

Working mainly in the power-gen industry, Local 216 member Travis Harkey balances family, career, and hobbies.

Travis Harkey of Atkins, Arkansas, has been doing mechanical work since he was 14, but he didn't find out what a millwright was until he was 27. He joined Millwright Local 216 in December of 2016 and became a journeyman in the summer of 2019.

"This is exactly where I needed to be," Harkey said. "I didn't know the millwright career existed, and I didn't know anything about the unions, either. I've obviously got myself a lot more educated, and I love everything about this career path."

Matt Nowlin, business agent for Local 216, said he has complete confidence in Travis' ability as a millwright. "Travis is a great young man," Nowlin said. "He has shown responsibility and leadership strength on and off the job. He has finished the apprenticeship program and is now helping out as a mentor to current apprentices."

Continue reading to learn more about Travis Harkey.

Q: How did you find out about the millwright career and then what made you choose it?

A: I was frustrated with the job I had delivering uniforms. It was salaried. I was working 50 or 60 hours a week and not getting supplemented for it. I was tired of it, and a buddy of mine that was in the Laborers' Union said, "Hey man, come join us, see what you like out here, and then build from there." I ended up working for Siemens as a labor hand on an outage. I got to go on the turbine deck and see what the millwrights were doing, and I was like, "Holy cow, this is awesome. I love mechanical work." I talked to a few millwrights on the job, and they said, "Man, go to your local hall, sign up, you'll take a test, and then you'll be in. So I did just that. And it's been millwrighting ever since. I've never looked back.

Q: Tell me about your past mechanical work.

A: My hobbies have revolved around mechanical work since I was a kid. I've been a mechanic ever since I was 14. My uncle got me into it. He had his own shop where he worked on diesel engines for big trucks, and I would work under him. I also went to a vo-tech school during high school, and they would teach me auto mechanics, things I didn't know.

Q: What do you like best about your job now?

A: I love going to new places. I hate traveling away from my family and my kids, but normally during the summertime is when I get to take my time off – sometimes three or four months – and spend time with the kids when they're out of school. We have fun – vacations and things like that.

Because I make such a high wage, I'm able to budget for that and enjoy my time off. I love the freedom that I get with this job. I mean, heck, if I don't want to work, I don't have to work.

Q: What contractors have you worked with?

A: I got my first job with APM, and it's been APM ever since.

Q: So you've been with the same employer the whole time?

A: I've worked for multiple different employers, but they're my main. They call me every outage season.



Q: What areas of the country have you worked in?

A: San Antonio, Texas, would probably be the farthest south I've gone, but I've been all the way up to Nine Mile Point Nuclear Station in New York, in a place called Oswego. And I'm getting ready to go to Jersey.

Q: What kinds of facilities have you worked in?

A: Mainly it's been nuclear, but I also do car plants and paper mills. I haven't done any chemical plants or refineries yet; I still plan on doing that. But it's been gas and fossil plants, mostly power-gen.

Q: Is there any type of millwright work that is your favorite?

A: I like working power-gen. I love doing pumps and motors and alignments. I really enjoy those. Getting something in perfect alignment within thousandths of an inch, it's not something that everyone knows how to do. We're talking about fractions of a hair. I enjoy the challenge of it. And this job definitely challenges me every day. There's always something new that I'm learning.

Q: Are you mainly learning on the job or are you continuing to take classes?

A: It's on the job. I want to further my education in a construction-management course. As soon as I get the chance, I'm going that route.

Q: Have you taken any courses at the UBC International Training Center in Las Vegas?

A: I've taken the .300 Hitters journeyman leadership course. I've done gas and steam. And I'm trying to go back to do the 212 journeymen leaders class as soon as they reopen.

Q: What are your hobbies?

A: I still work on diesel trucks. I sometimes work with my uncle, but a lot of times I have friends that call me and say, "Hey man, I got something wrong with my truck." And for the most part, I can help them out. We'll go get the parts and fix it. I also like spending time with my kids and barbecuing. I've been getting pretty good at that.

Another thing I do is train in mixed martial arts. I train in muay thai kickboxing and Brazilian jiu-jitsu. And, when I have time, I actually compete in cage fighting. I've competed all over Arkansas and in Tennessee and Oklahoma. I've got some friends who are part of the UFC that I train with every now and then. A couple of my coaches are two-time world kickboxing champions.

Q: How did you get into mixed martial arts?

A: I was into karate as a kid. I got back into it one summer and fell in love with it again and just went from there.

Q: Where are you currently working?

A: I'm in North Carolina at Plant Brunswick, working for APM. We're working on two low-pressure turbines. We're going to pull them out, clean them, and inspect them.

Q: What are your hopes and plans for your career?

A: There's so much that I want to do out there. If it is brought to me, then I would like to be in management one day, but I will leave that up to my superiors to say, "Hey, I think you would do well in this position."



FROM LEFT: Travis Harkey, his girlfriend, Stephenie Colvin, Stephenie's daughter, Brooklyn, 11, and Harkey's daughter, Addison, 13. Harkey also has a son, Liam, 6, and Stephenie has sons Caleb, 15, and Griffin, 4.



Mixed martial arts and cage fighting are two of Harkey's hobbies.