Ophthalmic lab technicians: eyeglasses made to order

There are two types of ophthalmic laboratory technicians, surfacers and bench technicians. These technicians spend most of their time preparing lenses for eyeglasses, but they also assemble and modify frames.

Starting with standard size lens blanks, surfacers lay out the work, and grind and polish the lens surfaces. They use precision instruments to measure the lenses and make sure they fit the prescription.

In small laboratories one person may do all these duties, including the benchwork. But in larger operations the work is divided into separate operations performed by workers skilled in the operation of power-grinding and polishing machines.

Bench technicians mark and cut lenses and smooth their edges to properly fit the frames. They then assemble the lenses and frame parts into finished glasses.

Lens cutters, glass drills and small files are all special tools used by the bench technician. In addition, they use automatic edging machines to shape lens edges and precision instruments, to detect imperfections.

Most skills of ophthalmic laboratory technicians are learned on the job. Technician trainees begin by performing simple tasks such as processing lenses through a grinding machine. As they gain experience, they progress to other operations such as lens cutting and eyeglass assembly.

Usually, to gain experience in all types of work, it takes about three years.

Technicians are considered all-round optical mechanics after having acquired this experience. Some technicians specialize in either surfacing or bench work, and the training time required to specialize is less than that needed to become an all-round technician

Three to four year apprentice programs are available to potential ophthalmic technicians. Apprentices with exceptional ability may complete their training in a shorter period of time.

Training authorities report that technicians who undergo the formal apprentice training have more job opportunities and more room for advancement. Vocational schools also offer nine-month, full-time optical technician courses.

Employers prefer applicants for entry jobs as ophthalmic laboratory technicians to be high school graduates who have had courses in the basic sciences, mathematics and mechanical drawing is particularly valuable.

Some states require licenses of ophthalmic laboratory technicians. The applicant must meet certain minimum standards of education and training and must also pass either a written or a practical examination, or both. Technicians should consult licensing boards in prospective states for information.

Opthalmic laboratory technicians may become supervisors and managers. Many of them have become dispensing opticians.

In 1974, about 22,000 persons worked as ophthalmic laboratory technicians. Most of this population was concentrated in large cities and states.

Forecasts for employment of ophthalmic laboratory technicians is expected to increase faster than the average rate for all occupations through the mid-1980's. More technicians will be needed to fill the rising demand for eyeglasses.

State programs to provide eye care for low-income families, Medicare and union health insurance plans will stimulate demand.

According to some union contracts, hourly wage rates for the technicians ranged from $3.61 to $6.14 in 1974. Some ophthalmic laboratory technicians are union members. The principal union is the International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (AFL-CIO).

For a list of schools offering courses for people interested in becoming ophthalmic laboratory technicians, contact the: National Academy of Opticianry, 514 Chestnut St., Big Rapids, Mich. 49307.

For general information about the occupation, contact: International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers, 1126 16th St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036; Optical Wholesalers Association, 6905 Wisconcin Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20014 or Opticians Association of America, 1250 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.

WASHINGTON — During the 1975 fiscal year, grants totaling more than $2.9 billion under Titles I, II and VI of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) were made to 403 units of state and local government to carry out the provisions of the act, according to the annual report of the U.S. Department of Labor.

Food stamp chief is Nancy Snyder

WASHINGTON — Administrator Edward J. Hekman has named Mrs. Nancy Snyder to be director of the Food Stamp Division of the Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. When she assumed the $37,800-a-year post on April 19, she became one of the top black women in government.

Mrs. Snyder is an experienced government executive who has worked both at the federal and local level. Since 1973, she has served in the U.S. Department of Labor as associate director for coal mine workers' programs, directing the black lung program which was implemented under her leadership.

Previously, Mrs. Snyder was deputy director of the special projects staff at labor, and director of its program and services design staff. In that position, her responsibilities included work involving the plans for reforming the welfare system, including the Family Assistance Program.

Mrs. Snyder was with the Peace Corps prior to joining the Department of Labor in 1966. Earlier, she served in guidance capacities for the school board at Newport News, Va., and for the Bureau of Community Education in Brooklyn, N.Y.

A native of New York City and a graduate of Ohio State University, Mrs. Snyder received her master's degree from Columbia University, in the field of counseling and vocational guidance. For the past 10 years, she has managed a 75-acre family cattle farm in West Virginia.

Mrs. Snyder is a member of the American Personnel Guidance Association and of Executive Women in Government.

As director of the Food Stamp Division, she succeeds P. Royal Shipp, who is now FNS deputy administrator for program operations. Since his promotion, an active search has been conducted to locate the possible person for this important position.

The Food Stamp Program is a major USDA activity. A total of 19.1 million people currently take part in the program (January figures, the latest available) and expenditures are estimated to total $5.7 billion for the Fiscal Year 1976.

President Ford has called for reform of the program, and USDA has proposed a series of changes in program regulations. The Senate is considering a food stamp reform bill, and the House Agriculture Committee is holding hearings on reform legislation.

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Engineer cites industry opportunities

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — According to a staff engineer with the Martin - Marietta Company, graduates of Florida A and M University's electronics engineering technology program stand a good chance of gaining high level decision making positions in industry.

But he believes their ability to climb the rungs to corporate rests mainly on self-confidence.

Willie Williams, a FAMU alumnus and staff engineer with 17 years of experience with the Martin-Marietta Aerospace Division in Orlando, was on the campus for a meeting of the program's advisory council which he heads.

Williams described electronics engineering technology as "a relatively new field that's wide open for young people with solid educational backgrounds."

"The field allows upward mobility to those persons with abilities, and most importantly, those with confidence in themselves," he said.

Williams explained that the higher one rises in the decision making ranks, the more isolated he becomes and the more he must rely solely on his own judgments.

"The only way to survive is to have confidence in your ability to make correct decisions," he said.

FAMU's electronics engineering technology program was initiated in 1968, and gained accreditation by the Engineer's Council for Professional Development (ECPD) in 1973. The program's advisory council, consisting of seven persons was appointed last November, and the membership elected Williams as chairman.

Williams said the role of the council includes acting as a liaison between FAMU and industry, making curriculum recommendations and assisting the program in obtaining materials and equipment.

Vernal Taylor, designer of the program and chairman of the area of electronics engineering technology at FAMU, said the program "prepares graduates for entry into many positions in industry at various levels in the occupational spectrum between the craftman and the research engineer."

"At the end of the spectrum closest to the research engineer is the engineering technologist which this program produces," Taylor said. The program's current ECPD accreditation is valid through 1977.

Williams earned a degree from FAMU in industrial arts with an electronics specialty in 1958.

He is a native of Madison, Fla. and a veteran of the U.S. Air Force.

He joined the Martin-Marietta Company after one year of teaching industrial arts and mathematics in the Nassau County public school system.

He is married to the former Martha Williams of Madison. They have two children: Stacey, 13, and Tarrance, 6.

WILLIE WILLIAMS

Job Corps helping indigent kids

WASHINGTON—The Job Corps and its volunteer support group—Joint Action in Community Service (JACS)—have reaped "a handsome profit on a government investment" by helping 45,000 disadvantaged youths prepare for worthwhile careers each year.

Secretary of Labor W.J. Usery Jr. made the comment in an address at the JACS annual award luncheon here.

"As a product of the labor movement," Usery said, "I'm proud that 8 unions conducted training in 36 Job Corps centers last year and placed 1,500 youngsters in jobs when they graduated."

He pointed out that in the past fiscal year, 90 per cent of Job Corps graduates found definite places to go — jobs, school or military service.

The Job Corps' current annual budget is $175 million. The Labor Department gives JACS about $750,000 for staff and other expenses.

But, Usery said, the services of the approximately 5,000 JACS volunteers would cost the government between $2 million and $3 million a year if it had to pay for them.

He pointed out that more than half a million young people have served in the Job Corps since it began in 1965.

"What they now pay in income taxes to the federal government could very well be enough to cover the cost of the program," he added.

Noting that government social programs are under sharp attack these days, he said most people do not really want to completely dismantle the programs.

"What everyone wants today is for these programs to do what they were designed to do with a minimum of waste and lost motion," Usery said.

The reason the Job Corps — JACS combination has worked so well, Usery said, is that from the very beginning the Job Corps program depended upon the voluntary participation of the young people it was created to help. It was strengthened by JACS volunteers, who got youths headed in the right direction, he said.

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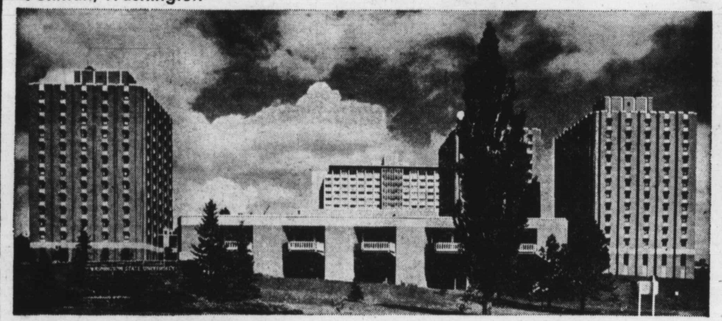

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