

International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 324: LINK-BELT 298 SII HSL PERFECT OPERATOR PREPARATION



OE 324 second-year interns James Ratliff (left and above) and Cole Loffer (above, in the facility's Link-Belt 298) are put through their paces as part of the Joint Apprenticeship Training Fund (JATF) curriculum. Ratliff carefully places a personnel platform, while he and Loffer tandem maneuver a 22,000-lb. mock girder. JATF offers a comprehensive certification program for individuals on a construction-related career path.

Columbus Equipment Company has delivered a Link-Belt 298 HSL lattice crawler crane to Local 324 of the International Union of Operating Engineers. The local, which covers the state of Michigan, will use the crane for training offered through its Joint Apprenticeship Training Fund (JATF).

The new Link-Belt joins more than a dozen cranes that are used in Local 324's hoisting and civil engineering program for apprentice crane operations, said John Haberkorn, a hoisting and rigging instructor for the union.

Several features on the 298 Series 2 crane contributed to the purchase decision. "Our first and foremost reason was the safety features," Haberkorn said. Those features include wide, full-length walkways on the boom, and most of the operations required for assembly and disassembly can be completed in a much safer manner from the ground level.

Another reason for purchasing the Link-Belt was the new heavy-duty top section for conventional and luffing jib configuration. "This is our first luffer crane out here for training and it's very exciting," he noted. Students are instructed on how a luffing jib works in the classroom, but "the real value is the hands-on experience of sitting in the operator's seat learning the advantages and limitations of

a crane with a luffing jib attachment."

Versatility of machinery is important in training, he added. The 298 HSL scores top marks on this front because it can be used with a variety of counterweight configurations and boom lengths. "We can create scenarios where the crane is rigged for various job requirements."

The IUOE Local 324 training facility covers 555 acres and logs between 75,000 and 80,000 training hours annually.

The JATF also wanted a quality machine. "Link-Belt has a long-standing name. I've been around several in the field, and I'm a big fan," said Haberkorn, who has 26 years' experience in crane operation. "I really like the product, and so does our staff."

The training facility owns 15 cranes used for instruction, with everything from a fixed-cab carry deck to a tower crane. That total includes four Link-Belt crawler and rough



Hoisting and Rigging Instructor John Haberkorn brings over 25 years of lifting experience to the JATF program. Today, he takes great pride in contributing to a program that nurtures the next generation of lifting professionals.

terrain cranes. The training center also occasionally rents other Link-Belts for specific training. “We give apprentices a good amount of exposure to Link-Belts, because we know they are going to experience them in the field,” he said.



With state-of-the-art systems and capabilities, the cab of the Link-Belt 298 provides an excellent learning environment.

Although Local 324 is located in Howell, Michigan, Columbus Equipment Company handled delivery of the unit because they wanted to use a union shop, and Columbus Equipment Company was the closest qualifying dealership. “Columbus Equipment Company has been a

real pleasure to deal with,” Haberkorn said. “[Crane product support specialists] Chuck Amnah and Steve Paul did the setup and they were great. The boom system is just out of prototype, and we were all basically learning, but Chuck and Steve have a great amount of background knowledge that came into play.”

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John Haberkorn, Hoisting & Rigging Instructor
International Union of Operating Engineers 324

The IUOE Local 324 training facility covers 555 acres and logs between 75,000 and 80,000 training hours annually, a metric that includes number of students and hours of instruction received. About 350 apprentices are enrolled, with around 100 of those in the hoisting program. The hoisting apprenticeship lasts for three years, with apprentices getting 600 total hours of training and 6,000 hours of experience in the field. The training facility and its programs are entirely funded by the 15,000 members of Local 324, with no state or federal funding involved.

In addition to training apprentices, the facility also offers training for journeymen. The hoisting team is already planning additional classes for the Link-Belt 298 which will include an assembly and disassembly class to embrace the newest technologies in the industry.

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