

Apprenticeship expand beyond trades

September 1, 2016

BY EMILY GOWDEY-BACKUS | GOWDEY-BACKUS@PBN.COM

When Andrew Cortes became an apprentice carpenter at 17, he had never swung a hammer before.

He's now director of Apprenticeship Rhode Island, a \$5 million nonprofit partnership between the R.I. Department of Labor and Training and The Providence Plan tasked with helping the state expand apprenticeships to nontraditional occupations. He says such apprenticeships, designed to build knowledge through on-the-job training and classroom instruction, allow participants to get paid while learning, "and you don't end up with any student debt."

A new state law provides monetary incentives for nontrade-industry companies to create similar experiences through apprenticeship programs in fields such as information technology, management, design and manufacturing.

The law calls on the Governor's Workforce Board to establish a wage-reimbursement program that would pay back 50 percent of wages for up to five apprentices in any registered, nontrade company, or \$1,000, whichever is less. In a 12-month period the maximum any one employer can collect is \$5,000.

DLT spokesman Mike Healey said \$150,000 has been included in the fiscal 2017 budget for the program.

According to Mathematica, an Illinois-based research company, apprentices can earn \$300,000 more over a lifetime than nonparticipants in related fields.

"It makes a lot of sense to incentivize smaller employers to develop an apprenticeship

program outside of traditional occupations," Cortes said.

Bill McCourt, president and CEO of the Rhode Island Manufacturers' Association, agrees the incentive is a real benefit for smaller companies. McCourt said another incentive exists, but only for C corporations, which are taxed separate from their owners. These organizations can receive a \$4,800 tax credit from the state.

When she was researching to build DESIGNxRI's Design Forward fellowship program, Lisa Carnevale, the nonprofit's executive director, said the new state law was the kind of incentive she was hoping to find to help the industry grow.

"The other [apprenticeship programs] were very specific for hands-on, industrial sectors," she added.

Cortes, who was asked by the bill's sponsor, Senate Majority Leader Dominick J. Ruggerio, D-North Providence, to advise his staff on the legislation, said the GWB is defining the rules for how and when companies can apply for the incentive.

"There's an awful lot of employer interest," he said. •