

Michael Garcia's electrician career lost was shut down before it ever got a chance to spark.

In a career path that should be flourishing in today's economy, the 20-year old San Jose native, is seeing no light at the end of the tunnel. While attending the Construction Craft Training Center to become a certified electrician in California and working for a small 34-year family-owned electrical company in San Jose, he's had nothing but trouble keeping a job.

"I've tried everything I can think of to succeed as an electrician so early in my career," said the struggling electrician apprentice with nearly two years invested into school and on the job training. "I had to put it on the back burner for a while because I wasn't even able to break even with my income to pay for the cost of school."

The United States Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics projects the employment of electricians should increase 12 percent between 2008 and 2010.

"After making it through high school, I thought I was making the right decision for myself by going directly into work force," said Garcia. "I knew I had to attend vocational school to continue working, however I always thought electricians would be in high demand."

The first-semester San Jose City College student was a year and a half in to the CCTC five-year electrical trainee program at the San Jose facility until they shut its doors on him and more than 30 electrician students throughout the city mid-semester.

The program ran more than \$350.00 per trimester and consisted of online components, where students are required to study material, and hands on components, where students take tests and get applied guidance from certified electricians.

"The school told us not to return to our classes because attendance was dropping along with grades and understanding of the material," Garcia said.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics states that as the population grows, electricians will be needed to wire new homes, restaurants, schools, and other structures that will be built to accommodate the growing population, along with updates of older buildings and homes to meet modern codes and accommodate higher electricity consumption used today.

How does the electrician industry expect to provide qualified electricians to complete these jobs, if schools, on the job training and small businesses are being put on the back burner while advanced electricians and large electrical companies are taking jobs from smaller businesses.

"I was working at least 40 hours a week for over a year with Tech Electric," Garcia said. "After finishing our big jobs, fulfilling our contracts and completing smaller side jobs the business just slowed."

"We stopped driving company vans to job sites, apprentices started working less, foremen began working more, customers we're turning to companies like PG&E or resulting to qualified friends they knew that could complete the job at hand," said Garcia. "It's affecting everyone, I was cut down to six hours a week, then told to stop showing up unless I got a call from my boss."

Contrary to the Bureau of Labor Statistics belief in the demand for electrician jobs to rise along with all occupations in the U.S., the Associated Press released Wednesday that California's unemployment rate remains the fifth highest in the nation.

The 2010 January Employment Situation Reports declares California's jobless rate of 12.5 percent, which was released last week, remains well above the national rate of 9.7 percent.

"My brother and sister-in-law were working for a contractor for Comcast and both got laid off in November," said Garcia. "After collecting unemployment and being denied an extension my brother is in a panic to find a job."

In a similar situation to Garcia, Nathan Stokes, a 24-year-old father of one attended vocational school to become an automotive mechanic at Universal Technical Institute in Rancho Cucamongo, California. Although guaranteed job interviews and positions after graduation, Stokes hasn't reaped any benefits from the school.

Although the United States Department of Labor Statistics' has uplifting hopes for those unemployed, Garcia is one of many unemployed workers waiting for their career field to pick back up, in the mean time returning to school and moving back home to a parents house isn't an option for everyone.