

# ENERGY EFFICIENCY: A “LIFE-CHANGING” CAREER MOVE



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—FRANKLIN SHELKEY  
SHEET METAL JOURNEYMAN

“It’s just a bunch of people who have a common goal: a better life for our families,” says sheet metal journeyman Franklin Shelkey, explaining how sheet metal workers like him help everyone save energy through efficiency. Shelkey designs and engineers air duct systems that move heated and cooled air efficiently, providing indoor comfort through all seasons. When built properly, he says, a building’s heating and cooling systems can use 20 percent less power, while still providing the same comfort. That helps make businesses more competitive, and rewards homeowners with lower monthly power bills.

**SHELKEY RECENTLY COMPLETED A FIVE-YEAR APPRENTICESHIP** with the Sheet Metal, Air, Rail & Transportation Workers Local 12 (SMART) union outside of Pittsburgh. His apprenticeship earned him journeyman status, a highly competitive title that makes him

“more proud than my diploma,” Shelkey says.

Before he began sheet metal work, Shelkey studied finance and earned a bachelor’s degree in 2008 from California University of Pennsylvania. But he notes, 2008 “was probably the worst year in

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recent history to look for a job in finance”—the Great Recession had caused widespread economic decline, especially in the finance industry. “I literally completed hundreds of job applications without getting a single interview, because I couldn’t get my foot in the door,” Shelkey remembers.

“I also realized I didn’t want to sit at a desk and crunch numbers for a living,” he adds. So, when an entry-level job opened at Ductmate Industries, the state’s leading manufacturer of duct systems, he made his move—a move he calls literally “life-changing.” Thanks, in part, to Pennsylvania policies like Act 129 that encourage businesses of all sizes to save energy, Ductmate has grown to employ approximately 250 workers in the Keystone State. After six months with Ductmate, Shelkey took a test for a sheet metal apprenticeship and was one of 30 who passed.

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Training through the SMART Local 12 union virtually guarantees job placement in western Pennsylvania, with 99.9 percent of SMART apprentices successfully placed in good jobs, says Local 12 SMART Business Representative Kevin Malley. For example, about 30 SMART Local 12 members worked to install duct systems for the PNC Tower in Pittsburgh, a 33-story Platinum LEED skyscraper that bills itself as one of the world’s greenest office buildings. “We were already geared up to take that on; we were already trained for it,” says Malley. “We have a better chance of getting these cutting-edge projects because of our training.”

That’s good news for Shelkey and sheet metal workers like him, who care about how their work helps businesses and homeowners save energy, and save money.

