

# Carmelo Castle “Protects the trade” of Plumbing

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[www.PreciousHeart.net/message/Castle-08-2025.pdf](http://www.PreciousHeart.net/message/Castle-08-2025.pdf)

“I never set out to be first,” said Carmelo Castle, 18.

He is the first in Texas to graduate from Woodville ISD’s High School three-year plumber’s program, pass the tradesman exam, and become a licensed tradesman plumber.

Meeting and conversing with him, you would think he was older than 18. He is a self-starter, his mother Gidget Wise said, “great at challenging himself.” He is her fourth and youngest, herself born in Tyler County Hospital and raised in Warren and Hillister.

Carmelo, “Melo” to his friends, remembers very well the day, three years ago, when he was walking through WISD’s row of tables for vocational classes and crossing paths with John Bunker, retired Master Plumber, with his table full of tools and a subdued engaging grin.

From his mother you see where Melo got his pleasant smile, though usually hidden behind his determined demeanor. She remarked on his intense “focus,” and proudly noted he graduated WISD with a 3.98 GPA with honors in Spani-sh, and he is teaching himself Russian.

Bunker had approached WISD Superintendent Lisa Meysembourg about Texas House Bil 636 (2021) that allowed High School students to enter a five-course sequence approved by the Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners and now listed in the Workforce Education Course Manual that prepares students to take the plumber tradesman licensure exam.

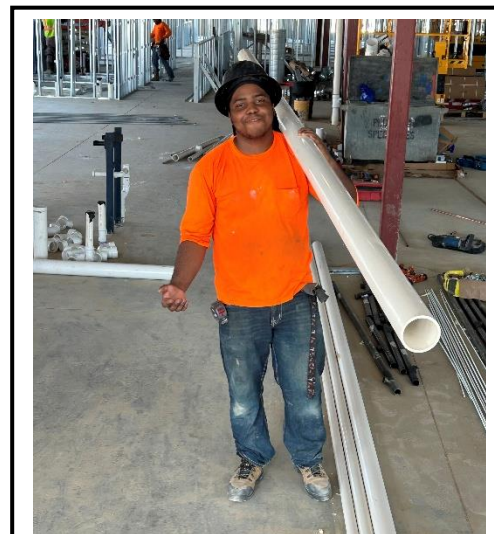
Melo vividly recalls his mother’s encouragement. He liked and wanted to pursue football, yet he realized the challenges of reaching pro and making a living. His mother said he should pursue the plumbing course “to have something to fall back upon.”

Melo was born in Nacogdoches and raised in Woodville. Except for second grade in Colmesneil, he has been a WISD student all his school life.

Ms. Wise endearingly said, “He had a tremendous amount of love, support and guidance from his siblings, especially his oldest sister Kaiya, and from his best friend Nery and his family who gave him a safe space and helped him to stay grounded.”

He bought an old truck when he was 17 and has been working on it with the aid of Nery’s dad. He has driven himself in his education, even updating his mother’s old 2011 computer for use in classes.

Melo is a mellow man. His love and respect for his mother is obvious. Yet he too had been thinking about his future as far back as the 10th grade when he encountered Bunker.



Carmelo “Melo” Castle, 18, is the first Texas graduate of WISD’s plumber program to pass the tradesman exam, and he is seen here working his trade for Plumbing Specialties in Beaumont as they plumb the Beaumont Bone and Joint Institute’s new building.

Photos by Journeyman William Sumner



On their teacher, Master Plumber John Bunker, Melo and fellow students call him “Bunker,” that is, no “Mr. Bunker,” or other formalities.

Melo told a reporter from 12News and reiterated with me, too, that he saw many going nowhere and that he wanted to secure a future—the vision of all good schools, WISD, its staff, and professionals like Bunker. And his mother beamed with pride.

When I first met Melo, he asked, “Did Bunker tell any jokes about me?”

I said, “No, he was just proud of you.”

Melo said Bunker was “a bit too enthusiastic! He was hard on us.” Melo did not know how to take Bunker’s energy. And Bunker struggled too, as “school” was new to him, he said, being used to running crews all his life.

Bunker settled down, or mellowed, over the years as he developed the classes and as he helped the students grow and form bonds.

Melo came to respect Bunker, who was energetically honest. Melo said Bunker “had all this real-life experience.” Bunker knew plumbing, their Union Local 68 in Beaumont, had connections over the state, and he liked to joke and tell stories from decades in residential and commercial plumbing.

By the time of this interview, Melo had talked with several reporters and felt surprised at the attention. He was the first in Texas to take the tradesman exam right after graduating and pass—a landmark in Texas education—and notable for little WISD, for little Woodville, Texas, and truly for the vast plumbing profession.

Bunker said the average general age of an apprentice is 37 and a licensed plumber 43. A 2020 Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners report said 50.8 was the average age of a Texas plumber. In 2024, Plumber Magazine said the national average age was 41, and Blue Recruit said the industry is “on an upward trajectory, providing real job security.”

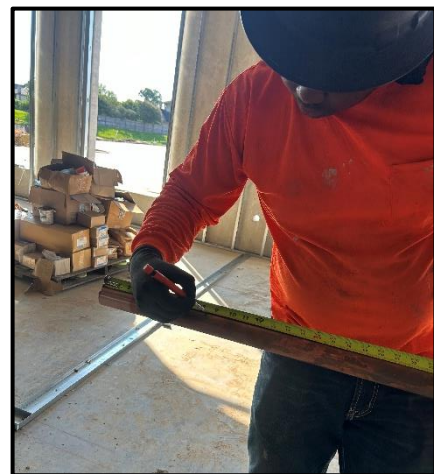
When District 7 Board of Education member Julie Pickren awarded a BOE certificate to Melo at the WISD board meeting in July of 2025, she reflected those averages, thanked the WISD leadership, and said, “We understand, we fully get it, how trades ... are an actual national security issue.” The certificate noted Melo as a “Texas trailblazer,” and Pickren told Melo that he has shown future students “what is possible.”

Indeed, plumbing is critical to health, to the water we drink, and even to the safety of the building’s structure and society’s very sanitation. Bunker noted that bad plumbing contributed to the plagues of the Middle Ages that killed so many millions.

Melo has his tradesman limited license earning a good wage now with Plumbing Specialties owned by Chuck Mulholland and Clint Hatton in Beaumont.

Melo is under Journeyman William Sumner doing the plumbing for the Beaumont Bone and Joint Institute’s new building. “We’re glad to have him,” said Sumner.

Reflecting back, Melo said their classes under Bunker developed a camaraderie, they became brothers in completing projects and studying code. “Bunker was tough!” reiterated Melo.



One time, Bunker made Melo stay in a room by himself for two hours to study the state plumbing code and more.

As the second year rolled into the third year, Melo said, “It got tougher.”

During Melo’s senior year, WISD was completing a new elementary school, and Bunker contacted the owner of the plumbing company contracted with WISD.

“Yes,” they said, and Bunker got Melo and two other students into their crew, apprenticing, in the plumbing of the new school building.

Of course, Bunker dropped by regularly to check on his charges.

As Bunker and Melo talked about the program and the bond they created, “plumbing” took on a whole new world. Melo and his mother not only respected but admired Bunker.

“He has become a mentor to Melo,” said Ms. Wise in motherly affection.

Not a sideline or forcibly in class, Bunker is a strong man of faith and a 20-plus year pastor of the Woodville Pentecostals. A few inside jokes were shared.

Bunker is a very well-respected minister, on fire, and that fire for teaching his life-trade carried over into the classroom.

Melo and his mother are also members Little Baptist Church in Hillister led for decades by the likewise energetic Pastor Bobby Cruse.

Melo and Bunker reflected and grieved that one of their own, senior plumbing student Dylan Bruton, died in car accident in January of 2024.

The long hours and study have been paying off in more than a paycheck. There are real-world advantages to having this licensure when graduating from High School. Melo is starting as a second-year tradesman, which is above apprentice. That means after three years and with Union Local 68 help, Melo will qualify to take his fourth-year journeyman exam. That might be another record, or close, for being the youngest to make journeyman.

Few know the complexities of the trade in the vast scope of codes, blueprints, and skilled art that go into plumbing an entire building.

As Bunker and Melo resonated, a maxim surfaced that was energetically inculcated into the students over the years. “Protect the trade!” Bunker repeated with a hardened conviction.

When the going gets tough, or some want to cut corners—or do it cheap—“Protect the trade!”

When Bunker visited Melo on site at WISD’s new elementary school doing “the trade,” he saw more than a student. Bunker saw a proud strong young man covered in sweat working right alongside other trade brothers, and that was a most satisfying sight.

Bunker’s steely eyes, resolute temper and voice, and Melo’s concurrence had met eye to eye.

Bunker had passed on the pride of his life’s trade with a portion of his faith. Importantly, Melo being first, hopefully many more will carry forth their beloved trade in Local 68 and beyond, a critical piece of our civilization’s infrastructure.

A mother was proud, and Melo had secured a great future in a trade to protect.



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