

# How NELMA's jobs program supports lumber retailers

AS THE SKILLED worker shortage continues to wreak havoc across all elements of the construction industry, the Northeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association (NELMA) is doing something about it. The NELMA Jobs in the Lumber Industry webpage, found at [www.nelma.org/jobs](http://www.nelma.org/jobs) and launched in 2018, works to draw qualified 18- to 23-year-olds to the lumber industry, in addition to individuals already in the workforce that seek to change their profession.

How does this help lumber retailers? Fully staffed mills and manufacturers are able to run more efficiently and create a culture of success and growth that is passed along to customers—retailers—through the buying process.

Read on for more about this innovative jobs outreach program, one of the very first in the lumber industry.

## NELMA Offers a Choice

In late 2017, members of the Northeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association (NELMA) approached their association with a proposal: as jobs became harder to fill, the members asked their association to come up with a plan to combine both their candidate-searching efforts and their hiring needs into a comprehensive educational outreach program.

“It was time to take the bull by the horns and create an interactive, two-way jobs program to benefit both our members, and high school graduates investigating jobs straight out of high school,” said Jeff Easterling, president of NELMA. “We felt as if we had one shot to get

this right, so we spent extra time researching how to get to the right group of young people, and how to grab—and keep!—their attention.”

## The Jobs Program Online

At the core of the program is the website. Users will find background information on program details, a current job listings board, an overview of the industry highlighted by sustainability/renewable resource information, and a careers video library, developed by NELMA administra-

tive assistant Ken Sweet.

“This generation is all about learning by video, so we decided to develop a series of short videos describing the many jobs available in the lumber industry,” said Sweet. “This way our target audience isn’t just reading about a job, they’re actually seeing where that job will take place. It’s a whole new level of education.”

Once the website was launched, Sweet distributed an informational program poster to the guidance counselor at every single high school in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Featuring a unique scratch-and-sniff element, the poster encourages students to consider what their next job might smell like.

By the end of 2022, additional recipients of the poster will include high schools in the Great Lakes area of northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. Following that, the association will begin an outreach effort aimed at trade schools and two-year community colleges throughout NELMA’s geographic footprint (Maine and New England over to the Great Lakes).

The entire effort has been supported through social media postings on NELMA channels. Posts are designed and written to bring home the point that this isn’t your grandfather’s lumber mill; gone are the days of archaic, old-school, technology-lacking mills; in their place students are finding high-tech career opportunities with good pay, good benefits, and upward mobility.

## What’s Next

Describing the poster as a “lightning rod” designed to get student attention, Easterling shares that results were immediate. Mill tours and one-on-one guidance counselor meetings followed, and the program was off and running.

Flash forward to three years down the road, and while temporarily delayed by the pandemic, NELMA mills are still posting jobs and still hiring.

“NELMA members are fully invested in the program and rely on postings to bring in quality applications,” said Easterling. “This is creating a true partnership between both sides. And while challenges still remain, each job posting, each interview conducted is a giant step toward educating the next generation about the variety of jobs within the lumber industry. Healthy, well-staffed mills are the cornerstone for a healthy lumber industry, to include our retailer friends. And that’s truly what it’s all about.”

