

Bob: Hello and welcome to the Illinois professional. A campaign created by Illinois Human Resources to showcase the diverse ways that employees carry out and support the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign mission. If you walk about campus in and out of our buildings whistling through your day, you may not notice some pretty remarkable things happening without fail everywhere you go. But you sure we'll notice if they quit working. I'm Bob Dignan. And in this episode, we're talking about electricity, lighting and wireless connectivity. Staples in a 21st century educational experience. And our guest, Steve Bainbridge an Electrical Foreman at Facilities and Services is on the cutting edge of his field. Keeping us well, cutting edge. Steve was awarded the 2020 Chancellor's Distinguished Staff Award. The award is designed to annually recognize civil service staff employees for their exceptional accomplishments and service to the university. Through this program, outstanding performance is encouraged in all civil service staff employees as they strive to win this prestigious award. We hope you enjoy these few minutes learning about Steve and the impressive work flowing out of his shop.

Steve, thanks for joining me.

Steve: Nice to be here.

Bob: Yeah, so we're going to dig in a little bit and find out about your world, what you do here at the university. So rather than me describing your job or your job title, why don't we hear a little bit from you. What what do you do here? And how long you've been here? Working at the University of Illinois.

Steve: Ok. I am an Electrician Foreperson at Facilities and Services. I run the electrical construction shop. We have about two dozen people in our shop. We do electrical improvements and modifications all over campus. And I have been here for 15 years at the University and I've been in this position for ten years.

Bob: Nice. So across 15 years and ten years, there's probably been some pretty big technological jumps in terms of your area and then going around to buildings and upgrading whole systems and stuff. What what are some of those what are some buildings that people that I know of and think, oh yeah, that either that's a new building, so new technology or new upgrades, new builds for you guys or an older building that maybe you worked on.

Steve: So when I first started here, Technology Services was in a, in a process of upgrading their wireless across campus. And we worked side-by-side with them and installing their infrastructure. To pull higher speed data cabling throughout campus. And that's through all campus buildings. Over that time. Since that time, we've expanded to wireless technology. And we spent several years working side-by-side with them to expand the wireless coverage across campus. Both of these things might be things that people don't recognize or even happening, but they would definitely know if they weren't there. So we just wrapped up final phase of the wireless expansion just here recently. So another technological advances that we've seen quite a bit across campuses is in lighting. We went through and did a major renovation

all just about all campus buildings for upgrading from the old T12 to T8 light fixtures to make them more efficient. And it wasn't very long after that, LED technology really started exploding. And so now all of our lighting that we put in is now LED technology and as part of the campus goal to be all LED by 2050. But that technology has been, been explosive and the controls for lighting are not what they once were. Now they we put in controls that cover not only lighting but you're building, interact with your building automation systems and all of that too. It's no longer just a toggle switch.

Bob: Yeah, of course, LED invented here on campus, so a nice connection there. But even in the video world, we work LED has been explosive over the past several years in terms of surpassing traditional lighting options. And you have so much more flexibility within selecting certain products. It's not like you're laning yourself and you're kind of stuck with what you've got. You can select a product that has lots of different options for you and then you can dial in those options later. And another thing that I was thinking about when you were talking about the wireless is at the beginning of your tenure, you're doing one internet related technology upgrade. Now you're doing another one. You just finished another one. And it makes me think like how rapidly these things are turning over. Do you have any projections or estimates when a whole other campus wide initiative is going to need to happen around internet connectivity.

Steve: Soon.

Bob: You just finished all campus. That's a huge project.

Steve: Now, I'm not the expert in this, but working with our technology services people. I do know that we are we're working on expanding some 5G coverage across campus. We're working with Verizon actively and AT&T. They're trying to work something out. So, so what we're doing is we'll expand wireless connectivity via cellular connections. And knowing they're also talking about green space connections, you know, trying to get it to where you could be in the middle of Engineering Quad or the Bardeen Quad and have wireless access.

Bob: Wow, that's amazing how quickly those things turn over. It just makes me think about, I don't know too much about the profession and going back a long ways, but the rate of change is probably just increased astronomically to where. To be an electrician nowadays, you need to learn so many different skill sets than, you know, flash back 30 years ago. You were an electrician before you joined the university. What or why did you join university? Why did you want to work here?

Steve: So I was an electrician on the outside, as they say, for eight years. Before I came here, I worked in the private sector. You're absolutely right. The, the, the range of things that we can do in a, in a trade or it's just amazing. And it gets even more diverse as we go. But as far as why I wanted to come to the

university, I think that I now really value education. And I think it's, I just think it's so important in the university. I mean, we're educating people not only from Illinois but across the world, right? And just to be, just to play a small role in that, I think is a pretty good way to spend a career.

Bob: Definitely, it makes everything more meaningful. Even though they can be menial tasks throughout your day, you can connect them back to a bigger picture of what's going on. That's excellent. So you are an award winner. You won the Chancellor's Distinguished Staff Award.

Steve: Yeah

Bob: I'm guessing your first time.

Steve: Yes

Bob: How did you- paint a picture for us? How do you find out you won the award? Kind of like a light up some cells in your brain, you go, ah that's nice.

Steve: Yeah. So so my boss is Greg Moen and he let me know before I received an official notification that he had nominated me and and I thought that it was I thought it was really good. It's a good it's a good recognition. Just to be nominated. I was I was happy for that because what that meant for me was a he was he was recognizing that he understood some of what I was doing and saw the value of what I was doing. So so yeah, that was that was kind of important.

Bob: Yeah. I know around our office, you can go day in, day out, doing the best for the university thinking students. And you kind of can get into a groove. And you're just doing the same thing for years and years and years. And then what's nice is with this award, you kind of can step back and see for your purpose 15 years. It really adds a lot when you really think about what you've contributed to the campus. Yeah. So on that point, thinking about Steve's little section of what's going on in this big behemoth. How would you think about and relate what you do and your group to the overall mission of the university.

Steve: So for me personally, you know, I'm a managing and leading the shop. I'm not I'm not really working or not working with my tools anymore. So I'm not putting in a physical, the physical work that is actually so important for campus. But what we do as a shop is we maintain and we modify and we improve the, the built environment here. And so all the learning and all the research that goes on, we

enabled that, and you know, you talked about some of the technology advances and those things are we've played such a, such an important role. Not me personally, but the shop overall in advancing those technologies or making those technologies possible here on campus and it. And it just, it aids learning, whether it's in a classroom or whether it's research. So I think that's, that's what we do to further that mission.

Bob: That's excellent. And I think about something you said earlier, which is you do a big whole campus, switch over to upgrade on wireless. The kind of gauge of success of your team, your mission, partnering with technology services is, if it's not noticed, it's working well, right? Because when the internet goes out, that's like bottom of the hierarchy needs and everybody's like, oh, I need WiFi? Like I'm thinking about when the lights go out because the motion sensor hasn't detected somebody moving that's when everybody notices, oh, there are lights here and we need lights. And so thinking about that, you talked about the motion sensors and connecting it to building energy optimization. Are there any other kind of more of the interesting aspects of what you do and what your shop does that people might not be aware of.

Steve: You know, one of the most interesting things to me is that technology. You know that's suppose that's why I talk about it at first, I find that very interesting. But in general, I think I'm always amazed at the diversity of what actually gets accomplished on, on campus. We work in the, on the south farms. We might be working alongside pigs are cows in hand. We work out at the airport and you know we support the federal government out at CERL. And we work in clean rooms up on engineering campus, you know. So the range of the work we do is, is just so very interesting and I don't, I don't think maybe a lot of people understand all that goes on here. And even if they do, I think we're we're fortunate that we get to actually interact with it very often.

Bob: Yeah, that's a great perspective because the, the university is kind of sticking as a glue kind of everybody together. There's all these nodes of innovation. Whereas I'm just trying to think. A house is a house. If you're called out to an electrical job out at the house, there's kind of an upper limit for how wild you're going to get a job at a house. But like you said, you could be going down to the airport or you could be going to pigs. Those are pretty wildly different, and I can't imagine that. That also keeps the job interesting, right? Your problems are fresh and interesting as they come to you as opposed to same old same old?

Steve: Yeah, absolutely.

Bob: So last question, can you tell us about a time where you felt most proud to be a professional working at the university?

Steve: I'd say the, the day that I got hired on here I was pretty proud to be a professional working here. But maybe even more, maybe even more than that was the day that I was hired into this position that I'm in now, I really value the work that I did as an electrician. And I think it's, it's just incredibly important what guys are doing right now. For me though, I like the idea of being able to move into this position, get a little bit bigger picture of what goes on here at the university and maybe even have a little bit more of an impact personally than professional.

Bob: Excellent. Yeah, I'm thinking about back to my first day two. I was a student. So really sure what was going on or in- like you said, very limited view. Just trying to do your job, what's put in front of you. But then the more connected you get, the more you see how this is a big ship. And everybody is doing their part, but it's moving in a direction. And if you pay attention to what's coming down the pike, what's in front of you, the people that you're working with, you can actually influence where the ship is going for the better. Excellent. Anything else you want to add about your, your role here, what you're doing, your shop, and moving forward into the future.

Steve: I don't have much to add. I'd just like to reiterate the work. I think I've said it a couple times. But the work that the guys are doing, doing out there for the university, it's, it's, it is truly amazing in it and it's valuable. And I'm, I'm really glad to be working with so many professionals. You know, these guys are very skilled at what they do and I'm proud to be part of their team.

Bob: Well Steve, I appreciate you taking some time and talking with us about what you do and your role here at the university. Thanks so much.

Steve: You're welcome.

Bob: Thanks for listening to this episode of The Illinois Professional. If interested in nominating someone for a campus staff award. There's a link in the description with more information. And be sure to follow @IllinoisHR on Twitter for informational and inspirational posts.