

Southside High School's Chavez doing 'a first-class job' at Affordable

Lieutenant Drew Wade of the Alpharetta Fire Marshal's office is inspecting the fire protection system in one of the buildings of the 120-unit Westside Commons Condominiums development. This is serious business. Fire protection systems are now required by the building code for all public buildings. Fire protection saves lives and property and gives the tenant a greater sense of security.

"Everything I've inspected is well done," Wade says of the work done by the Affordable Fire Protection crew. "These people do a first-class job." High praise from the Fire Marshal.

That's exactly what Adrian Chavez expects. He knows the work is done correctly because he did it.

"That standpipe the Fire Marshal was looking at has to be right. See, if there is a fire, the firemen can just attach a hose to this outlet and open the valve," said Chavez pointing to a four inch outlet on a big black pipe in the stairwell. "That way they don't waste time hooking a hose to a fire hydrant and dragging a big hose in from the truck. Of course, most of the time the sprinklers in each unit will knock down the fire before it can get bad."



Sprinkler fitter Adrian Chavez of Affordable Fire Protection test fits a four-inch stand pipe in the stairwell of a huge apartment complex in Alpharetta, Ga. "Working with steel pipe is my favorite part of the job," said Chavez. "It isn't as complicated as plastic pipe, but you have to be sure it is done right because it is the backbone of the whole fire protection system."

How is this 19 year old so sure that the work he is doing is "right?"

Adrian Chavez is not your ordinary sprinkler fitter. He took construction classes at Southside High School in the Atlanta School System and is in the Georgia Fire Sprinkler Association apprenticeship program. Chavez also was a Construction Education Foundation of Georgia (CEFGA) summer intern with Affordable for two summers while he was still in high school.

"Adrian came onto the job with a lot of skills that most people don't have," said Foreman Tim Craft. "He knew the basics of construction, how to use a tape measure correctly, how to use hand and power tools, and blueprint reading. Probably the best thing Adrian already knew was how to work safely. He was head and shoulders over the everyday applicant. He's also a fast learner."



Foreman Tim Craft, right, discusses the proper way to install a sprinkler fitting with Adrian Chavez. Chavez is enrolled in the Affordable Fire Protection apprenticeship program. In four years he will be the equivalent of a journeyman in the sprinkler fitting craft. Since the building codes now require sprinklers to be installed in all public buildings, there is no shortage of work. Affordable currently has jobs in eight states in the Southeast. "I get to see a lot of cool places," Chavez said.

"My favorite thing I've learned is working with the steel pipes," Chavez said. "The steel pipe isn't as complicated as plastic pipe and it is very rigid and strong. It stays where you put it. You don't need so many braces and clamps."

Chavez has learned a lot more than just steel pipe, including all about blueprint reading, plastic pipe installation and sprinkler installation. "I get to learn something new every day," he said happily.

"Adrian has a great work ethic and he's enthusiastic and motivated," said Superintendent Bill Hill. "I can get people who have the skills but aren't motivated to do the best job possible. I don't need those people. I need people like Adrian who not only want to work, but also to do the highest level of quality work. The highest quality work is our mission here at Affordable."

So where does Bill Hill find more people like Adrian? Why not in Adrian's own family?



Adrian Chavez, left, works with his father, Javier Chavez, right, and brother, Andre Chavez (not pictured). Affordable Fire Protection Superintendent Bill Hill was so impressed with Adrian's work ethic that he hired both Javier and Andre on the assumption that they would have a similar work ethic and high level of motivation. Turns out they do. Affordable only hires employees who are willing to do top quality work.

“We figured that if Adrian was a quality oriented, motivated worker then he must have learned it at home,” Hill said with a smile. “So we hired Adrian’s brother, Andre and his dad, Javier. They’re all doing great work for us!”

“Yeah, having all of us on the same job is great,” Adrian Chavez said with a smile. “We have to drive 50 miles one way to get to work. With three of us sharing the cost of gas, it helps out a lot. But that’s one of the things I like about construction. Affordable has jobs in eight states, so I never know where I’ll be working next. It never gets boring. That’s why my dad was so happy to get work here. He was going to the same place day after day and working indoors. Now he’s happy to be moving around and outside.”

Adrian also likes the apprenticeship program. He goes to school one night a week from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. The classroom work lasts for two years. He has to complete 8,000 hours of OJT, so the whole program will last for about four years.

“We’ve told Adrian that when he’s completed the apprenticeship program and gotten a good bit of his OJT behind him, he will be a strong candidate for promotion to foreman,” Hill said. “Then he can go as high as he wants. The sky is the limit. Maybe he’ll have his own company some day.” That thought brought a big smile to Adrian’s face.

For fun, Adrian likes to play baseball on various sandlot teams. He’s a shortstop. When Bill Hill asked Adrian why he wasn’t playing on the Affordable softball team, Adrian admitted that he didn’t even know there was one. You could see the thought of playing softball for Affordable lighting up Adrian’s mind. You can bet the current Affordable shortstop is going to be facing some serious competition pretty soon.

With a great start on a sound career, outstanding training in his craft, and a possible shot at playing ball for Affordable Fire Protection, Adrian Chavez is on his way. The sky may not even be the limit for this man.