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A New Way to Get Your Construction Management Degree

MODERATOR:

- Heidi Ellsworth, RoofersCoffeeShop®, Partner

PANELISTS:

- Amie Grant, WTI®, Education and community outreach coordinator
- Joey Lee, WIT®, Lead foreman

Heidi Ellsworth:

Thank you for attending today's Roofers Coffee Shop webinar. This is Heidi Ellsworth, a partner with Roofers Coffee Shop, and we are very honored to welcome all of you and the team from WTI, the Weatherproofing Technologies, which is a subsidiary of Tremco Roofing. Today's webinar is going to be about how to get that new construction management degree. We are very excited to hear about it, but first, let's have a few housekeeping items.

All attendees will be muted, but feel free to ask questions or comment in the comment area on your webinar panel on the right of your screen. At the end of the webinar, we will have a Q&A segment where you will be able to ask questions that you type in into that webinar panel and I will grab them from there. The webinar is being recorded and will be available online to view, listen, or read as part of our Read Listen Watch, RLW, program. We would love it if you would also share everything you see today or hear or read with your fellow roofing professionals. Let's get started.

As I mentioned, in today's webinar, we're looking at a new way to get your construction management degree. There is a lot of need out there right now in roofing for a good labor force and for talent. There are companies like WTI and Tremco who are really going above and beyond to put together programs to help teach young people, people who want to change careers, about the roofing industry. In fact, going to a point where they're actually working with local universities and colleges to provide training to allow new employees to really get into the roofing industry.

Today, that's what we're going to hear about and we're going to learn how this is all working. Our first panelist is Amie Grant. Amie is WTI's education and community outreach coordinator. She is also the education chair for the Cleveland, Ohio chapter of National Women in Roofing. I've been very lucky to work with Amie and she is doing some amazing things with WTI in community outreach in working to recruit and bringing people into the roofing industry. She also has received her master's degree in education from Cleveland State University, so has a lot of great experience really understanding what goes on when you're trying to get your degree and also work full-time.

Amie, thank you so much for being here today.

Amie Grant: Thank you. I'm excited to tell you about our programs.

Heidi Ellsworth: Excellent. I also want to introduce Joey Lee. Joey Lee is a lead foreman for WTI in Eastern Tennessee and he has been an employee of WTI's since October of 2008. He is very accomplished with his OSHA 30 training. He has received his Registered Roof Observer Certification through RCI and he is one of the shining examples of the Rise program. He is currently in the middle of that program to get his construction engineering degree.

We're very excited to hear exactly how Joey is making this happen and what he's doing, so Joey, thank you so much for being here today.

Joey Lee: Thank you for having me, Heidi.

Heidi Ellsworth: Okay. I gave just a little small introduction there, but what we really want to do is hear from our panelists what they are doing, what's their education, what's their career path, what's their story. Amie, why don't you kick it off and give us some insight into what you're doing with your career?

Amie Grant: Sure. I've been with WTI since 2017. Before that, I worked for almost a decade at a public housing authority, so I have a lot of background in social services, that kind of thing. I was really just looking for a change at that point. Where I was there wasn't a ton of opportunity for growth or to move up, so I took a chance and made a career change and came to WTI originally as a cost engineer. I had the opportunity to learn a lot about the industry, what goes into making a project successful, that sort of thing, a really good foundation for moving into my current role which is the education and community outreach coordinator.

I also went to school for school counseling, so I have a master's degree in education, always been really passionate about education. I'm really happy to be in the position I'm in where I can focus on that passion and help people move forward with their lives.

Heidi Ellsworth: I think it's just amazing that Tremco and WTI is so focused on helping employees bringing in people to the industry that they have someone like you full-time. It's really inspirational, Amie, so thank you for what you're doing.

Amie Grant: Yeah, thank you. I love it. It's great.

Heidi Ellsworth: That's cool. So, Joey, same thing. Why don't you share a little bit about how you got into roofing, what you're doing, your career path? Tell us your story.

Joey Lee: Well, my story starts in high school. My father in 2014 or 15 started working for WTI. Graduating high school, I originally wanted to be a pilot. I was going to go to school, going to fly, and then I was colorblind so I failed the physical to actually be a commercial airline pilot. At that point, I was looking at options, wasn't sure what my backup plan was so I came to work for WTI. From there, I enjoyed the travel, enjoyed being out on the roofs, and then took advantage of what WTI offered me.

They'd given me opportunities to get my RRO. They've trained me through safety, getting me my OSHA 30. Now, I'm the lead foreman in East Tennessee and hopefully soon, a construction manager once I finish the RISE program.

Heidi Ellsworth: Wow! That's exciting. A little bit about where are you in the program right now?

Joey Lee: I'm about done with my associates. I have, I think, one semester left, and I've already started a couple of actual construction management classes [inaudible 00:06:41] as well as the associate's classes.

Heidi Ellsworth: That's exciting. You're going to love it. You're getting into the good stuff now. Speaking of good stuff, there's a lot of young people out there and, I think, even people who maybe have been in one career but they're looking for a change, that really don't understand how great roofing is. Joey, I'd like you to share some of the experiences you've had, what you see as entry points into roofing, the career paths that are available, and what education helps with that. If you could share that with our audience, that would be great.

Joey Lee:

Yeah, so the main entry point you typically find is coming to work for a roofing contractor, stepping into that role as maybe a laborer or lower on the roofing scale. Depending on your dedication, your study time, things like that, you can definitely work your way up quick. I think I was out as a patch and repair tech within maybe six to nine months, fixing leaks on my own. That took a lot of time working on the roof and then also, in the afternoon, finding stuff to study, to learn different roofing systems to make myself better at the craft that I was dedicating myself to.

Once you're in career path-wise, you can move up on the labor side as far as becoming a foreman or a supervisor. Within WTI, after you become a supervisor, you can work your way into construction management, which is what I'm doing now, and then work your way into a regional business manager. Hopefully, one day I can work my way to a vice president position.

That's where I think education becomes big within our industry. The more that you want to do, you're capable of doing it, and WTI's giving you that option with the RISE program and even the apprenticeship program as well that Amie will get into here shortly.

Heidi Ellsworth:

Excellent. I don't think people really realize how much opportunity there is in the trades and especially in roofing and we're seeing it every day. We need to get out there more and continue to let them know about it. Amie, talk to us a little bit about what RISE is. Maybe tell us a little bit how it got started, how Tremco really went down this ... And, WTI, why they formed this and then what it's all about with the apprenticeship program and the construction management degree.

Amie Grant:

Sure. I don't think it's any secret that we're really anticipating some labor shortages in the future, so we were taking this really innovative and proactive role to invest in the future of the labor force. A big part of that is our RISE program. RISE stands for Roofing Individuals Succeed Through Education. Right now, there's two options in the program. We have an apprenticeship which is the industry's only non-union apprenticeship program across the country. It combines on-the-job training with related online and classroom instruction. Our program is nationally accredited and federal sanctioned, so it's available in all 50 states.

That's a pretty cool thing. No matter where you're located, you can be a part of this program. Apprentices receive about 4,000 hours of work instruction and about 400 hours of online and classroom instruction. Part of that includes 17 college credit hours towards the associate's degree that I'll talk about in a second, with our construction management program. When people complete the apprenticeship program, they get a journeyman's card and because we're not affiliated with a union, there's no indentureship and they're free to take that wherever they like.

The second kind of path we have is our construction management program. This is an exciting partnership with the University of Akron here in Akron, Ohio. We're able to provide online associate's and bachelor's degrees in construction management at no cost to our employees. The University of Akron is a real college campus. While this is an online degree, it is a real school. There's 22,000 students that attend and hundreds of degrees in associate's, bachelor's, master's, doctorate and law. They're really experts in offering career-focused and experiential learning and help students get ahead in the job market.

Our classes, while they are online, are taught by the same high-quality faculty who teach on campus. Similar to the apprenticeship program, no matter where people live, they can take advantage of this because, from application to placement testing, students can learn wherever they want whenever they want. It's really built by design to be flexible for our employees.

Then, really, the great thing about both of these programs, there's no requirement to pay anything back to us at any time and there's no commitment to long-term employment. In theory, you could get your bachelor's degree with us and decide to go somewhere else the next day. We're pretty sure you're not going to do that with a great company to work for and we're really excited about these programs. But, there's really no strings attached in any kind of way.

Heidi Ellsworth:

That is so important. You just don't hear that. When you talk about educational programs, whether it's apprenticeships or college through any large corporations, very seldom are there no strings attached. That's a really big benefit.

Amie Grant:

Yeah, it's an offer to really get a lot of work experience but also not to have to take out student loans which can be so crippling for a lot of people. There really is a shift when I talk to folks in the education fields from the traditional going to college after high school, there's really a shift to focus on manufacturing, skilled trades, that sort of thing. We're on the cusp of that change.

Heidi Ellsworth:

Wow. That is excellent. Joey, you gave us a little bit of your background and you talked to us about that and that you made this decision. Can you share why RISE? I know you started with Tremco. There's a lot of places to go to college. There's a lot of places to get your education, but what really brought you into RISE and what are you finding when it comes to meeting some of those goals you shared with us and working full-time? There's a lot that goes on trying to put college education and working full-time together.

Joey Lee:

Yeah, RISE was an easy decision for me. My wife went and got her master's degree, but the entire time she was in school, we've always talked about I would go to school after. It just so happened, nine months after she graduated, Maureen and Amie and them put out fliers for the RISE program and said, "Who would be interested?" I immediately jumped on it, have no regrets at all.

My father has always been a goal-oriented person, so when I started here, he always said, "Okay, where do you want to be in five years? Where do you want to be 10 years? How do you want to end your career and what are you going to do to get there?" College education was always one of those steps for me to get where I wanted to be if one day I wanted to be an RBM or VP within WTI.

As far as working full-time and college, it's a bit of a challenge, but if you can dedicate and manage your time correctly, it is absolutely doable. Family, wife, or if you have kids, 30 minutes a day in most cases will still allow you to take one or two classes in a semester and meet your deadlines. The other thing is within WTI, they're so supportive of this program, they just allow you to, "Hey, I might need a couple hours on Friday. I got a paper due." They're willing to say yes because they know it's important and they know what they're trying to build here and that this part of it is actually a huge portion of our future.

Heidi Ellsworth:

I just think that's so great to be able to work for a company like that. Tell us, share with us the journey you've had so far. Doing the work-life-school balance, the challenges, I know you touched on it, but maybe go a little bit deeper and just how are you doing it? To our audience who are thinking about this, how do you balance all that?

Joey Lee:

Yeah, I wake up really early on a daily basis, anywhere between four and five. Anybody on here that's already in roofing probably knows you wake up a little early, but then you also sometimes get off a little early. I try and dedicate 30 to 45 minutes a day. Sometimes I have to work maybe before the wife gets home, that way I'm not losing time with my family. Also, at the same time, accomplishing my goals on what I need to get done for school.

30 - 45 minutes a day, weekends you got a paper due, maybe you write it on Saturday. Sit down. A 2,000-word essay or 1,000-word essay, five, six, seven hours, maybe split it up over two days. It's definitely doable in keeping your work life and your family life and your school life separated but also getting everything done and keeping everybody happy. At the end of the day, it's really making your education a priority and getting yourself where you want to be in your life.

You're looking at a short time period that you're actually in school and by making a few sacrifices, you can be where you want to be, and you actually have more opportunity for family time in the future getting through the program and dedicating yourself.

Heidi Ellsworth:

Good. Thank you. Very inspirational. Joey, we're going to have you talk just a little bit more, switching gears here a little bit, talk about why roofing? 'Cause there's going to be a number of people who are listening to this webinar. Many of them are already in roofing and you've already talked about, "Hey, this is great. This is a way to enhance your career path," but let's talk just a little bit to maybe some of the people who are listening who are thinking about coming

into the roofing industry. Why would you say people should come into roofing? What is really motivating about our industry?

Joey Lee:

Well, I would say the biggest is the opportunity that we offer here. You have the ability to turn yourself into whatever you want to be. Depending on how hard you want to work, how hard you want to study, and how hard you want to dedicate yourself, you can really do anything. You can own your own business. You can work for WTI and work your way up. You can work for another contractor, but, at the end of the day, you hold control based on your ability and your dedication.

It's a recession-proof industry. Everybody has to have a roof on their house. If they've got a shed in the back, then you've got to have a roof on it. Every building in the United States has to have a roof on it. A lot of these are covered by different programs. Hospitals are required to have leak-free roofs. It creates an industry that's really recession-proof because they have to do it.

Then, also, we have an aging workforce. I have the issue here in East Tennessee finding good roofers that are also younger. I can find plenty of guys that are good roofers, but the younger generation just isn't coming into contracting, especially roofing. They just look at it and they bypass it as if it's nothing. That's where I think RISE is such a big deal because now you can learn on the job and, at the same time, get a college education. When you're done with your college education, to me, you're actually ahead of where a lot of college graduates are because of the experience that you've gathered through that time.

Talking with friends that I have that have graduated college, some of the biggest issues they have is everybody wants two to three years of experience, but they just graduated after going to school for seven years. They don't have it, but with this program, you do have it. You have everything that somebody would want in an employee.

Heidi Ellsworth:

That's really true. We're talking about this aging workforce, even thinking about something of us older folks who maybe want to go back and get some continuing education to learn about a lot of the things that are going on on the roofs that are different than they were five, 10 years ago, this also offers that type of opportunity.

Joey Lee:

Yeah, through the apprenticeship program, they have the RISE, you don't want to go to college and get a construction management degree. Through the apprenticeship program, you're going to be able to go through and you're going to learn up-to-date codes, you're going to learn up-to-date, detailed drawings. You're going to learn how to read specs and things like that to where you can further yourself. Even if you're already in roofing and you don't want to dedicate to the college, you're able to say, "Hey, I still want to go be a foreman. I don't want to be on the roof anymore." Or, you're a foreman, "You know what? I want to be a supervisor. I want to be the project manager-type guy." You can learn that through our apprenticeship program as well.

Heidi Ellsworth: That is great. I know that there is a number of ... The proof is in the pudding. We are seeing it out there every day. Amie, I know you have some really interesting statistics on what's happening in roofing and the labor overall and why continuing education is so important. Maybe you can share some of that with us.

Amie Grant: Sure. According to the Department of Labor, our industry is growing at a rate of 11% over the next 10 years, that's just compared to the national average of 7%. Definitely above average. With the existing and future labor shortages and the aging workforce, you guys touched on a little bit, it's a great time to get in, learn a new trade. With people who are moving into retirement age, there's plenty of opportunities to move up.

Obviously, we're trying to attract new employees with this, but there's a wealth of studies out there that show how continuing education like ours increases employee retention and professional growth and it really fosters a positive company culture. I read a study on workplace learning that was done by LinkedIn in 2018, and it says that 94% of employees would stay at a company longer if they invested in their careers. That's pretty huge. There's plenty of other benefits too to initiatives like this, like increased employee morale, corporate pride. Both of those lend themselves to better productivity and attendance.

Heidi Ellsworth: I agree. I think it's one of the best things anyone can do for themselves. And, for I know a number of young people who are coming out of high school maybe community college, this is that opportunity for them to really look at apprenticeships and then taking that apprenticeship and going to the next step of a construction degree if they want to. I can tell you as a parent, this is pretty enticing. Are you seeing some things that way with even the parents coming and saying, "Hey, our kids are going to be graduating from high school. I'd like more information on this program?"

Amie Grant: Absolutely. The funny thing is, we've been traveling a lot promoting this to a lot of high school seniors, and I'll get calls from the parents that say, "My son told me about this program, and I know there's a catch. It's too good to be true, and he had to have something wrong here." But, there really isn't a catch and this is really just our way of trying to lift up the industry as a whole by providing these opportunities.

Heidi Ellsworth: Wow. Okay. Let's talk about that a little bit more. How do you apply, eligibility? How do you do this? Let's talk about it if you're coming out of high school or continuing education or maybe even you're a parent out there who wants to do a little bit of research. How do they go about it, Amie?

Amie Grant: Sure. We have a website. It's www.wtirise.com. There's an interest form on that site where potential employees can complete an interest form and that will come right to me and I'll reach out to them with more information. There's also a ton of information on our careers website, which is careers.tremcoinc.com.

That's a great place to check out what kind of positions we have and see more information about our benefits.

As far as eligibility goes, we do require 90 days of employment before you're able to enroll in the RISE program. You do have to have your high school diploma or your GED, but if you don't, I wouldn't want that to discourage anybody from being interested in a career path in roofing. If you don't have your GED, but it's something you want to do, definitely reach out to us still and we can help you work on that so you're ready for this program. Once folks are in the program, they need to maintain a 2.0 GPA with all the college coursework.

Heidi Ellsworth: Maybe you don't know this, but how many folks do you have enrolled right now, Amie?

Amie Grant: I believe it's somewhere around 19 so far of current employees. That includes people studying for the summer semester.

Heidi Ellsworth: Excellent. Wow. That is great. We really have given all the information out there. We talked about how to get into this and the importance of it, but we really want to open it up for questions from our audience to see what questions you may have about this program or how to get involved or what you should be doing. Please, feel free to put your questions into the box as we discussed. I do have a few that have come in.

We're just talking about how to apply. What is the due dates? Right now we're in March. If they want to get into the summer or if they want to get in the fall or maybe next January, Amie, thinking ahead, what should they be doing right now?

Amie Grant: They do have to get that 90 days of employment with us in. If you're talking about maybe a high school senior, if they're 18, they can start the application process right now and we can get them started in the summer. That way they'll get that 90 days and they can start school in the fall and still be on the same track that they would be if they went to a traditional college path. We really encourage our students coming out of high school that if they can work for us part-time and focus on school full-time, we'd really prefer that they did that and make their education a priority.

In general, once folks get hired on, after that 90 days, they can start the following semester. They don't have to wait until the next fall, they can start in the summer, the spring, or the fall semesters.

Heidi Ellsworth: Great. Okay. One other question to you, Amie. What about relocation? Do people have to relocate? Is this open nationally? How does that work?

Amie Grant: Great, that's a good question. While the college is based in Akron, Ohio, everything is online. There's no need to travel for this program at all. We have employment opportunities throughout the country and beyond really. There's

no need to relocate for this program. It's really, really flexible, which Joey talked about a little bit. No matter where you're at, we can work on this program where you are and when you can do it.

Heidi Ellsworth: That's nice. I work from home. I like working from home, so that's good [inaudible 00:27:02] working out in the field. That's excellent.

Amie Grant: Yeah.

Heidi Ellsworth: Okay, we have another question. I think this is a good one for Joey. Joey, are there requirements that you have to meet as in do you have to have experience in roofing or construction? We know you need to have a GED or high school diploma, but any other requirements?

Joey Lee: There aren't any requirements. Age and the GED or the high school diploma, which Amie also said, "Don't worry about." We can also help you accomplish finishing. If you haven't gotten your high school diploma, at least get your GED to get you into these programs. Past that, you need a good attitude and some dedication and hard work. That will get you in.

Heidi Ellsworth: Great. That's nice. This is a question that just came in. How do they know? How do they know if they're going to like roofing or if they're going to like construction or if this is something they want to do or even if they're going to like going back to college? Joey, what have you found as you've taken that journey?

Joey Lee: I think it's personal for each person. I enjoy being outdoors. I like going hiking. I was a two to three-sport athlete. Working hard and just physical labor did bring me in, but then, after that, I said, "Okay, I don't want to beat my body all the way up even though I enjoy it now that I'm younger. Let me work forward." Anybody can really do it. A lot of times you've got to try it and see if you like it. A lot of people aren't willing to step out and say, "I don't know if I want to work hard."

Not everything for us is really hard labor. We have restorations, which is at a basic sense, painting a roof. You might move some buckets around, but we really do watch it, WTI, about safety. We care about strains. We care about sprains. We try to use as much equipment as possible to move weight to where your body isn't taking a toll like it used to when guys started roofing back in the 60s, 70s, 80s. It was just, pull the bucket up. Carry the bucket up the ladder. Now, we have pulleys or we have lifts or lulls to make sure the material is getting moved where it's not killing everybody's body every day.

It really has opened up to anybody that wants to do it, I think you should give it a try. It's something that you may enjoy even if you haven't thought about it before.

Heidi Ellsworth: Great, great. We have one last question. Is there any limit to how many people who can get into this program? Amie?

Amie Grant: No, there's no limit. We're really using this as a recruiting tool to attract people to the industry and if people are interested, I hope that they reach out whether it's on the website or contacting me directly. I think my contact information is on the slide there. Feel free to call or text or email me and we can talk about it more.

Heidi Ellsworth: Perfect. WTI and Tremco also have some great information on this on the Coffee Shop website, rooferscoffeeshop.com. Please visit the Tremco directory, the WTI directory. We have blogs on the RISE program. We're going to be blogging on success stories like Joey that we're going to continue to see that is coming out of this.

I have to say, I do a lot of work with a lot of different groups and associations in the industry and Tremco and WTI is really putting their money where their mouth is. You guys are really stepping out and you are really doing the things that are going to help attract people to the roofing industry. We applaud you. Thank you so much for everything you're doing.

Amie Grant: Yeah, thank you. We're really excited about it.

Heidi Ellsworth: Excellent.

Joey Lee: Yes. Yes, thank you, Heidi.

Heidi Ellsworth: Thank you. Well, thank you, Amie and Joey. Again, thank you for being here and being a part of this RLW. Again, thank you to the audience for being here today and for listening. I would ask you to please visit rooferscoffeeshop.com. That's where you can learn more about WTI and Tremco and the RISE program.

Be sure to check out all the blogs, the directories, the webinars, podcasts, and e-books because, as part of this RLW, Read Listen Watch program, we are creating information to help all of our audience, all of you who are on here, to really understand what's available in the roofing industry and to learn your way when you want. If you want to listen to it on your way to work or read about it in the wee hours of the morning, 'cause we all heard Joey's getting up pretty early, this is a great place to learn what opportunities are out there for you.

We will be having continued webinars in RLW series happening again in April, so please watch for the next segment coming up. If you have any thoughts or ideas, please feel free to send those to us as Roofers Coffee Shop. We want to be able to offer information that you need. Thank you so much for attending today and have a wonderful week.