



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

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Guests: Angela Collins, Chief Learning Officer at PHCC Educational Foundation

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Questions or Feedback: thefix@oatey.com

00:00:04 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Welcome to The Fix, the podcast made for the trades, where we sit down with inspiring individuals across the trades to discuss their unique take on the industry, including career paths, job site stories, overcoming challenges, and everything in between. I'm your host, Catherine, a marketer here at Oatey with my co-host and friend, Doug, one of Oatey's resident experts in all things trades. The Fix is more than a podcast. It's a community, a community built to support tradespeople and inspire the next generation of essential pros. Let's start the conversation.

00:00:45 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Well, Doug, you know, our guest today, I am sure we are going to walk away and felt like we have really learned a lot about this guest and the work that they do. I love the learn.

00:00:55 **Doug Buchan**

You like that? I loved it. Yeah, I did. But you know what? The organization itself that she represents is, uh, it's always been a big part of my life. It's a big part of our life today here at Oatey. It is. And she has the absolute coolest title of all times. The chief learning officer. Isn't that awesome? How is that? I love that. Welcome Angela Collins from PHCC. Thank you

00:01:21 Katherine Lehtenin

for having me. You've got it. Yeah, both Doug and I looked at that title. He's like, oh, I wonder if I could have that someday. I got to get one of those. A lot of work here we can share. That's right. You know, I was hoping that we can take some time and if you can just tell us a little bit about yourself, how you got into the role you're into today, and so our listeners can learn a little bit about you.

00:01:46 Angela Collins

So my name, like you've said before, is Angela Collins. I'm the Chief Learning Officer at PHCC Educational Foundation. So I kind of had a weird journey into the trades as I actually started off as an accounting major. So my background is all accounting and finance. So when I went through, I ended up in financial services for a period of time, and I was doing exactly what I'm doing now, building out training, but for those people in financial services. And ironically, financial services and trades are very similar in the fact that it's, they need training compressed, they need it now, they don't want to leave the office, there's productivity items that need to happen. So I was in financial services. And then I've decided I was going to kind of step out and kind of do more consulting, because I also love the educational technology piece that the learning management systems, how we make things simple so that students understand and their different audiences. So I worked in that for a while

00:02:39 Angela Collins

and I decided at some point I was like, well, I've never really done not -for -profit. So I've done academic, I've done corporate. So that's when I actually started with PHCC Educational Foundation. And that was almost eight years ago, which is kind of crazy. It's kind of just flown by. So we, so in that journeys, we actually had four different systems, three or four different systems that held our apprenticeship learning. And so my first job when I came here was to consolidate it and make sure that it was easy to access. So that's when I first started, as I flipped everything over, including the model, and what we branded was PHCC Academy. So that was 2017. Within that period of time, we went from, I guess it was 2014, we had apprentices, but then, basically, we couldn't manage them. In 2017, we had, I think, about 200 apprentices. And today, when I looked this morning, We have about 6,700 students in about 13 different programs in 40 different states. So we really believe in the online

00:03:42 **Angela Collins**

model. So yeah, and as you can see, we ballooned.

00:03:45 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Yeah.

00:03:46 **Doug Buchan**

Wow.

00:03:46 **Katherine Lehtenin**

That's impressive.

00:03:47 **Angela Collins**

That's why I'm here today.

00:03:49 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Do you think too that the pandemic helped balloon that a little bit faster than you would have thought?

00:03:55 **Angela Collins**

So I've thought about that because we were actually doing online learning before COVID even hit. Right. It did help us. But we were still, once we turned the model over to our state, PHCC states, that's where we saw the growth. Because our average apprentice is about 28 years old. So they go to work, they come home, it's hard for them to turn around and then go to school at night. They've got families, they've got elder care issues. So we always had kind of a float like number, but the pandemic definitely

increased our workforce readiness and pre-apprentice for young people programs. Those just exploded. We went from zero to a thousand within three months. That is so unbelievable. That was with all of the technical schools because they were looking for curriculum. They didn't have it. Yeah, we put them in our stuff and we saw the big lift off there.

00:04:40 [Katherine Lehtenin](#)

That's really cool. Well, can you tell us a little bit about the mission and vision of the PHCC Educational Foundation and how it supports, you know, the growth and success of the plumbing and

00:04:50 [Angela Collins](#)

HVAC industry? Sure. So our the mission and vision that we, you know, it's clean air, clean water. We want to also make sure that we have education and training that's accessible to the people that need it. I think as we support the industry, we're really starting to look at how we can take these students from the beginning, you know, high school, a little bit lower than high school, mentor them, kind of help shape their futures, give them different options, and then either they can choose to go through our apprenticeship or go to through our service and repair side of the house. The other thing that I would say about our, that's unique to us, is that we really do a lot of work for the contractors, right? So if you are a member of PHCC and you use our programs. We're also here to help vet your employees, technicians to make sure they're good fit. We never wanna put a student in distance learning that does not wanna be in distance learning, but we also understand that contractors need to

00:05:42 [Angela Collins](#)

have productivity. And that's what we try to provide is that bridge of, I'm not a contractor, they're not a trainer, but we work together to figure out how we can support that, making sure that we have the clean air and clean water and education that's accessible to any person in the US. Yes. And overseas. Yeah. Don't have many, but we do have a couple.

00:06:02 [Katherine Lehtenin](#)

Yeah, for sure. You know, so as that chief learning officer, what are the key initiatives and educational programs that you've developed to really address the needs of employees at different career stages within their career?

00:06:16 [Angela Collins](#)

Sure. So like I said, at first in 2014, all we really had was the apprenticeship program. We then had a kind of a workforce readiness. It was called pre -apprentice, but we kind of made some changes to it. So under probably the last two years, what we have done is we've created what we call a workforce matrix. And so we have looked at how all of the students can come in and all of the different avenues they can come in. And so we've created what we call a workforce pipeline. So the first course in that section is going to be workforce readiness. And that course is, what do I want to do? And do I want to go into plumbing or HVAC? Because I know we're known as the plumbing group, but we really are making strides to make sure that we have equal visibility in that HVPR. The next course that we would take is we call pre -apprentice and that is actually for someone that was hired as a, I would say a technician. Can they be successful in distance learning or not? And can they complete it without

00:07:12 [Angela Collins](#)

asking a thousand questions? Do they, are they really ready to go? And then these courses, we talk about all kinds of random stuff. Like, do you like getting underneath houses? Do you like being cold? You know, do you like having to go out when it's snowy and you know, or it's rainy? Because we're really trying to help get that right fit for our contractors. After the pre -apprentice happens that's when you get to make a choice depending on your state licensing requirements. The first one would be fast track to service and repair that's for people that need to get people up and running in a truck and so it's not apprenticeship approved but this is something that we can give someone that's you know pretty new around the pretty new or we can actually have them just do that. So that's a 12 to 18 month program, again, to get them prepared to go into a truck. If you're just like, wow, Catherine is fantastic. She's going to run my business. If you needed a license, we do have a traditional four

00:08:09 [Angela Collins](#)

-year Department of Labor approved program in both plumbing and HVAC. Coming in October, just so everyone knows, is that we're actually going to have the same programs offerings in HVAC. That's a big lift for us. Our board had a vision a couple years ago that that they wanted to make sure that we were equally represented and took out money and we have built that program. So that'll be released at Connect, HVAC pre-apprentice and HVAC fast track.

00:08:36 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Awesome. That's great.

00:08:38 **Doug Buchan**

Wow, that's fantastic. My question is, Angela, so you take a lot of new, interested individuals into the trades. You support them. You get them to what their end goal is. Do they come back? Do they come back to help others then, you know, giving back to the system, we'll say. What's your retention on something like that?

00:09:08 **Angela Collins**

So we actually have a very good model right now of how we help develop these new technicians, these new apprentices, so that they're successful. Once the student comes out of our apprenticeship program, because it is run at the state level, they have a lot of contact with the local states. so that the states really engage them to make sure that you know is there anything else I can help you with? Is there anything else that we can do for you? A lot of the states now are starting to do their own code prep classes so that that's the next section that they need to go through and so the relationship starts to be built there. Again knowing that they're going to turn around and come back after that. Most of our apprentices work for PHCC contractors so they there is a relationship already built there. But one of the initiatives at the end of this year and going into next year is that, how do we start walking them back over to knowing if that continuing education is one of the most fundamental

00:10:00 **Angela Collins**

needs of this trade, because you always need to be learning. Code changes, product changes, material changes, business practices change. So we really encourage them to keep learning. I've been kind of surprised over the last eight years that at first people were like, they just want to get through apprenticeship, but I've actually been quite pleased that they want, they ask for more classes. They want, they want to know different things. They want to know about technology. They want to know about, you know, backflow or those types of issues. So, we just maintain that we were trying to sort them in the right place. So, we make sure there's aligned interest wherever they want to go.

00:10:38 **Doug Buchan**

Okay. Okay. Let's talk about competition. We all love competition, right? Okay. So, You give me a contest where I can show my skills against other people's skills, you know, to check myself to see where I'm at. You know, what type of, you know, these type of events are you involved in and how do you support them?

00:11:01 **Angela Collins**

Sure, so PHEC Educational Foundation, we have three big events. One, I'll talk about skills first, SkillsUSA. So the foundation actually runs that program with the help of numerous manufacturers, including Oatey. So thank you so much for your support, we couldn't do it without you all. We do that, that's always in June, that's normally on the third week of June. So that is where we actually take students that are in high school or two years in vocational technology colleges or units, they get to compete against one another on a national basis. So one state sends one person at the post-secondary or secondary level, and they compete on a national scale. So, we support that. The other things that we support also, I think that, you know, it's coming up is the national competition at PHCC. Every year at Connect, we have a national both plumbing and HVAC competition. This year, we've got 20 in plumbing, I think we've got 10 in HVAC, so we're very excited about that as we're growing that program.

00:12:06 **Angela Collins**

That comes from the state. So, those are typically winners that have come out of their states at their state competition, and they get to compete on the national level. I think you all have seen, too, that

as we continue to grow and as the industry comes together, there's actually some very cool opportunities to start linking up to additional contests. So we can start actually following the same student from skills if they walked into a contest. Maybe they would appear at our national contest. The union sends people over. So we have a really good melting pot of, we're just trying to make the industry better.

00:12:37 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Yeah. That's awesome. That's really cool. It is. I know, I'm excited to see the contestants this year when they're here for Connect. So I actually -

00:12:46 **Doug Buchan**

We're

00:12:46 **Angela Collins**

very excited to be in Cleveland.

00:12:47 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Yeah, many years ago have seen a SkillsUSA contest, competition happening with all the different trades that are out there. And if no one's ever seen it, they really need to go in and see it sometime because it is unbelievable and really impressive. So from hair to culinary to trade, what you would say your traditional maybe trade you think of with building materials? It's unbelievable. So they have 6 ,000 students

00:13:13 **Angela Collins**

there this year or 6 ,000 people there and they had 110 competitions. Wow. So the ones they add new ones every year. So if you haven't been down to see I mean to see it exactly it's it's a sight to behold. Yeah. So and the winner of our skills actually goes to world skills. So there's another skills on the back

end that actually it happens and that's a the nations across the globe send people in. Yeah, that's like number one in

00:13:36 **Doug Buchan**

in

00:13:36 **Angela Collins**

the world.

00:13:37 **Katherine Lehtenin**

So cool. That'd be awesome.

00:13:39 **Doug Buchan**

Yeah, that would be.

00:13:40 **Katherine Lehtenin**

I know.

00:13:41 **Angela Collins**

I think it's in France this year, so they go everywhere. Yeah.

00:13:44 **Katherine Lehtenin**

I think Oatey needs to sponsor it.

00:13:46 **Doug Buchan**

Yes, that would be good. I see. I see the wheels turning, Katherine. Right? I see them turning.

00:13:51 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Oui, oui. Yes. So let's talk a little bit about workforce development, and it's critical for the future of any industry. What is the foundation doing? We heard about some of the short-term things, but what are you really doing from long-term goals and strategies, you know, that are going to help foster this skilled and sustainable plumbing and HVAC workforce?

00:14:12 **Angela Collins**

We've, we've really sat and thought about it and workforce development is a goal, a strategic goal in both PHCC and PHCC Educational Foundation. So as we've looked over the kind of surveyed the land of what we can do is one of the things for apprenticeship especially is I've been working with several manufacturers to start with. They have great training, but it's not talking at the right level. So what we've been doing is actually kind of working with each manufacturer saying, let's take this training and let's bring it all the way down to like a seventh grade level. And let's start talking why it's important. Let's put it into stuff that we could actually get into a science classroom or a math classroom. Like, so it's something more real world applicable. That's one of the projects we're working on right now. We also have been working on a diversity, equity and inclusion process of what are the young people asking for, like maybe we're not communicating in the right language and that does

00:15:05 **Angela Collins**

happen. We just rebranded and that's one of the things that we did is let's look at colors. What do colors mean to these students? What does font mean? I didn't even know this. Like they have a certain font they like to use. Yeah. Like wow I didn't have a clue. So we're working on making sure that we're actually talking to the right audience and then also training our states as well as others to say this is the language that we're talking in. Right. Because I think both sides get may get a little frustrated when one's talking up here and the other one's talking down here and it's like, what do you, I don't

understand. So the other things that we're doing is again, trying to engage them at every single like checkpoint. So again, the beginning of apprenticeship, the end of apprenticeship, five years in, 10 years in, 15 years in, to make sure that they're always, that we're nurturing them across the platform and we're moving them through. One of the things I do think that's really important

00:15:56 [Angela Collins](#)

that a lot of places haven't, skilled trades is fantastic, but you can go in and take an apprenticeship course or a process, and you can have all kinds of avenues. It's not just being a, it can be an owner, it can be used or cool with being a technician, it also can be working for the manufacturers or the code bOateys or government. So we're really trying to flesh out what that looks like for our students, as well as building things around so that counselors understand it's not just they're a plumber, they're going to go do service and repair work. That's absolutely not

00:16:27 [Doug Buchan](#)

true. Yeah, I think that's a great point, Catherine. We've said that dozens of times throughout the podcast that, you know, you don't have to stay a plumber, you know, PMs, construction managers, warehouse, manufacturing, yeah, it's all there.

00:16:40 [Katherine Lehtenin](#)

Well, and even here at ODEO, a lot of our entire technical team, most of them either have their journeyman's license or they have had some sort of technical and support out in the field. So, you know, those, it's super valuable for us to have that within our organization. So lots of, lots of opportunities for sure. You know, collaboration is often essential for driving positive change. And it's a lot of the conversation that we have here is how do we impact and drive change? So how does the PHC educational foundation collaborate with industry partners, employers, you know, or other organizations to achieve, you know, its educational objectives and change really that you want to see in the market.

00:17:23 [Angela Collins](#)

So at SkillsUSA this year, I think I had one of my best skills this year, and it was in fact that I got to spend so much time with manufacturers because I really had not really listened or had an opportunity to speak to them because I've been in the weeds of trying to get the curriculum finished. Sure. And when I sit and listen to them, I mean, they're very upfront about what they need. They're very willing to help any which way they can. So I think in the collaboration space, it's just more of listening to what they're seeing because they see a whole different side of it than I see. And then, you know, an instructor will see a whole different side. But having someone or a task force that can start pulling these people all together so we're all sitting at the same table has been extremely helpful. One of the manufacturers at Skills this year gave me one of the best ideas that I think I've ever had. It was copper development and was talking about starting to do train the trainer and let's

00:18:12 [Angela Collins](#)

start doing these big collaborative pieces together and so it looks like that is going to happen and it's those types of just generic, honest conversations, that's like, that would be great, like, and being able to do it and not just, well, this is my plan. It's being nimble and being able to say, how could we do this together? And they've all jumped in. And it's just, it's an amazing sight to see that they love the students, they love this career. And so it's been, it's been nice to see how everyone kind of just jumps in, rolls their sleeves up and said, let's just get it done.

00:18:44 [Katherine Lehtenin](#)

Yeah, that's awesome. You know, as we kind of close out today, we'd love to get your perspective of, you know, Where do you hope and dream to see this trade in the next 10, 15 years? Maybe once you've retired and get a chance to sit back and watch, what are kind of your visions and goals for the plumbing and HVAC?

00:19:05 [Angela Collins](#)

Sure. One of the things I think is really important, I actually have been reading about it, is I really wish, because the trades are so rooted in science and math that we were on, that I can see in a couple of years, I would think it's probably gonna happen in a couple of years, that it is kind of more embedded in STEM. I'm not talking traditional engineering and those types of things or aeronautics, but it's just

more viewed as that, especially at the school counselor level. We really have some work to be done at that level to make sure that we're accurately communicating with the parents, even the students and the counselors that there are lots of avenues here. It's not just, like I said before, your service and repair plumber. I think it's also gonna be nice to see more diversity. That's one of the things like we're starting to watch, you know, this is a wonderful career where you can make a very healthy income that supports your family. Right. So I think that if we really start working

00:19:57 [Angela Collins](#)

on those messages, that's what I hope to see like in the future. So that's great.

00:20:02 [Katherine Lehtenin](#)

Well, we we couldn't agree more. And we thank you so much for the work that you're doing.

00:20:06 [Doug Buchan](#)

Yeah, I want to actually thank Angela for not staying in the accounting field. Yeah.

00:20:14 [Katherine Lehtenin](#)

Rhymes a big switcheroo. Yeah. Thanks, Angela. Thank you. Thank you.