

Readers Letters



Last month's comment regarding the need to bring new blood into the industry and employing more apprentices struck a chord with many of you as you can see from some of the responses.

Dear Leigh,

Thank you for the C&A comment article, it was good to see it in print especially after our conversation at the recent Nifty event. We now have four apprentices, three of whom we have sent to the CITB training centre at Bircham Newton, Norfolk. They are all proving to be motivated and keen to get on with the job and don't mind getting their hands dirty.

It is interesting to note that a number of the major players, A-plant and Nationwide booked up much of the availability at this training centre earlier in the year.

Let's hope our industry starts to introduce new blood, we need it going forward.

Chris Caney

Dear Mark,

After reading your latest editorial I just had to send you a quick note. Nicely done! I think you hit the nail squarely on the head as I too am questioning "what the heck is going on here?" Don't get me wrong, I am "All In" on Operator Training but I truly believe that "the train has somehow and inadvertently left the track". Simply stated, something is wrong! Is it the fact that most Training done decades ago was headed by "Factory Trained Personnel"? Is it the fact that the "Trainer" KNEW the product? Is it the fact that, since there is simply NO UNIT or MODEL STANDARDIZATION, each "Training Session" was tailor written to the need? Sorry to say, those days are NOW in the past and what you have now UN-Accredited and UN-Knowledgeable people posing as Trainers that can't answer knowledgeably when asked unit and/or model specific operation questions. Is THIS the problem? Is the problem that a Barber carries MORE Credentials to do a "Bowl Cut" than a "Trainer" does instructing people on aerials going 150ft in the air. Could THIS be the problem? Is it the fact that there is absolutely NO TECH TRAINING OFFERED ANYWHERE by ANYONE to instruct technicians on the proper way to do their job? Could THIS be the problem? Something is wrong ... and more people are going to die UNLESS this problem is confronted SQUARELY and deliberately and soon!

As I am sure you are aware, David Single & I have Co-Authored Incident Documents for BOTH the AWP industry and the Telehandler market. These documents, Never before available anywhere, are sorely needed. It is NOT a matter of 'IF' something will happen, is a matter of 'When'. Now, with these documents persons, be-it trainer, operator, technician, Company owners - anyone for that matter, can have a document at their disposal that instructs them as to what to do 'when' something goes terribly wrong (be it catastrophic or not).

Please keep up the good work as your editorials and writings are much appreciated.

Best regards,

Craig A Ihde - President

Aerial Specialists Inc-USA

Dear Sir,

How many school leavers know that they can earn £40k as a bricklayer? While there is no shortage of debate and column inches devoted to the construction skills shortage, I feel that the problem is a little more fundamental. When the recession hit, hundreds of people left the construction sector, now it's booming again but many of those that left have either let their cards lapse or are nearing retirement. The other issue is education - who ever hears a careers advisor talking about a job as a crane driver or plant operator? And yet, in our office in Wales, plant operators five years ago were being paid £10 per hour - today, depending on the category of plant they are operating, they can be paid anything up to £20 an hour - that's equivalent to over £40k a year - more than quite a few professional jobs! It's the same for bricklayers. Five years ago in Wales we were looking at £12 per hour - today's rates, depending on experience and the level of responsibility held, can be up to £20/£25 an hour.

I don't understand why the Government is set on sending so many people to university when there is such a chronic skills shortage in the construction sector. We should be encouraging more kids into vocational careers - because with the level of infrastructure investment we are seeing, those are the skills that the country actually needs. You only have to look at cases like 19 year old Ashley Mullins who was featured in the Daily Mail recently earning £2,000 a week as a plumber after a two year training scheme.

The industry needs around 35,000 new entrants just to stand still and The Royal Academy of Engineering estimates that the UK will need a million new engineers and technicians by 2020, a sobering thought.

The fact is we have turned into a service-based economy which means that we are now having to rely heavily on a migrant workforce - a workforce that is skilled, hardworking and reliable. If they all went home, I dread to think what state our economy would be in!

Paul Payne,

One Way recruitment

Hats off

Just wanted to say well done and congratulations to Vertikal Days and the guys at Liebherr GB for having the foresight to organise the schoolchildren's visits to the show highlighted on your training page in this month's magazine - My Future success at Vertikal Days page 69 C&A July. We need more of this sort of thing rather than excluding youngsters from such events. The younger they are the more likely they are to become converts and get the bug that is the crane business. Well done to all involved.

Ray Fringley

Dear Sir,

I have been working within the crane hire industry for the past 10 years and feel that I am an accomplished operator with a high degree of knowledge regarding lifting operations. I have always advised customers that 'man riding' work is a last resort and should only be considered after exploring all other avenues to perform the task safely. This brings me onto my question, I attended the Royal Norfolk Show this year and was more than a little surprised to see an East Anglian crane hire company, the one that has recently been purchased by a farmer, offering 'rides' in a man cage for charity. Although I cannot fault the motivation, I feel that this is putting people at risk unnecessarily, unless I have misinterpreted the current legislation. Could you please advise.

Regards Richard

Our correspondent is correct in that in a work environment the risk, however slight is not necessary, given other forms of access. However the HSE does allow such 'rides' as long as the safety measures are in place that apply to purpose built rides and a full and detailed risk assessment has taken place. Opinion on this is totally polarised with many adamant that it should be banned, while others consider it ought to be allowed as long as it is done properly. An attempt by ESTA and FMCEC to end this sort of ride by banning it was rescinded after it was ignored and after the company organising Dinner in the Sky appealed strongly against the banning clause.

It is our view that it should be permitted but that strong guidelines/regulation accompany it. This should apply to both cranes being used in this manner as well as aerial work platforms and telehandlers.

Ed

Simon Wilkinson R.I.P

UK equipment finance specialist Simon Wilkinson passed away in late July after a short illness, he was just 58. After appearing to have beaten a bout of cancer he returned to work full time, and helped man the Skyjack stand at Vertikal Days in May. Shortly afterwards he was taken ill with an unusual form of brain disease, that quickly affected his short term memory and led on to other complications, resulting in his death on July 27th.

Simon Wilkinson had a long history in the crane and access industry and was very much appreciated and respected by all those he worked with helped. He started off in finance working with Mercantile Credit and became one of the UK's leading experts on leasing. As such he wrote an informative article for this magazine in 2002, covering the options available for financing capital equipment - see: Money Money Money - C&A September/October 2002.

Quite how he made a connection with the cranes and access equipment industry we do not know, but he quickly became an expert in the field, and trading



Simon Wilkinson

as S&S Wilkinson Corporate Finance helped a whole range of companies find attractive funding to buy new cranes and aerial lifts, as well as obtain financial support for other projects. Those who knew him well speak of his wisdom, his ability to help, his love of the more challenging and quirky financial requests, and the fact that "he would never let you down" and that "his solutions and assessments were always spot-on". He leaves behind wife Sarah, two daughters and a son.

In the run up to his final demise he received tremendous support from the charity St Wilfrid's Hospice in Eastbourne. A memorial service and reception for friends and colleagues to pay their respects and celebrate his life was held the

10th August in Burwash Common, East Sussex.

The tributes posted on the vertical.net news report of his death sum up how the industry felt about him more than our words ever could. Here are a few excerpts from some of them.

"He helped us in so many ways, used equipment values and finding funding in darker times. He was always respectful, modest, polite and helpful. When I saw him at Vertikal days this year I thought, 'what man would have driven 250 miles with such serious health issues?' Not a man to give in eh? He will be sorely missed".

"I'm sorry to hear of Simon's passing, when I started in business he offered support guidance and an ability to source finance solutions where others failed, which continued throughout. My condolences to his wife and family".

"Very sad to hear the passing of Simon. A true genuine gentleman who had great connections. He managed to source solutions to our finances over the past 15 years. Always able to find time to help with the best deal and give valued advice within the crane industry. I

will personally miss being able to pick up the phone for his advice and knowledge".

"We had the pleasure of working with Simon over many years and we can only offer our thoughts and prayers to his family. You find out a lot about people when things get tough; Simon would always stand and offer help and advice and a constructive word at the darkest times. He will be sadly missed".

"Simon, as already has been said, always went that extra mile and was always happy to help. We enjoyed many years involving him in many transactions. He always had an innovative idea up his sleeve to pull a deal together".

"Simon knew his stuff and would always get a good deal. He also went the extra mile to help us out when our bank made things difficult. We always looked forward to his visits. A great man who we will miss. Condolences to his wife and family".

"It is so sad to hear that Simon has passed away particularly at such a tender age. Above all I admired Simon's attention to detail and his ability to raise finance whilst others struggled. I send my deepest sympathy to his wife and family".