

## Focus On: New York City District Council's Labor Technical College

Giancarlo Rachiele knew how to drive a nail before he knew how to ride a bike. No wonder the veteran carpenter and cabinet-maker is the heart and soul of the millwork and cabinetry training program at the New York City District Council of Carpenter's (NYCDCC) Labor Technical College.

Rachiele's two decades as a member of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, as well as several years in part- and full-time teaching roles at the NYCDCC Labor Technical College, make him the perfect role model. The dozens of men and women who learn the UBC's millcab curriculum from him each year understand that the craft is learned by consistent practice and the correct attitude.



"It's all about making the job go in according to plan," he says. "There is a great satisfaction when everything goes without a hitch."

The NYC millwork and cabinetry shop is comprehensive. Its 130' x 38' footprint hosts a machine shop area, a CNC router area, a bench area and a finishing room. The CNC shop is also insulated to reduce noise, since instruction in the classroom would be nearly impossible when all machines are running. In

this shop, Rachiele looks for lights to go on.

"You can always tell when they 'get it.' You can see that light go on and you know they understand. That's the best part of teaching."

Communication with contractors is also a key component of Rachiele's teaching strategy. He says he consistently reminds contractors to give apprentices as much real-world experience as they can.

"I have apprentices for four weeks, but the shops have them for 48. They have to pick up a lot of the skills in the shop. I remind students that if they do nothing different at work, nothing will change."

Millcab apprentices at the Labor Technical College are enrolled in a five-year curriculum, which covers everything from hand tools to AutoCAD to veneering and finishing. Hands-on experience is gained in lessons that include reading blueprints, stock billing, cutting and assembly. Rachiele

said he makes sure the light goes on by working projects to completion.

"For most of this work, they have to see it stained finished to understand why all the other finishing and preparation steps are there."

### Reaching Out to Nontraditional Workers

Currently, 52 apprentices are learning from Rachiele. While only four are women, the millcab program is an active participant in the District Council's industry-leading commitment to attract women to the trades.



Women from the NEW program try their hand at custom woodwork.

The District Council's partnership with the New York regional organization Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW) opens the door for women to explore career opportunities with the UBC. And while federal goals for women in the trades are set at 6.9 percent, the partnership has helped fuel a whopping 11.2 percent female enrollment at the Labor Technical College.

"I give them a feel for what cabinetmaking is all about," Rachiele said. "They get a look at each of the different specialized areas, including my millcab shop, general carpentry, floor covering, dockbuilding and millwright. Then they pick what they want to do."

Rachiele believes attention to skill training is the foundation of continuing to provide expert installers to union contractors and, therefore, to customers. "Because of our training, we stand above everyone else. And that's what I try to stress every day."



# millwork ARCHITECTURAL

THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE CERTIFIED CUSTOM WOODWORKERS ASSOCIATION

## MidAmerica Mastercraft Delivers Superior Product in Pharmaceutical Setting

### CONTRACTOR/PROJECT FOCUS

In the pharmaceutical industry, every move is scrutinized, including the environment where products are researched, developed and created. So when a major Midwestern pharmaceutical company needed a host of newly constructed areas, the specifications needed to be delivered efficiently and to the letter.

MidAmerica Mastercraft was tapped to do just that. For this \$1.7 million project, the St. Louis-based, carpenters-union signatory cabinet and millwork manufacturing company relied upon its reputation for fast turnaround, skilled shop workers and experienced installers to get the highly technical project completed on time and on budget.

MidAmerica contracted, drew, built and installed the project within 11 months, meeting or beating all of the customer's delivery expectations, said company President Mike Winters.

And, Winters and his crew focused on constant communications between his shop and project managers, as well as lots of talk with everyone else on the job. "We were

able to coordinate with other trades on the project and provide them with mockups and access points for their materials, which helped keep the project on schedule."

Work completed at the pharmaceutical company (privacy laws prevent this publication from using the company's name) included the corporate office interior, new cabinet installation in existing wet and dry labs, extensive cabinet and high-end millwork in the corporate offices, extensive modular laboratory casework, and high-end cabinets and casework in new laboratory construction.

Specifically, MidAmerica tapped its skilled crews to work with special chemical-resistant cabinet and countertop material used primarily in labs and schools. This material is used for wet or moist areas, in cold room areas, and for glass cleaning cabinets with special draining countertops.

Having the ability to handle the pharmaceutical job didn't happen overnight. In the years leading up to capturing such a large project, Winters used a great deal of forethought as well as a helping hand from the St. Louis and Vicinity Regional Council of Carpenters. To handle an increasing volume of work, Winters reorganized his 28,000



square-foot shop with a new layout that would allow for a smoother, faster production process.

And then there was the need for automation. Thanks to a loan facilitated by the Carpenters Union, Winters was able to totally automate his operations. He first bought a beam saw, then followed with an overhead machining center and an edge bander. Computer systems were also updated.

"The key to making things work was the automation of the shop. We worked hand in hand with the union and now our productivity is better, and we are getting better optimization of materials," Winters said. "Within three years of automating, we doubled our manufacturing capacity and doubled our sales. This was a large endeavor, but it proved to be beneficial."

That foresight and increased capacity allowed MidAmerica to bid – and win – its largest project in the company's history: the pharmaceutical company job.

Another key component for Winters, as his company expands, are his employees. Union craftsmen, with the training of UBC millwork and cabinetry curriculum at their core, are on every job MidAmerica performs. The first seven cabinetmakers he hired when he opened his shop 20 years ago

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## Marketing Best Practices Chicago Goes the “Magnificent Mile” to Communicate Benefits of Union Millwork & Cabinetry

*In the marketing industry, “integrated” is a common term, meaning product promotion is done in an integrated manner, such as with advertising, publicity, brochures, etc. At the Chicago Regional Council of Carpenters, the millwork and cabinetry program is benefiting from an integrated approach to communicating the benefits of using union contractors. The CCWA committee congratulates Chicago on its marketing work and presents it here to spark some ideas for others around the country.*

### Getting In Front of Decision Makers

The Regional Council, its Mill-Cabinet-Industrial Local 1027 and the Chicago Labor-Management Committee for the Custom Woodwork Industry recently took their message directly to decision makers by hosting a luncheon for architects, construction officials and project managers. Signatory employers and union representatives also attended, completing the decision-making circle.

The message guests received at the event centered on the following: Everyone recognizes the quality of union-manufactured millwork. However, if a non-union contractor is used, the end user usually finds out that the small savings, if any, are sacrificed in quality and rework and by depriving the local communities of wages, benefit and tax dollars.

### Getting Into Print

To reinforce the message, the Regional Council, Local 1027 and the Labor-Management Committee published a beautifully illustrated coffee table book, called *Millwork, The Journey*.

The book showcases the professional skills and craftsmanship of millwork carpenters and their signatory partners. It highlights the history, via text and photography, of high-end millwork projects performed in the Chicago area by signatory manufacturers and represented by the Woodwork Association of Chicago. Examples are

from Soldier Field, the Art Institute, Millennium Park, the Museum of Science and Industry, McCormick Place, the Merchandise Mart and many more.

The book helps drive home the point that professionals and union millwork carpenters in this area deliver quality work, because they are dedicated to training in the latest technology, and they learn from veteran instructors.

“This book highlights our uncompromised dedication to provide quality workmanship and professionalism in every project we do,” said Rich Albrecht, representative for the Council’s Mill-Cabinet Industrial Local 1027.

### Varied Audiences Need Varied Messages

The key to an integrated marketing plan is touching all audiences in the way that is most appealing and likely to be heard. The coffee table book will attract and inform many members of the target audience, while other marketing vehicles further target specific segments, such as customers and current and prospective members.

“We know that using only one type of message delivery strategy will not meet the needs of all audiences,” said James Kasmer, a board member of the Certified Custom Woodworkers Association nationally, and assistant to the president for Industrial Operations and representative for the Chicago Regional Council’s millwork and cabinetry program. “We believe having an arsenal of messages is the best way to communicate our message concerning quality, productivity and profitability to those who need to hear it in their own language.”

cabinets, millwork and installation. Its customer base is the larger general contractors who work in the healthcare, university, banking, education and corporate construction sectors. The company is a certified fabricator for Corian, Avonite, Surell and various other solid surfaces, and has thermoformed and machined a state-of-the-art, self-draining Corian vanity top used in many hospitals in the St. Louis area.

For more information about MidAmerica Mastercraft, Inc., call 314-772-4884, visit [www.midamericamastercraft.com](http://www.midamericamastercraft.com) or email: [info@midamericamastercraft.com](mailto:info@midamericamastercraft.com).

learned that cooperation between the designers, those doing the shop drawings and manufacturers is paramount. We learned the importance of building fast and accurately, how to produce a product within a tight schedule and how to deliver on time,” Winters said.

“This was the most fun I’ve had owning my business in the past 20 years.”

### About MidAmerica Mastercraft

MidAmerica Mastercraft is a full-service cabinet and millwork manufacturing company that provides shop drawings,



### MidAmerica Mastercraft Delivers Superior Product in Pharmaceutical Setting (continued from page 1)

are still with him. This group comprises the core of his 20-person staff. In fact, Winters said that his crew’s experience is a major selling point when bidding for work.

“Ten years ago, we would not have been able to bid for, let alone try to build, a project with the magnitude of this pharmaceutical job. This project brought our company into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We

## Time Management, Teamwork and Training: One MillCab Veteran’s Keys to Project Success

*How can a trained, skilled craftsman make a big difference when a job encounters complications?*

*What can contractors and project owners do to help ensure a project is completed to the customer’s satisfaction?*

*A veteran carpenter and instructor shares his tips based on nearly two decades of experience.*

“A quality project takes a lot of cooperation and forethought, and that’s not always as easily accomplished as it sounds,” says Glenn Parker, a 17-year veteran millwork and cabinetry professional and a member of Carpenters Local #470. He also teaches millcab apprentices under Local #2633.

Parker, who works for the Tacoma, Washington-based Vrieze & Olson Custom Woodworking, Inc., believes that project issues he and his brother craftsmen around the country sometimes encounter could mostly be avoided with better communication.

“I am always willing to give feedback on how to make the installation process go a little easier.”



Glenn Parker, pictured here, repairs nail holes and small scratches on a semicircular medical reception area desk/counter fixture with a finish touch-up wax kit.

**Parker’s initial tip:** Ensure that the person doing the layout is aware of how square a room is – or isn’t – before plans are created.

“Our specialty is to design, make and install fixtures that are unique and seem to grow naturally out of the walls. And of course no two walls are ever the same, so we do a lot of scribing, shaping and delicate cutting to make the fixtures fit and flow perfectly, Parker said.”

On a recent job that Parker and his coworkers Rick McPike and Tom Jorgensen worked, delays surfaced in the wall unit installation, because the crew had to stop

to build out part of the wall to make it plumb. Had the planning team known about the 5/8-inch difference, the product would have been created with that misalignment in mind.

**And that leads to his second tip:** Get installers involved early in the process of custom projects to work hand in hand with designers, job superintendents and shop workers.

“Everyone’s thought process is different, and installers tend to think more about how it’s going to go in. Our part takes up a lot of expense on a job if it’s not thought-out properly,” Parker explains. “Too many times, I’ve seen that the transfer of information from one hand to another doesn’t always get covered. Getting these people out on the job site together helps prevent mishaps.”

Adds Parker: “Installers need to be fully prepared with the right fasteners, quick-dry adhesives and any specialty tools that might be required when they report to the job site. Close communication with the engineer or project manager and a visit to the job site before the work is done can do a lot to prevent delays.”

**The third tip:** Time management. Rushing prevents installers from doing a job properly, according to Parker.

“Every job is different, and each one has its own surprises. The unexpected problems that always crop up tax every skill we have as woodworkers. Time management can help build in time for those surprises.”

But even assuming that plans are made in cooperation with all parties involved, and enough time is allotted, the crux of the project ultimately still rests in the skilled hands of the UBC craftsman.

**Tip #4:** Get solid training and never stop learning.

“When it comes to constructing the project, you most definitely need someone who is meticulous. The best productivity and production is supplied by someone with a combination of shop and on-the-job experience.”

In his apprenticeship classes, Parker places a lot of emphasis on math, specifically geometry, because of its importance as the foundation for all layouts. He also stresses a healthy dose of fundamentals along with the high-technology courses. In fact, a key assignment is building an entire project with nothing but hand tools. He does this, he says, so that his students are ready for whatever a job throws at them.

“You’ve got to be very, very skilled with your hands. That’s a given. We make sure that every UBC installer is trained to use basic hand tools, because you often don’t have the luxury of using a power tool or high-tech tool at a job site.”

## From Your Labor-Management Committee Chairmen:



How many times does the word “communicate” appear in this newsletter? We don’t want you to stop and count, but the point is this – If we are going to succeed in this business, we must communicate effectively.

Veteran journeymen, instructors, a successful contractor and a busy union representative quoted in this issue all stress the importance of communicating.

Today’s industry is as competitive as ever. Project schedules are tighter, the number of jobs is fewer, and budgets are leaner. When installers and shop professionals work with designers and project managers, problems can be anticipated and alleviated prior to becoming productivity killers.

Collaborating on designs, understanding the layout of project areas and working to select the proper materials takes teamwork, and teamwork requires communication. Whether you are a veteran shop owner or an apprentice, make effective communications one of your best skills. Be the person who insists on a pre-project conference. Make sure other trades know your plans once work commences. Keep project managers informed of work progress. Be the communicator.

If you take away nothing else from this issue, we urge you to upgrade your communication skills. We all know the saying, “talk is cheap.” We challenge you to think of the flip side of that instead. How expensive will your project be if you don’t talk?