



**ISDA**

International Sonoran Desert Alliance

# **Working to preserve and enrich the environment, culture, and economy of the Sonoran Desert**

## **Workforce Development**

### **Journeyman Apprenticeship**

We believe in employing local people to solve local problems. The latest American Community Survey Estimates show that the average Ajo home is significantly older than the state and county averages with more than half of the homes built before 1960 and approximately 16% of those built prior to 1940. While many of these homes were built to last, most are plagued by aging plumbing, out-of-date wiring, little insulation, and crumbling facades. The combination of old homes in need of repair, a high rate of poverty, and a high rate of homeownership creates a wide-spread problem of unsafe housing in our community. Through our journeyman apprentice program, we are making home maintenance and upgrades more affordable while simultaneously training the next generation of local skilled tradesmen.



ISDA/ewel Cleanwater

Congressman Raul Grijalva visits with our apprentices.

### **Background**

The Journeyman Apprenticeship program is a three-year (4,000 hour) paid apprenticeship program sponsored by the International Sonoran Desert Alliance. Registered with both the State Apprenticeship Office and the U.S. Department of Labor, apprentices are mentored by area handymen learning the basics of various building trades while working on both repair and renovation projects within the Ajo community.

In addition to the benefit to the community, apprentices are learning a “portable” skill, that is, these skills can be used here or in any community. Even if the apprentices don’t complete the entire program, their skills are still useful and will help them find employment anywhere they live.

An apprentice must be at least 18 years old to be accepted into the program (there is no maximum age limit), be eligible to work in the United States, capable of meeting all physical requirements with reasonable accommodations, and commit to working 25-30 hours per week. In addition to these requirements, an apprentice must also have obtained, or be working towards, a high

school diploma or GED equivalency. While not required to begin the program, it is a requirement of completion as part of ISDA’s commitment to education.

In partnership with plumbing, electrical, and fire system contractors, participants in the apprenticeship program have renovated three multi-purpose training rooms; finished a 2,200-square-foot commercial kitchen and demonstration space; repaired and finished walls, floors and ceilings in multiple Plaza bays; repaired aging wiring at the Plaza Recreation Hall; and completed a number of accessibility and home repair projects for low-income homeowners. Currently, they are working on converting five classrooms on the Historic Curley

## Innovations

With our apprenticeship program in building maintenance and repair, ISDA is using capital grants for building renovation to pay for workforce development and building renovation. Two results for the same dollar!

Our journeymen can also address community needs for housing repairs and increase the safety of housing within the community. Everybody wins!



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School campus into 11 bed/bath units for the Sonoran Desert Conference Center.

Personal benefits and successes of the apprenticeship program are never hard to find among the diverse group of apprentices. With so many old houses, so few highly qualified tradesmen, and such limited economic opportunity, empowering the local workforce to repair the homes of low-income and vulnerable people is a double win for Ajo.



ISDA/ewel Clearwater

With two years under his belt, Josh Manual is now the furthest along in the program and has taken full advantage of the opportunities afforded to him. In addition to the projects he works on with the program, Josh is also now able to lend his skills around town working on houses, the clinic, and other projects. Currently he is in the process of obtaining a job working for the county once his apprenticeship is completed within the next year and hopes to continue working side jobs part time using the skills he has acquired.



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*It's a great opportunity if you are motivated and stick to it. What we are learning here is just as good as going to a trade school. Our instructors have a lot of knowledge and know what they are talking about because of all their years of experience. It's also something that can help benefit the town in the long term. I know now that a lot of the houses around here are dangerous to live in because they either have no codes or no updated codes. The town needs a makeover and now we know how to fix that.*