

# CAREERS IN THE TRADES

## RESOURCE GUIDE 2026



Resources, trainings, and opportunities for those interested in a career in the skilled trades industry

Ames Region

# A FUTURE WITH A CAREER IN THE TRADES

## Looking for a career that is built to last?

Something that pays competitively and has room for growth?

A role with stability in high demand?

A career that teaches you skills you can use in your every day life?

A place to work hands-on, allowing you to craft something new?

## Look no further than the Trades.

Throughout this guide, we will highlight some of the most common opportunities in the trade industry, showcase some of the local opportunities in the Ames region available to students, share some helpful resources to get started, and share the stories of individuals who are already building a future for themselves.

### What are 'trades'?

Trades, or vocational jobs, are jobs that need special skills and training in a particular field. These jobs usually involve hands-on work and require knowing how to use special tools and equipment. Many trades offer training programs, some paid, that help you learn the skills you'll need on the job.

### Why would I want to work in the trades?

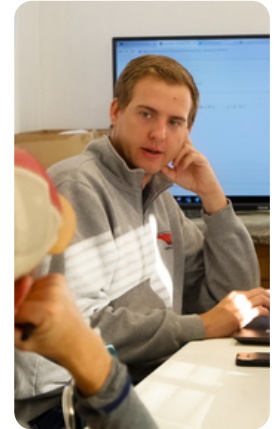
Careers in the trades allow students to invest in themselves and build real-world skills without taking on huge debt and spending years in school. Tradespeople play critical roles in society, ensuring that essential services are provided, infrastructure is maintained, and goods are produced. They work in diverse residential, commercial, and industrial settings. They may be employed by companies, contractors, or government agencies. One major aspect of the trade industry is that people can work as independent contractors or entrepreneurs, using their skills to become their own boss.

Trades offer rewarding career paths characterized by job security, competitive salaries, opportunities for advancement, and the satisfaction of making tangible contributions to society. Trades can also be a good pathway for people to enter the workforce quickly through apprenticeship programs, technical schools, or on-the-job training. Currently, many industries forecast that the demand for these jobs will rise, but the number of young people taking on these roles has decreased. As fewer and fewer young people enter the trade workforce, the people who take on these roles will become more valuable, earning higher wages and gaining more opportunities for different types of employment.

## Career Spotlight

# Woodruff Construction

Zach Phillips' journey into the construction industry is both inspiring and deeply rooted in his local community. Growing up in Nevada, Iowa, Zach was first introduced to Woodruff during a high school shop class presentation, which sparked his interest in construction and ultimately led him to pursue a degree in Construction Engineering at Iowa State University. His early connection with Woodruff came full circle at the Engineering Career Fair. From there, Zach began a hands-on journey with the company, starting as a field intern after his freshman year and returning each summer to build his skills through superintendent and project manager internships. Upon graduation in 2020, he officially joined Woodruff as an assistant project manager and quickly rose through the ranks—earning a promotion to project manager after just 3 months. By June of 2024, at only 26 years old, Zach made history as the youngest employee in the company to become a Senior Project Manager.



WOODRUFF CONSTRUCTION



100% Employee Owned

In just a few short years, Zach has distinguished himself as both a leader and a role model within Woodruff. He has not only completed the MBEye on the Future program through Master Builders of Iowa, but has also been recognized with two of the company's highest honors: the 2023 Judy Henze Office Leadership Award and the 2024 Leonard Woodruff Employee of the Year award—both voted on by his peers. Zach's leadership has been particularly evident in his role overseeing major projects, most notably leading the bid and project management for the Ames Nutrient Reduction Modification project, the largest contract in Woodruff's history. Alongside this achievement, he has managed a range of significant projects, including several water and wastewater facilities, the OnTrack Construction office in Nevada, and the recently completed Ames DOT office renovations. His rapid growth, strong leadership, and dedication to his craft showcase a remarkable career trajectory—one that continues to inspire both his colleagues and the next generation of construction professionals.



### Job Outlook

**45,800**

openings for construction managers per year, expected over the next decade



### Rising Sector

The construction industry is a rapidly growing field that will continue to demand more skilled professionals to design, build, and manage essential infrastructure projects.

## Career Spotlight

# Kruck Plumbing and Heating

Patrick Reed is a Plumbing Pre-Fabrication Leader who brings designs to life using materials like metal, wood, and piping for custom plumbing projects. He discovered his passion for hands-on construction early, working part-time at a local plumbing company in Boone while in high school. Encouraged by Mark Ashby to join Kruck Plumbing and Heating, Pat enrolled in the ABC of Iowa Plumbing Apprenticeship Program in 2013 and, by 2017, completed the four-year program, earning his Plumbing Journeyman license.

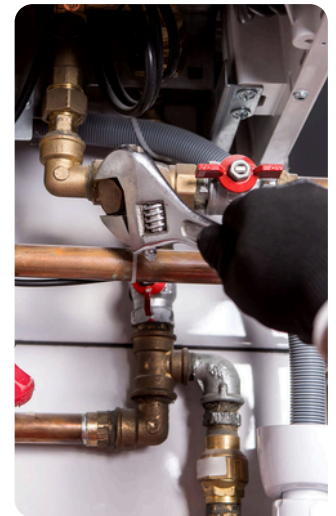


### → Job Outlook

**43,300** openings in the plumbing industry per year, expected over the next decade



Will Rainey is a third-year Plumbing Apprentice at Kruck Plumbing and Heating, gaining hands-on experience both in the classroom and on job sites. He discovered plumbing through Boone High School's EDGE program, and after initially planning to study engineering at Iowa State, he chose a gap year to try the trade with Kruck. That decision led him to enroll in the ABC of Iowa Plumbing Apprenticeship Program the following fall, sponsored by Kruck, where he continues to develop his skills. Will is also a second-generation Kruck team member, following in the footsteps of his mother, Shana Rainey.



### → Top 5 Skills

Critical Thinking, Active Listening, Systems Skill, Complex Problem Solving, Operation Monitoring

Zach Wulf is a fourth-year Sheet Metal Apprentice at Kruck Plumbing and Heating, preparing to complete his apprenticeship through ABC of Iowa in Spring 2026. He discovered his passion for sheet metal as a Boone High School junior in the EDGE program and continued as a summer intern at KPH, drawn to the variety and hands-on work. That fall, he enrolled in the Sheet Metal Apprenticeship Program, sponsored by Kruck, and has since developed his skills while contributing to diverse projects and seeing buildings come to life through design and fabrication.



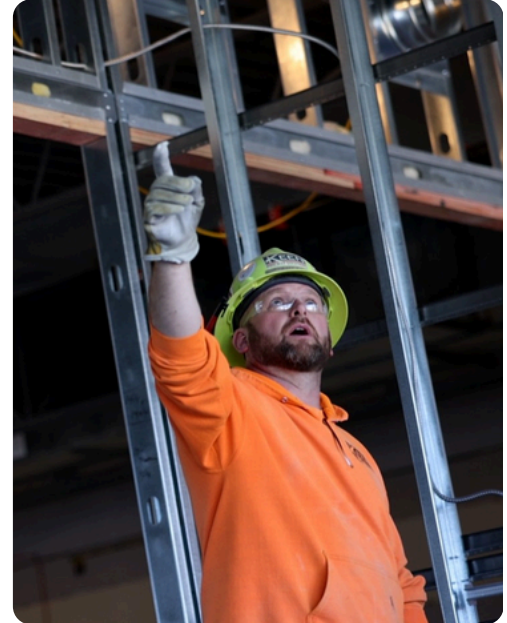
### → Job Outlook

**11,500** openings for sheet metal workers (including apprentices) per year, expected over the next decade

## Career Spotlight

# Keen Project Solutions

Growing up in a small town in rural Iowa was rewarding in many ways, but as graduation approached, I was faced with difficult questions about my future—what career I would pursue, where I would go to college, and what I would study. Unlike many of my classmates who came from farming families with clear paths ahead, I felt uncertain and pressured to figure it out quickly. With no exposure to building trades in high school, I initially followed my interest in cars, enrolling in college to study auto body repair. However, after graduating, I struggled to find stable, well-paying work in the field. Just as I began to feel stuck, a family friend who owned a construction company offered me a job. Despite having no experience, he assured me he would teach me everything I needed to know, and I jumped at the opportunity. From that day forward, I immersed myself in construction, learning everything from concrete and framing to plumbing, drywall, and finishing. I quickly discovered that I was mechanical, hands-on, and able to think outside the box—qualities that helped me thrive in this new career.



**KEEN**  
PROJECT SOLUTIONS

Over time, my skills and leadership ability grew, and I developed a strong passion for construction. Running my own crew gave me confidence, but I knew I wanted to take the next step into management, where I could have an even greater impact by overseeing schedules, budgets, and projects. Since the company I was with was too small to offer superintendent roles, I made the life-changing decision to move to the Des Moines area in pursuit of bigger opportunities. There, I joined the Carpenters Union, which provided excellent pay, benefits, and training. After several years as a foreman, I finally achieved my goal of becoming a superintendent, a role I have now held for 15 years. With over three decades in the industry, construction has not only given me a fulfilling career but also the chance to move back to rural Iowa and raise my family. My journey is proof that there are many rewarding opportunities in the construction industry, and I hope it inspires others to pursue their passions, even if the path forward doesn't seem clear at first.



### Top 5 Skills

Active Listening, Critical Thinking, Content Skill, Complex Problem Solving, Coordination



### Rising Sector

**1.2%** Increase annual growth rate in Story County

## Career Spotlight

# Mullenbach Construction & Painting

Parker started with Mullenbach Construction & Painting after high school as a scrapper, he worked up from scrapping sheet rock to running the texture crew and is now the residential superintendent and oversees all residential jobs.

Parker oversees our crews, our sub crews, and our projects from start to finish. Parkers dedication to learning and bettering his skill set has allowed him to climb the roles of the company to where he is now.



We take tremendous pride in providing continuous employment to our team members. We strive to live by our core values everyday and our constantly looking for individuals who fit our values to join our team! No Experience? No Problem! If you are willing to learn, we are willing to teach!

### Our Values:

- Respect
- Teamwork
- Positivity
- Growth
- Communication
- Pride



**Job Growth**

**8%**

growth in Painters, Construction and Maintenance fields within the Ames region from 2025-2035



**Rising Sector**

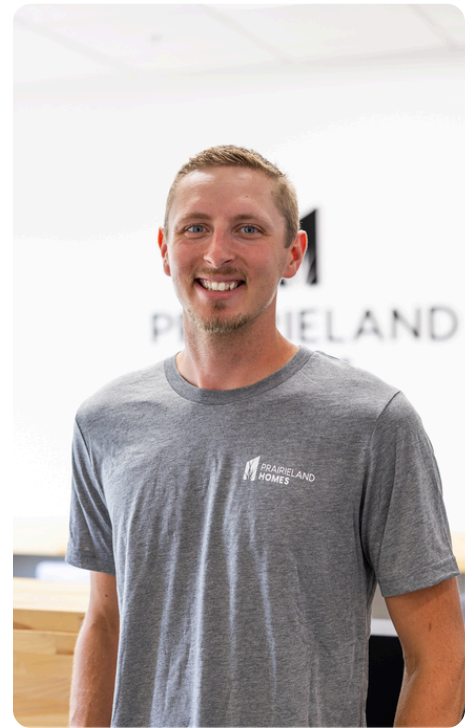
By 2031, 41% of construction workers are expected to retire

## Career Spotlight

# PrairieLand Homes

Ryan Cole has served as a Superintendent at PrairieLand Homes since 2020. In this role, he oversees the home-building process to ensure a smooth and efficient experience for all parties, from homeowners to his team. His responsibilities include managing day-to-day operations, such as scheduling and supervising subcontractors, conducting on-site inspections, and ensuring projects stay on schedule and within budget.

Ames native, Ryan's passion for craftsmanship began with a high school woodworking class at Ames High School. He was drawn to the tangible reward of working with his hands and transforming raw materials into a finished product. This early interest developed into a career where he now applies his skills daily to build homes that families will cherish for years to come.



As you've discovered throughout this guide, the trades offer a world of opportunity for those seeking fulfilling careers. With demand on the rise and a shortage of skilled workers projected, now is the perfect time to embark on your journey into the trades.

By choosing a career in the trades, you're investing in yourself and acquiring valuable skills that will serve you well throughout your life. Whether you're drawn to plumbing, electrical work, HVAC, carpentry, construction management, or one of dozens of other trade opportunities, each road offers its own unique rewards and pathways for growth.

So, take the first step. Explore apprenticeship programs, technical schools, or on-the-job training opportunities here in the Ames region. Seek out mentors, connect with industry professionals, and investigate which trades would be the best fit for you.

The future is bright for those willing to roll up their sleeves and get to work. Your journey into the trades starts now – seize the opportunity and build your path to success!



# Programs & Local Opportunities

## DMACC Career Academy

[www.dmacc.edu/careeradvantage/cadmaccclasses.html](http://www.dmacc.edu/careeradvantage/cadmaccclasses.html)

Career Academies engage high school students and prepare them for successful transitions to post-secondary education and employment. Organized as small learning communities, they combine academic and technical curricula around a career theme. These themes help Career Academies to establish partnerships with local employers to provide work-based learning opportunities

# DMACC

## Iowa Works Apprenticeship Services

[www.workforce.iowa.gov](http://www.workforce.iowa.gov)

IowaWorks provides free career services throughout the State of Iowa. Resources include access to no-cost training workshops, the ability to earn training certificates, access to career and skill assessments, coaching and assistance with resume writing and online applications, and more.

The logo for Iowa Works features a green swoosh above the text "Iowa WORKS". "Iowa" is in black and "WORKS" is in green.

Iowa **WORKS**



# FREE RETRAINING PROGRAMS

**Free to all residents in Story County 18+ with a diploma or GED  
Classes take place at various DMACC Campuses**

## BENEFITS

- **Transportation assistance** - Gas card each week you attend a class
- **Childcare assistance** - determined on a case by case basis
- **Cash Stipend** - \$150 half way through the class, \$150 at the end of class, \$300 after working in a job in Story County for 30 days (\$600 total)

## STEPS

**Step 1** - apply with the WTA application (Workforce Training Academy)

**Step 2** - you will be contacted by DMACC

## HOW LONG ARE CLASSES?

Classes are 5-15 weeks depending on the course.

## WHY SHOULD I SIGN UP?

This FREE Retraining Program provides an opportunity to master new skills and technology that will set you apart in the workforce. You get real-world experience and can earn a certificate and begin your new career adventure in weeks.

## CLASS LIST

- Office Specialist PLUS
- Dog Grooming
- IT/Helpdesk Fundamentals
- Direct Support Professional
  - Behavioral & Mental Health
  - Developmental Disabilities
- Nurse Aide
- Phlebotomy
- Sterile Processing Supply Tech
- Industrial Electrical Maintenance
- MIG Production Welding
- Commercial Driver's License (CDL)

Visit [dmacc.edu/careertraining](https://dmacc.edu/careertraining) for more information

The Retraining Program is Presented by:





# FREE RETRAINING PROGRAMS

## Mid-States Companies

Mid-States Companies is a leader in agricultural construction. Much of their 20+ year reputation is in providing a full range of design-to-build contracting services, notably for grain and feed storage construction. The company is multi-generational and family-owned with their roots in Nevada dating back to 1965. They are proud to call Nevada and Story County home and invest in not only the community, but their people as well.

Dustin Johns is a Production Manager at Mid-States Companies. As a supervisor, he has encouraged several people to participate in the Retraining Program and sees it as an opportunity.

“Often times, we have employees come in at an entry-level position and absolutely love working at Mid-States because of the culture we have built,” said Johns. “They want to do more with our company and want to make more money. This is where we used the Retraining Program to help make that happen.” One of those people was James Stewart who completed the welding program in March 2022.

Stewart admits that he had no metals background when he started at Mid-States, but he had always been interested in learning a new skill. He started taking the evening classes and quickly realized that he had a natural ability to weld. He started in shipping at Mid-States, and today does welding full-time and hasn’t looked back. “It changed the way I look at things, not only for my career, but what Mid-States does.”

High on a wall on the production floor reads “Hard Work Beats Talent When Talent Doesn’t Work Hard”. It’s a mantra that the company lives by, but it can also serve as a reminder of the seriousness of the products they are building. Welding is a process where two pieces of metal are fused together by heat and pressure. At Mid-States, the quality of weld supports buildings and cat-walk structures that people walk on, sometimes 200 feet in the air. There is not an opportunity for errors or producing a weak product.

Stewart notes that the program has helped him out financially (having this skill earns him a higher wage), but that he is also more excited to come to work every day.

“We have to leverage the talent that we already have in the building,” says Johns. “We want to push people to grow, advance their career, and ultimately stay here at Mid-States. If we can support that through this program, we will continue to do that.”

Developing high-quality welders is a passion that Johns has not only at Mid-States Companies, but beyond. He learned on the job while employed at ALMACO, another Nevada-based manufacturing company, and today is a welding instructor at DMACC and teaches high school students at Nevada High School. He fully recognizes that not every student he works with will pursue welding as a career, but high school is a time of career exploration, and he loves sparking that interest in students.

The Retraining Program continues to be a viable option for Mid-States Companies. Never one to sit idle, Johns is taking coursework this spring to get his Commercial Driver’s License (CDL).

Traction Magazine Issue 02 - Spring 2023

The Retraining Program is Presented by:



# Additional Resources

## Looking for employers?

The Ames Home Builders Association (AHBA) is a non-profit trade organization dedicated to promoting a positive business environment by uniting, serving, and representing all aspects of the building industry.

The Association's services and activities foster the professionalism of its members and provide a forum for education and information exchange for the benefit of the industry and the communities its members serve.

AHBA monitors and exerts influence upon issues and regulations affecting the housing industry. The Ames Home Builders Association is an affiliate of the Iowa HBA and the National Association of Home Builders.



Thank You

# Workforce Sponsors



**START YOUR CAREER**

We're proud to offer a diverse range of career opportunities in our community, spanning industries from tech and healthcare to education and manufacturing. This site allows employers to post jobs for free and gives job seekers easy access to job openings. Whether you're looking to grow your team or take the next step in your career, the job board is a valuable tool to connect, explore, and become part of our vibrant workforce.

**WORKINAMES.COM**