



# JOSH MANDEL

## STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

By Frank Lewis | Portsmouth Daily Times

State Treasurer of Ohio Josh Mandel was in Wheelersburg Wednesday to present an award to an employee of Tri-American Contractor, Inc., Industrial Contractors and Pipe Fabricators &mdash; a multi-million dollar company that employs skilled tradesmen. Mandel presented the "Ohio Strong" award to Alan Winters, a longtime pipefitter.

"I'm honored to have somebody want to come and give me an award," Winters, a member of Local 577 Plumbers and Pipefitters, said. "Because what I feel that we do, as far as craftsmen, is we're able to give back to our communities. We train well in our hall. What we do is train better than everybody else. And to have the opportunity to give back to our communities and share ideas of how jobs need to be run and the importance of what we do as craftspeople."

Mandel is a proponent for skilled labor training to prepare people for actual jobs that require exact skills.

"We're here recognizing folks who work in skilled labor," Mandel said. "I believe that skilled laborers are an important component of Ohio's economic backbone and I think it's important that Ohio invest more in vocational training and these important skilled labor jobs. If Ohio is going to be strong as a state and America is going to be strong as a country, we need to make things. We have to be an economy that's based on manufacturing and construction. Ohio needs to up its investment into skilled trades education."

No one appeared prouder of Winters' award than Greg Stanley and Mike Scott Taylor, owners of Tri-American, and Mike Zirkle, director of safety for the company.

"They're trying to steer kids out of high school to at least consider that path because there's a shortage of that work force in the area, especially in Ohio," Stanley said.

"I think Mr. Mandel said too, also there's a great gap between the education and the work force, kids getting out of high school and going to college and spending tens of thousands of dollars in student loans," Taylor said. "And this is just another opportunity for kids getting out of school to actually get in a trade and manufacturing job as an option to college, because we are short in that work force right now."

Stanley said Local 577 takes in apprentices ranging in age from 18 to around 35 years of age. He said apprentices go through a screening process for aptitude and willingness to work in that trade. He said that field consists of "very hard" work, but comes with an "excellent wage package." Stanley said employees are paid wages and given benefits so that they can raise a family on their income.

"Insurance is provided and retirement - all the benefits," Stanley said. "And those are employer paid for. They are not employee copay. It is a 100 percent employer-sponsored program. The building trades in this area are an excellent alternative."

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Tri-American is a company that does industrial contracting. They do not do house building, residential or commercial work. The company employees work in existing plants such as refineries, chemical plants, steel mills, and manufacturing plants.”

Mandel recently wrote an op-ed that said, “In American high schools, it is becoming increasingly hard to defend the vanishing of shop class from the curriculum. The trend began in the 1970s, when it became conventional wisdom that a four-year college degree was essential. As Forbes magazine reported in 2012, 90 percent of shop classes have been eliminated for the Los Angeles unified school district’s 660,000 students. Yet a 2012 Bureau of Labor Statistics study shows that 48 percent of all college graduates are working in jobs that don’t require a four-year degree.”

Mandel said too many young people have four-year liberal-arts degrees, are thousands of dollars in debt and find themselves serving coffee at Starbucks or working part-time at the mall. Mandel said many of them would have been better off with a two-year skilled-trade or technical education that provides the skills to secure a well-paying job.

“I also think we should put shop class back in high schools,” Mandel told the Daily Times. “I strongly support putting shop class back in high schools and investing more in vocational education.”