERICH

sgiegerich@post-dispatch.com
314-340-8172

Electrician's green foresight pays off

Special training keeps him on cusp of environmental shift – and employed.

It's the catch phrase on the lips of every politician, economic expert and career counselor with a panacea to cure an ailing job market. This week, the President's Council of Economic Advisers took its turn.

Health care and "clean energy production and environmental protection" stand as the centerpieces of economic and job recovery, the council announced.

There it is again – "green" jobs.

By the time 2016 rolls around, the council predicts the number of employment opportunities in environmental fields since 2001 will have risen by 52 percent.

The Pew Charitable Trusts estimates that 770,000 clean energy jobs were created between 1997-2008.

That may well be, but for most of us the notion of someone drawing an actual salary from a job classified as "green" is still a pretty abstract concept.

So, meet Chris DeMoor.

A father of six, DeMoor, 38, describes himself as "just a journeyman electrician."

His overly modest assessment (as anyone who has ever grappled with the circuitry powering household lights and appliances can well attest) may have been applicable in 1990, the year DeMoor earned his first union card from Local 1 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

But the professional landscape began to shift

about five years ago when global warming became a national conversation, prompting an evaluation of carbon footprints by businesses and individuals alike.

The electrical industry took notice. As did DeMoor.

He began taking intensive training programs offered by the IBEW and his employer, Guarantee Electric, to ease the transition from the traditional means of electrical generation.

The training moved the Fenton resident from the "comfort zone" of the tried and true practices of his profession and into the realms of solar power, sophisticated battery power-storage systems and other advances in the electrical field, no pun intended.

"It can be a difficult transition because of fear of the unknown," DeMoor said. "But with what is going on in the country, I had to ask myself, 'Will I have a job tomorrow?'"

With the recession stealing away work from 5,500 members of Local 1 and 725,000 union electricians nationwide, it's a good question.

Odds are that DeMoor will, for the simple reason that his personal compass pointed him in the direction that career counselors say is key to surviving in the post-recession job market.

An advanced degree isn't necessary. DeMoor doesn't have one, but, he says, he does have an open mind.

"I believe I'm going to learn until the day I die and after that comes the big understanding," he said.

"We can either fear technology or, we can figure it out."

DeMoor's philosophy landed him on the Ferguson campus where Emerson Electric makes its headquarters.

Named project superintendent by Guarantee, the national electronic con-

tractor based in St. Louis, DeMoor has spent the last year supervising the installation of the labyrinthine electrical system in the 35,000-square foot global data center Emerson will open next month.

The facility represents a \$50 million investment in building and informational technology equipment. It is designed to save energy in the operation of everything from high-powered servers to ventilation to a sensor system that automatically shuts off the lights when a room is not in use. A "redundant" energy storage system to prevent power outages and 240 battery cells to preserve energy are among the highlights DeMoor notes proudly during a tour of the building.

For the grand finale, DeMoor led me up a ladder and through a trap door to the roof where a 550-panel, 7,800-square-foot solar energy grid, capable of providing the structure with up to 25 percent of its power, rises majestically above the immaculate Emerson campus.

It is believed to be the largest solar grid in the state.

"No smokestacks," DeMoor observed. "No carbon emissions."

The unassuming DeMoor credits the project's architects and engineers responsible for the data center's design and infrastructure. "There were certain things that were sort of difficult to understand but generally, electricity is just electricity," DeMoor shrugged.

Brushing aside the suggestion that the center's Byzantine electrical schematic suggests he deserves a little credit, too, DeMoor insisted again that he is simply a "journeyman electrician."

"By the letter of the law, I'm the same as everybody else," DeMoor explained.

Albeit, much greener.