

Webb Finds Great Career in Plumbing, Straight out of High School

Ten years ago, Brad Webb was doing an electrical wiring project in the construction lab at Maxwell High School of Technology in Gwinnett County. When he turned on the power to test his circuit, he blew out the breakers for a whole wing of the school. Webb decided to go into plumbing.

Webb started doing plumbing work right out of high school. “The construction program at Maxwell taught me the basics,” Webb said. “I knew a lot about plumbing, but I also knew about carpentry, masonry, and a lot more. And I knew to stay away from electricity,” Webb continued with a chuckle.

Tony Shore, construction teacher at Maxwell High School, was asked if he remembered Webb from ten years past. Shore only paused for a beat. “Tall, lanky kid with dark hair,” Shore queried? “Oh, sure, I remember him. He really paid attention to what he was doing. I always thought he was going to do well because he was serious about learning. He was also just a nice guy. He got along well with people.” Not everyone makes such a good impression that his construction teacher remembers him after ten years.

So Webb knew some stuff. Did it do him any good?

“Well, I started out making between 75¢ to a dollar more per hour than people who didn’t have any construction training. That may not sound like much, but over a year’s time, that’s a lot of money,” Webb recalled. “I got raises a lot faster, too, because the contractor didn’t have to train me. In fact, sometimes I was the one showing the new guys how to do things; especially how to work safely.”



Brad Webb takes a much needed break while working at an office park in Suwanee, Ga. Webb was repairing a broken main supply line to a building. “This is an unusual repair,” Webb said. “I’ve been in the plumbing business for ten years and I’ve never seen the coupling for the main water supply fail at the meter. But that’s what keeps the work interesting.” Webb works for Roberts Plumbing and is preparing to take on some customer service duties in addition to his field work. He looks forward to new challenges, but he wants to keep up his skills through field work.

Webb moved around to several companies over the years. He even tried working in sales once. He hated it. "I like working outside, I like solving problems, I like to see things get done right," Webb explained. "I'm not cut out to be in an office all the time."

Training for Webb has mostly been OJT. With one employer, he had his own company truck within six months, faster than any new hire in the history of that company. He has plumbed restaurants, homes, water and sewer lines, businesses offices - you name it. Once he had to repair all the main supply lines to the new homes in a subdivision because the people putting in the underground power cut every single water line.

"That's what is so great about this business. It is always something new and different," said Webb. "We get to use the latest tools and equipment. There is always something new coming out to help plumbers get the job done quicker and with less chance of leaks. We never want to be called back by a customer to fix a leak that's our fault. And at Roberts Plumbing, we never get that kind of call-back. We get called back for more work."

Webb told a story to illustrate his point. He was on a job where an old home had no shut off valve for the main water supply. He and his helper, working in a two-foot high crawl space, put a shut-off valve on a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch copper line in less than five minutes – *without shutting off the water!*

How do you do something like that? "We used this ProPress solderless pipe crimping tool and special fittings with neoprene gaskets," said Webb, showing off an impressive cordless electric crimping tool. "This costs \$1,700, but it saved us hours of digging under that house to try and locate a shut-off. We got pretty wet, but if we were still using solder, we couldn't have done that job. Particularly not in less than five minutes!"

Lots of interesting projects, working for a great company, and making lots of money is pretty satisfying for Brad Webb. Yet, like so many people in the construction business, Brad wants more. He has a nine-year-old son and wants to make sure he can provide an even better living for his family.

"I'm learning as much as I can about the business aspects of the job," Webb said. "You'd think that ten years experience would give me everything I need to know, but not so. The business side of the job is another ball of wax. You know, things like figuring out how much material to buy for a job or how to order supplies in the least expensive quantity. The boss, Scott Roberts, likes the way I work with our customers. He wants me to do more customer service work now. So, I'll need to know more about how the business is run, anyway," Webb concluded.



Brad Webb, right, explains a repair to a customer. Webb's employer, Roberts Plumbing, Inc., sent him to fix a leak that was sending water into the parking lot of an office complex. He located the problem at the meter and promptly fixed it. Although Webb had never had to fix a meter coupling before, he had the correct part on his truck and knew what to do right away. "I've had to put in the water system for entire subdivisions before, so I knew what the problem was," Webb explained to the customer. "But I've never seen one of these just break into two pieces like this one did." Webb likes the challenge of figuring out how to fix or install plumbing in a variety of situations. "It's always something new," he said with satisfaction.

Those sparks that flew out of Brad Webb's failed electrical project in 1995 headed him into a fantastic plumbing career. With that knowledge of the business, field experience and a good company that values his work, he knows he has a great future ahead.