THE HANDS THAT BUILD AMERICA

ABC’s Construction Executive Highlights Five Years of Merit Shop Workforce Success Stories

2012-2017

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Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC)’s Construction Executive Highlights Five Years of Merit Shop Workforce Success Stories 2012–2017

Editor’s Note

In the pages ahead, Construction Executive presents a selection of feature articles and Q&A’s highlighting the accomplishments of construction professionals employed by ABC member firms—who are supported by the efforts of ABC National and its chapters.

Without their commitment to excellence in training, mentorship and workforce development, the American buildings and infrastructure where we live, work, learn and grow as a community would not be here today. It takes many hands to build America. Here are their stories.

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STRONG PROSPECTS

Colleges Are Retooling Their Construction Programs to Suit Today's Students and Employers

BY JOANNA MASTERSON
What happens when 20 million people are expected to move to Texas in the next 30 years? Local contractors and college construction programs get busy.

Already last year, 20,000 homes were built in the greater Austin area to accommodate the anticipated population influx, which is estimated to require the construction of 50 percent more residential units than the current stock.

Texas State University is experiencing correlating growth in its construction science and management program to the tune of 453 students enrolled today versus 244 in 2013, due in part to the economic recovery and the school’s accreditation through the American Council for Construction Education. Correspondingly, the school’s construction job fair went from 16 companies participating in 2009 to a total of 140 employers at the fall 2016 and spring 2017 events.

“This growth has provided excellent internship and employment opportunities, with students receiving multiple job offers,” says Vivek Sharma, senior lecturer in Texas State’s department of engineering technology. “Based on a survey of our recent graduates, starting salaries are averaging $60,000, with about 70 percent of undergraduates going into commercial construction and 30 percent entering residential construction.”

The numbers also tell a story at Colorado State, where enrollment has gradually increased to 750 students since the economic downturn knocked it back to less than 500 around 2009 and 2010. Today, more than 95 percent of construction management students are placed in a job prior to graduation.

“Our last two job fairs sold out in less than a week,” says Anna Fontana, internship and outreach coordinator at Colorado State. “We cannot keep up with the demand for both interns and full-time graduates.”

According to December 2016 statistics compiled by Colorado State’s construction management department, undergraduates received an average of 2.6 job offers per student with an average base salary of $62,000. Two-thirds of job placements were with an internship sponsor.

“Because the market is so strong, our students seem more focused on finding the best fit in terms of company culture instead of just focusing on finding a job that pays,” says Kayla Boos, Colorado State’s student recruitment coordinator and academic advisor. “They value employers that care about their employees, they want to do meaningful work, and they appreciate sustainability, work-life balance and a competitive starting salary.”

Mastering the Right Curriculum

Georgia Tech looked at the downturn as an opportunity to move its undergraduate construction management program to the civil engineering department and retool its four master’s tracks (residential development, facility management, construction management from the contractor’s perspective and program management from the owner’s perspective). Prior to 2009, the school put all of its efforts into the residential and construction management tracks, but that didn’t align with what was happening in the economy.

“It used to be that almost 90 percent of students were professionals taking classes in the late afternoon or evening, but during the downturn we saw more full-time, international and out-of-state students,” says Daniel Castro, chair of Georgia Tech’s School of Building Construction. “It was a sudden change, but we had to adapt.”

Now, Georgia Tech offers more courses during the day to cater to the 50 percent of enrollees who are part-time students and part-time workers. In addition to moving the residential program to a new master’s degree in real estate development (pending approval by the Board of Regents), the school expanded the program management area of study to cater more to owners.

“We saw that regardless of the economy, owners are always maintaining and building facilities,” Castro says. “We learned our lesson and are diversifying our program.”

To that end, in February Georgia Tech launched a new professional master’s in occupational safety and health (PMOSH)—the first program of its kind in the state. According to the Georgia Department of Labor, employment for occupational safety and
health specialists is projected to grow 7.3 percent from 2012 to 2022. In 2013, 2,753 positions in the field required a master’s degree (a 60 percent increase since 2010), yet only 18 percent of safety professionals had one.

“Although safety hazards are inherent to the construction process, they tend to be addressed separately rather than as an integral part of it,” Castro says. “Through PMOSH, we aim to shift the way safety is treated by equipping graduates with the knowledge, skills and confidence to address safety holistically.”

The PMOSH degree—designed for working professionals in construction, manufacturing and related industries—covers fundamentals and standards, as well as business aspects of safety such as leadership, communication and teamwork. Technology is another important piece of the puzzle.

“Rather than interpreting statistics and learning about causes and risks after accidents have happened, today’s technologies are designed to help us minimize safety risks so significantly fewer accidents occur,” Castro says, citing the importance of BIM and sensors to prevent collisions. “PMOSH exposes participants to current and emerging technologies so they can use them to strategically reduce hazards throughout the construction process.”

The degree takes two years to complete and is offered in a flexible online structure with three on-campus sessions—a hybrid format that suits professionals who want a challenging program but can’t afford to disrupt their work schedules.

Opportunities to Collaborate and Compete

THROUGH ASSOCIATED BUILDERS AND CONTRACTORS’ (ABC) student chapter program—which includes a network of nearly 30 colleges and universities—students pursuing construction-related degrees can build strong relationships with each other, faculty, and local ABC chapters and members. In addition to facilitating guest speakers, internships, community service projects, career fairs and jobsite tours, ABC student chapters can participate in the association’s annual Construction Management Competition (CMC), as well as apply to be named ABC’s Student Chapter of the Year.

The 2017 CMC will take place during ABC Leadership Week Nov. 5-9 in Orlando, Fla. Sponsored in part by the Trimmer Construction Education Foundation, the event will feature teams of four students testing their project management, estimating, safety, quality control and presentation skills. Last year’s winners were Colorado State University, Florida International University and Ohio State University.

Nominations for the 2017 ABC Student Chapter of the Year award are due Sept. 29, and the winner will be announced in November at the Future Leaders Awards Luncheon during ABC Leadership Week. The award recognizes a group’s outstanding accomplishments in programming, community service, communications/public relations and interaction with its sponsoring ABC chapter. Texas State University took home the honor last year. Winners receive $2,000 and complimentary registration, hotel accommodations and airfare for two student chapter members to attend ABC Legislative Week in Washington, D.C.

For more information and to submit a nomination, click on the Education & Training tab at abc.org.
Responding to Educational Preferences

In higher education, students (and often their employers) are the customers, so their schedules and learning preferences dictate how courses are delivered.

“Today’s construction students prefer to be included in active learning more than their counterparts 10 years ago. Therefore, Texas State University has included more laboratory activities, computer projects and group activities than in the past,” Sharma says. “Also, because students often need to work to be able to afford school, our program plans to offer its first online class next semester to compliment other courses currently offered remotely by other departments.”

Looking ahead, Texas State is planning to create an online master’s degree for construction professionals within the next five years. The department already offers a graduate degree in technology management with a construction emphasis that caters to students making a career change from another field of study or who are already employed in the industry but don’t have a

Degrees at Work

Check out how two employees in McCarthy Building Companies’ Dallas office are adapting their traditional architecture and construction degrees to today’s technology-driven industry.

Chris Patton
Senior VDC Manager
University of Kansas
Bachelor’s degree in architecture

What did you envision doing for your career?

CP: I’ve always been interested in things that require critical thinking and problem-solving. After taking drafting and design classes in high school, I saw architecture as critical thinking and problem-solving for an owner through design.

RM: I have always loved building things and learning how big buildings and projects come together. I love finding efficient ways to solve problems.

How does your current job line up with that vision?

CP: I was in design for a few years, but felt I was in a bubble. I was not experiencing the challenges and business side of the real world, so I first diverged away from architecture into a design manager role for an ownership group.

Now, I oversee and execute all of McCarthy’s VDC initiatives and projects during the preconstruction and construction phase of work within our Texas region. My focus is on the development of VDC project strategy, field personnel training, VDC execution, as well as research and development of new VDC technology. I lead a team of engineers who create models for site logistics planning, estimating, self-perform work, constructability reviews and MEP coordination. I’m also a member of McCarthy’s VDC Leadership Group.

RM: My job enables me to work with all projects and project teams to solve their problems in creative manners using technology.

My job is focused on evaluating new technologies and processes and helping deploy those in our company. I help bring new technology to the industry, evaluate if it would be effective for our company and then help deploy the new solution.

Did school prepare you for the real world?

CP: School taught us critical thinking to solve problems through design. I think I am still doing that, but in a different application. I have to work within a very complex industry to help guide teams and individuals toward solutions.

RM: My education helped groom me for the construction industry, and I became involved with the industry early on via an internship. The construction science program I participated in catered well to our industry and helped ensure I was ready for work.
relevant degree. However, more employers see value in a professional master's degree as a means for their employers to advance within the company, Sharma says.

A healthy mix of technology use and educational basics seems common across the board. “Students seek value regardless of the learning platform,” says Jim Sullivan, director of undergraduate programs at the M.E. Rinker School of Construction Management at the University of Florida. “They tend to prefer live classes during their first two to three years and then seem more flexible with online classes as they get exposed to positive online experiences.”

“We have integrated project teams of both architecture and construction management students,” adds Bill Bender, chair of the construction management program at the University of Washington. “Most faculty members have moved to a learning management system with less paper and more online submission for work. We teach more technology and have it integrated through our courses.”

Offering virtual reality services helps McCarthy resolve issues early in the design process, allows project partners to make decisions more efficiently, provides cost savings, improves safety and increases collaboration on the jobsite.

**What technologies do you use regularly to design/build construction projects?**

**CP:** I use Autodesk Revit, Navisworks Manage, Civil 3D and BIM 360 products. I had to take some software training when I transitioned into the construction industry after working for the ownership group. I continue to participate in seminars that offer classes to keep up on the latest trends.

Technology has flooded the construction industry during the last few years—from using virtual reality mock-ups to drones and laser scanning—opening up even more tech-focused jobs for upcoming college graduates.

**RM:** For me, it is primarily drones and laser scanning in addition to tablets and phones and technology surrounding that.

I think what has been most valuable is still understanding the process of building a project and seeing how this technology can support that. No matter how much we wish, our phones will never build a hospital. Most of what I have learned has been from my experience working at McCarthy.

**Is the company involved in any collegiate programs?**

**CP:** I serve as a guest lecturer at Texas A&M University and I’m advising Montana Tech on its BIM curriculum. Previously, I served as a guest lecturer at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Many students reach out to us to participate in course projects through interviews and data collection, and we are happy to help them. McCarthy’s support of college programs and students is a great way for those institutions to stay acclimated to the latest trends so they can produce top-notch students who are ready for the industry the moment they graduate.

**RM:** McCarthy has its own mentoring program and regularly provides internships for college students interested in a career in the construction field, including hosting college interns in our VDC department.

Additionally, as high school “careers” are on the rise, McCarthy has stepped up to begin mentoring teenagers who are ahead of their peers when it comes to their chosen career path after college. For instance, McCarthy is involved with the 2017 Mayor’s Intern Fellows Program, an eight-week paid summer internship program that introduces Dallas public high school students to careers and employment opportunities in industries and companies where they have expressed interest. McCarthy also is involved in the North Texas ACE Mentor Program in Dallas-Fort Worth.
With the workforce shortage being felt across the country, college construction programs are working to prepare the next crop of workers to make an impact right away.

Colorado State’s Fontana concurs, underscoring that outside of estimating or modeling, construction careers aren’t easily confined to online or work-from-home situations. “It is difficult to develop relationships or visualize and collaborate remotely. We need to be onsite to provide the best service we can, both in the classroom and on the job,” she says.

At Georgia Tech, that translates to offering more capstone experiences so students work in teams and address challenges that they’ll see in the industry. “Those problems are very interdisciplinary. Working in teams reflects how they’ll address those issues in real life,” Castro says, adding that opportunities for collaboration exist in the digital environment as well. “The online format provides an ideal forum for engagement among program participants as well as faculty, leading to rich discussions and valuable industry connections.”

Hiring the Future Workforce
Don’t confuse the demand for online learning with laziness. Colorado State construction management students are highly motivated and technologically savvy, according to Boos. “Many of them dream of owning their own company and are eager to get as much work experience as they can,” she says.

Sharma agrees, describing students in Texas State’s program as very focused and dedicated to making a career in the construction industry. The school’s senior exit survey shows more than 90 percent of students find careers in the construction industry, and the majority have a job before they graduate. Most start their careers as field engineers or project engineers on the path to becoming superintendents; there’s also a growing trend toward being hired for BIM engineer positions.

Students are also active in community service initiatives and extracurricular groups, including the Construction Student Association, which is a student chapter for Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC). Buoyed by support from the ABC Central Texas Chapter and time and financial commitments from member companies such as SpawGlass, DPR and Turner, Texas State University was named ABC’s 2016 Student Chapter of the Year.

“The ability to get out of the classroom and connect with ABC member companies by participating in student competitions and experiencing networking events, jobsite tours and information sessions lends a major point of growth to our students,” says Chase Jones, president of the Texas State University Construction Student Association. “We learn not only how to manage construction projects, but also how to build up the people around us and attack challenges as a team.”

With the workforce shortage being felt across the country, college construction programs are working to prepare the next crop of workers to make an impact right away.

“They know technology, are able to work in teams and communicate well orally and in writing,” Bender says of his University of Washington graduates. “They are ready and eager to work.”

Joanna Masterson is senior editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email masterson@abc.org, visit constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
When you choose to work with an accredited quality contractor (AQC), you choose to work with the best of Associated Builders and Contractors' more than 21,000 member firms.

The AQC designation provides national recognition to construction firms that document their commitment to quality achievement in five areas of corporate responsibility: quality, safety training, community relations and diversity, employee benefits and employee training.

abc.org/aqc
ABC Craft Professional Of the Year
Adam Ruff Is Driven to Be The Best
When Adam Ruff was promoted to field supervisor at Price Electric, Robins, Iowa, last year, he set some personal goals to help develop the company’s next crop of leaders, improve operational efficiencies and have a positive influence over a larger group of people. He can place a definitive checkmark next to that last goal now that he has been named Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) 2017 Craft Professional of the Year. Ruff received the award in front of hundreds of contractors, apprentices and their families at ABC’s Workforce Week, held in March in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
“I didn’t just win this award. It’s more about Price Electric. If I win, they all win too,” Ruff says, hearkening back to his days as a competitive athlete. “I thought I knew what being on a team meant until I started playing rugby. One individual cannot be successful without the other 14 teammates on the field. I played in national championships with great rugby teams that trained hard together, had each other’s backs on and off the field, and personally cared for one another. These concepts helped me get where I am and have taught me so much about leadership and how to build camaraderie.”

Ruff’s colleagues and superiors appreciate his reliability and fairness, his ability to solve problems and learn quickly, and his dedication to increasing productivity and maintaining safe work practices. His coworkers voted him employee of the year in 2015, and Price Electric President Jeremy Price describes Ruff as a “rock star employee who everyone wants on their team.”

“A win for Adam is a win for all of us,” Price says. “It means a lot to the company and employees. It shows everyone what can be achieved by making their job into a career. It builds us up in the community and it helps bring in future employees.”

Rewarded for Hard Work
Ruff came to the construction industry 19 years ago after being paired with a roommate pursuing an electrical apprenticeship at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Having some uncles in the trades

AN IMPRESSIVE GROUP OF FINALISTS

ABC’s Craft Professional of the Year award recognizes individuals who exhibit outstanding skills and leadership, a passion for their trade and pride in hands-on work. This year’s finalists possess all those qualifications and more.

CHRIS ALLISON
Journeyman Electrician
Sentry Electric, Lincoln, Neb.

Allison has been with Sentry Electric for 12 years, managing the company’s largest jobs and serving as president of the Employee Safety Council. He also teaches apprentices at the ABC Cornhusker Chapter and set up the chapter’s first local craft competition. Outside of work, Allison volunteers with Boy Scout troops and is an avid volleyball player.

Best of both worlds: When I got out of high school, I had to choose between teaching and going into the trades. I chose the trades because going to college was daunting to me. I wasn’t good with traditional bookwork, but if I touch something and use my hands, I can understand it almost instantly. So I put teaching on the back burner because I didn’t think I’d have an opportunity for it. Now that I get to be an electrical instructor too, I try to break down all the technical terms in the books and get the students out of the classroom as much as possible so they can use hands-on tools and our motor control system.

A family business based on merit: Being the son of Sentry’s owner pushed me to prove I’m a good electrician—and that I want to be the best that I can be—so I could earn my peers’ acceptance. Then, when I started running larger jobs as a 23-year-old project foreman, I had to prove myself even more with general contractors. I wouldn’t be where I am without the merit shop philosophy. If you apply yourself, you can be a better person with a lot of advancement opportunities.

Perspective on industry opportunities: You can start without debt and move up the salary chain quickly. There’s great growth potential; you can go in many directions just within the trades. I’m interested in power generation, which is more the mechanical side of things, but I’m still an electrician.

App initiative: We had a disconnect between office and field staff in terms of paperwork and getting workers checked in and out of jobs, so I took it upon myself to create an app that would make it simpler for everyone. I programmed it myself and expanded on the MIT App Inventor software to make it do what we need (e.g., track parts, log who’s out driving versus who’s at lunch, and send materials sheets from the van or shop to the jobsite).

TERRY BUSCHERT
Foreman

Buschert has been a journeyman sheet metal worker for 30 years. He fine-tuned the NCCER apprentice curriculum for Architectural Metals, Inc. and is a certified instructor for the program. He also implemented the company’s safety program, which earned platinum status in ABC’s Safety Training Evaluation Process in 2016. Always passionate about helping those in need, Buschert is in the process of fixing up a
and seeing the earning potential for an electrician, Ruff abandoned his initial plan to become a park ranger and fell in love with construction.

“I like working with my hands and the people in the industry,” he says. “You’re never in the same place for an extended period of time, and every project is different.”

Ruff landed at Price Electric after a six-year stint with a residential electrical firm. Not only did he want to experience the commercial and industrial sector, but he also wanted to work on—and eventually run—the best construction projects in the state. Mission accomplished: As a foreman, Ruff was involved with many of Price Electric’s award-winning projects, including an emergency power generator facility at the University of Iowa Children’s Hospital, which won a 2016 ABC Excellence in Construction® award.

That drive to be the best at his craft aligns well with the ABC merit shop philosophy of being rewarded based on quality performance and Price Electric’s culture of going above and beyond for both colleagues and customers.

“Being from Dubuque, where Illinois and Wisconsin meet Iowa, my family is all union, but I want to be paid on merit,” Ruff says. “I really believe if you’re working alongside someone and dedicating more time and effort to the job, then you should be rewarded. In a union, that guy is making the same or more. That kind of mentality results in entitlement. I want to be rewarded for my hard work, and I feel like I have been.”

home for a disabled veteran and has collected scrap metal for the past 14 years to raise funds to send more than 600 underprivileged kids to camp.

**Introduction to the industry:** I took shop class in eighth grade, and in high school there was a new program where I could work on building houses my junior and senior year. I became the teacher’s pet. I would get there early and stay late and asked a lot of questions. I learned electrical, plumbing and carpentry. Those two years at the high school program gave me the foundation to know what I wanted to do as a career. Once I was working, the company owner didn’t have enough for me to do in carpentry, so he moved me to the sheet metal side of things.

**Pride and accountability:** When Architectural Metals went nonunion, I was the first to raise my hand in support. I took a $5 wage cut but ended up making more money. I knew our reputation would be destroyed if we didn’t make the change. Under union leadership, there was no accountability or pride in workmanship. Now, I sign the back of the last panel of every project because I take pride in my work.

**Challenges for the next generation:** Too many people are being brought up and hired without enough education. New products come out every single year; if you don’t know how to install them, you’ll have failures. Also, too many people are looking for a fast job. But if they don’t look at it as a career, they’re closing the door on themselves too quickly. No robot will be able to take my job. It takes hands-on and visual skills. I use technology, but it won’t replace me.

**DAN VANREE**
**Project Superintendent**
**Dan Vos Construction Company,**
**Ada, Mich.**

VanRee and his crews have completed hundreds of millions of dollars in commercial projects during his 38-year tenure with Dan Vos Construction Company. Colleagues say he works with honesty and integrity, is a quiet mentor who leads by example, and that he manages from the field, boots on the ground. Off the job, he is involved in his church as a deacon and has coached Little League.

**Most important parts of the job:**
People, whether it’s the owner, the custom-er’s representative or nurturing the folks we work with day to day. Our interactions with subcontractors’ employees are important so we can meet our common goal. Recognizing a job well done and rewarding superior workmanship are what Dan Vos Construction and ABC are all about. Going above and beyond is what I’m about as well.

**Working with compassion:** At Dan Vos, if somebody has a sick family member, you are told to take the time you need. If I know someone on my jobsite is struggling, I spend time figuring out why he’s not on top of his game. When you show someone the real you, it forms a pretty tight bond. It helps build a long-term relationship. That goes for both clients and employees; repeat business is about how you treat people. As much as you talk about dollars and cents, it’s more about the personal side of things.

**Advice for high school graduates:**
College isn’t for everybody. We’d love to have you in the construction industry. The truth is you’re going to get dirty sometimes, but your reward will be a great career. Some days you’ll be pushing a broom and other times you will direct people, and I do that too even though I’ve been with my company for 38 years. No matter where you start or what you finish your day doing, the bigger picture of every construction job will be more significant. Whether you are a field laborer, craftsman, leadman or superintendent, you might not always get instant gratification, but you will always have an opportunity to show others what you can do. Your desire to make a difference will truly set you apart.
ABC CRAFT INSTRUCTOR OF THE YEAR BRINGS FIELD EXPERIENCE TO THE CLASSROOM

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, Roger Thompson is one of the industry's best at funneling his 32 years of experience in the electrical field into the minds of first-year apprentices. They're listening, they're learning and they appreciate the care he shows for their careers.

Thompson’s impressive résumé includes being chief electrical estimator for Jesse Stutts, Inc., Huntsville, Ala., since 1997 and serving as an NCCER-certified electrical instructor for 19 years at Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) North Alabama Craft Training Foundation. As of March, he can add being named ABC’s 2017 Craft Instructor of the Year—an award that recognizes an innovative teacher with a positive attitude who promotes lifelong learning to the future workforce. The award includes a $10,000 prize from NCCER and the Trimmer Construction Education Foundation.

“Roger enjoys the challenge of motivating and teaching the first-year apprentices and providing the cornerstone needed for each apprentice to be successful,” says Tiffany Brightwell, president of the ABC North Alabama Chapter. “He is a model instructor, and contractors often ask for their apprentices to be assigned to his class because they know Roger will take the time to prepare their employees for not only the classroom, but also the jobsite.”

Thompson, who completed his own electrical apprenticeship with ABC in 1991, has had plenty of unique jobsite experiences to share with the roughly 500 apprentices he has taught. In addition to supervising estimates on health care, government, industrial and commercial facilities for Jesse Stutts, Inc., he has worked as an electrical technician at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida and spent five years doing electrical design, estimating and maintenance for Johnson Controls World Services in the Marshall Islands.

“Roger always told us stories about his experiences in the field that went hand in hand with the subject matter he was teaching,” says Nathaniel Curry, a former student. “He gave us tips and tricks of the trade that I practice in the field and make me better at my job.”

Thompson also speaks to high school students about craft training opportunities and does hands-on projects with middle school students to give them a general introduction to the skilled trades. At the apprentice level, he makes sure to carve out time after class to discuss career advancement.

“Since I finished school in 2014, I have called on Roger many times and have always found him eager to help in any way,” says Kenny Beck, now an OSHA outreach trainer. “His passion for the students and knowledge of the subject is what sets him apart and makes him a valuable asset to the program and the community.”

Joining Thompson as finalists for the 2017 ABC Craft Instructor of the Year award were James Davis, who teaches at Hardeman County Schools in Middleton, Tenn; Alvin Pardo-Morell, who works at the APM Vocational Institute in Alexandria, Va.; and Lowell Reith, an instructor for Interstates in Salina, Kan. Each finalist received $1,000 from NCCER.

Ruff credits his boss for making staff feel like they’re part of a family, not just an employee. “Jeremy sets the tone for all divisions to treat people fairly and with respect. He cares about the development of people.”

Learn by Watching
To that end, Ruff has benefited from continuing education opportunities through the ABC of Iowa Training Center and LeanProject, Inc. Lean concepts in particular have really hit home with Ruff and led him to do some independent research on YouTube and by reading “2 Second Lean” and “The Toyota Way to Lean Leadership.”

“It makes sense to put the power in the hands of the people doing the job to find the solutions. It’s so simple and effective,” Ruff says. “The people doing the work come up with the best practices, and then I can pass them on to the rest of the team. It has opened my eyes to the idea of continuous improvement and the need to make everything visual and simple.”

Armed with a desire to put these concepts into practice, Ruff helped coordinate an effort to start a company YouTube channel to display training videos on topics such as how to set up a core drill and how to safely perform repetitive installations. To start, Ruff set up a camera in a hotel project and recorded the crew so they could judge themselves and recommend areas of improvement. He also recorded foremen doing all the tasks required in a hotel room to draw the link between repetition and efficiency.

“At Price, we want information available to our team members, and most everyone has a smartphone with access to YouTube. It was a no-brainer because they can look at it anytime without tying up other team members,” Ruff says. “We need to adapt to the way the younger generation learns, and our young men and women love the videos.”

In addition to improving onsite safety, the videos can be viewed quickly and often. And if someone comes up with a better way to do a job, the video can be remade and uploaded as the new company standard. Looking ahead, Price Electric is considering investing in a GoPro camera so questions can be answered in real time.

Prefab and Diversity
In the spirit of improving processes, Price Electric has embraced prefabrication as a way to lower costs, cope with industry-wide labor shortages and keep workers safer in the shop while making onsite workers’ jobs easier. As a result, Ruff says foremen can spend more time focusing on their crew’s wellbeing and making sure the project is on schedule.
The shop also presents a taste of the industry for high school students working for Price Electric before graduating. The company recruits fresh talent at several local schools and community college job fairs, and Ruff looks forward to seeing more women entering the trades. “I believe women have different talents and perspectives to offer. More diversity in the industry is always better,” he says. “A coworker and I do all the hiring and firing for the company’s electrical divisions, and I’m proud that we’ve hired our first two female apprentices, one of whom just graduated college. They’re both doing well; there’s nothing the guy next to them can do that they can’t do.”

That sentiment resonates with Ruff as the father of two daughters with cystic fibrosis, a life-threatening disorder that damages the lungs and digestive system. Ruff and his wife Sarah, who works full time for an electrical distribution company, manage medical care for Brenna, age 7, and Brielle, age 3, each morning and evening. “We have to accept the fact they won’t outlive us, but since our oldest was born, life expectancy has gone from the low 20s to 37,” Ruff says. “We are lucky to have the University of Iowa Children’s Hospital 20 minutes from our home. They provide great treatment to keep them as healthy as possible. If we do their treatments and continue working with the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, positive things will come out of it.”

Ruff was part of the team that built an award-winning emergency generator facility for the University of Iowa Children’s Hospital using BIM and prefabrication to navigate complex installations of heavy electrical equipment.

Ruff received a 2017 Ram 1500 Laramie truck from the award’s sponsor, Tradesmen International, with custom upgrades donated by Ram Commercial.

Joanna Masterson is senior editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email masterson@abc.org, visit constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) 30th annual National Craft Championships (NCC), held March 1-2 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., raises the profile of careers in construction and highlights the $1.1 billion that ABC member companies spend annually on workforce development. Each year, the competition draws some of the nation’s most talented craft professionals and highlights the important role that skilled craft training plays in the construction industry.

This year’s field featured nearly 170 trainees from 28 states competing for top honor in 13 competitions:
- Carpentry: Residential-Commercial
- Electrical: Commercial-Industrial
- Electrical: Residential-Commercial
- Fire Sprinkler
- HVAC
- Instrumentation Fitting
- Insulation
- Millwright/Industrial Maintenance Mechanic
- Pipefitting
- Plumbing
- Sheet Metal
- Welding-Pipe
- Welding-Structural

Competitors first took an intense, two-hour written exam and then competed in a daylong hands-on practical performance where they demonstrated high-level craftsmanship and safety best practices. Gold medal winners took home $750, silver medal winners earned $500 and bronze medal winners received $350.

In the pages ahead, Construction Executive profiles six individuals who found their way into construction—some through the encouragement of their friends or family, others through luck and happenstance—and all through the determination to work hard to succeed in one of America’s most in-demand careers. Additionally, Construction Executive gets the employers’ and trainers’ perspective on the value this big event brings to the industry as a whole.
VINCENT COMO
Pinellas Park, Fla.
Fire Sprinkler – Gold Medalist

“I got my start in construction when I was 16 years old working summers as a plumber’s helper. After graduation, I continued as a plumber for about three years until I began working on a golf course maintenance shed installing compressed air lines using galvanized schedule 40 steel pipe. A close friend of mine worked for a small fire protection company. Once he told me that’s what he does all day, I was sold.

“When he recruited me, he told me to be careful because once cutting oil gets into your veins, it will never come out.’ I joined the Marine Corps and performed airframe/hydraulic maintenance and repairs on attack and escort helicopters, and all I wanted to do when my enlistment was up was hang sprinkler pipe.

“Preparing for the NCC helped me in my day-to-day job performance by refreshing my memory on installation procedures that I do not do every day, or at all for that matter. Since beginning my apprenticeship, I have moved into the design field of our industry, so I have been fairly rusty as far as installation of pipe is concerned.

“I enjoy the fact that the fire protection industry is for life safety. There is nothing more important. Out of all the sprinkler systems that I have installed, serviced or designed, if one family or firefighter escapes that fire unscathed, then my job is done, because minutes matter when a building is on fire.”

EMPLOYER: WAYNE AUTOMATIC FIRE SPRINKLERS, INC.
SPONSOR: ABC FLORIDA GULF COAST CHAPTER

“It is important for our chapter to support the NCC because it continues to highlight all the training programs around the country and the effort they are putting forth to benefit the construction industry,” says Laura Newton, education administrator for the ABC Florida Gulf Coast Chapter. “We continue to send competitors every year not only to celebrate their accomplishments in our apprenticeship training program, but also to celebrate the hard work our craft instructors and ABC staff put into these apprentices.

“The NCC benefits our chapter because it provides us with another opportunity to celebrate our successes and highlight the efforts we are putting into closing the gap on the workforce shortage.”

According to Newton, the most important trait an apprentice coming into the industry can possess to make them a good fit for construction is a willingness to learn a trade. “It is becoming more apparent that there are other avenues of success than traditional post-secondary education, and apprenticeship and craft training programs are becoming more appealing.”

Adds Robert Gant, manager of service inspections and alarms for Wayne Automatic Fire Sprinklers, “Vincent is a great craft worker because of his dedication to the fire sprinkler industry. He is a very focused individual and always strives for excellence. We are very proud of Vinnie and are fortunate to have him on the Wayne Automatic team.”
“Going into the competition this year, I had to get the entire thing into perspective. We all know how hard it is to win gold in any of the competitions, so shooting to get two in a row really made the odds look stacked against me. From the moment I found out that I could compete again, since the electrical field is actually considered two separate competitions, an attempt to win it back to back is all that I’ve strived for and thought about. I was told about the NCC from other apprentices from the day I was hired by Gaylor, and all I could think about was going wherever the competition was held, representing my company to the fullest of my abilities and trying to have fun while doing it.

“To me, as far as difficulty, the residential and industrial electrical competitions are pretty even between the two fields. I think that the residential-commercial competition has everything to do with speed and accuracy. For the commercial-industrial competition, it is based on a skillset that some people may have never had to do—cutting, threading, bending rigid conduit, and knowing how to read ladder diagrams and test equipment by reading resistance with your meter.

“This event gives me pride in what I do day to day. I look to every task that I am given and think ‘my name is on this. It needs to be perfect.’ Just think of every task you do throughout the day and then imagine that judge is going to come and inspect every bit of your work; it will definitely keep your work topnotch.

“As far as the NCC helping my career, if I were to build a résumé right now, who wouldn’t be thrilled to be able to put two-time national craft champion on it and have it mean what it does? I am very thankful for all of the people who have helped shape me so far in the short time that I have been an electrician, and I can’t wait to see what the future holds.”

EMPLOYER AND SPONSOR: GAYLOR ELECTRIC, INC.

“It is important for us to support the NCC because it provides a platform for so many to show their hard work and skill set in front of a group of their peers,” says Bryan Feller, general superintendent at Gaylor Electric, Inc. “We send our competitors each year not for the betterment of the company, but for the betterment of the apprentice. This competition provides apprentices with an experience that they will most likely not get anywhere else. It brings awareness and creates excitement about not only our company, but also the industry as a whole. The new wave of apprentices coming has high critical thinking abilities and problem-solving skills.”

To Feller, what stands out most about Christenberry as a craftworker is his “dedication to excellence and the desire to improve not only himself, but also those around him every day.”
HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The 2018 National Craft Championships (NCC) will be held the week of March 18-22, 2018, in Long Beach, Calif., in conjunction with ABC’s 2018 Convention.

Register a competitor. Participation in the NCC is not limited to ABC chapter-sponsored training programs. ABC chapters and members must complete an intent-to-compete form specifying the number of competitors per craft who are planning to compete by Dec. 1, 2017. The registration deadline is Jan. 12, 2018. The cost per competitor is $1,000.

Volunteer as a judge. Judges must have recognized experience and expertise in their craft. They must be onsite the day of the hands-on performance test and available to attend an orientation session.

Become an event sponsor. NCC sponsors interested in donating a combination of cash and materials or tools for the hands-on performance tests must commit to providing the ABC-requested quantities to ensure each competitor in a craft works with the same materials/tools. Sponsor benefits may include logo placement, advertisements and exhibit space.

Spread the word. One of the easiest ways to support the NCC is by sharing news and information about the event with colleagues, employees, project partners, local schools, social media networks and other media outlets.

For more information, visit nationalcraftchampionships.org, email nationalcraftchampionships@abc.org, like facebook.com/ABCNational or follow @ABCNational.

CAMERON CAMPBELL
Thibodaux, La.
Millwright – Competitor

“Competing in the NCC will stick with me in the years to come. Not only winning first place in the local state competition, but also competing at the national level was an honor, and that alone will always stand out as far as my work ethic and career.

“Preparing for the millwright competition opened up my thought process more on a day-to-day basis. The different job tasks I was given leading up to the competition made me think about things from different aspects and more in depth, putting myself and my mind in a more focused position.

“Every day is a new day being a millwright. You never know what to expect going into work. I run across many different jobs that require troubleshooting, even some of the more common pumps we work on. The majority of the time, issues come from the process side and not the mechanical. The process of elimination is always a good approach when it comes to finding an issue, whether it’s bearing failures, blown seals or misalignment. Those are just a few of the many reasons that troubleshooting plays a huge part in being a millwright. If you figure out the reason it failed, you will always remember what to do to prevent it from recurring.”

EMPLOYER: TURNER INDUSTRIES GROUP, LLC
SPONSOR: ABC PELICAN CHAPTER

“Cameron’s willingness to continue to grow and gain knowledge throughout his career, even after he graduates this semester, is what makes him such a great craftworker,” says Kelly Carpenter, director of training for the ABC Pelican Chapter. “The NCC is an opportunity for our best trainees to compete against their peers from across the nation. It gives our chapter and member contractors an opportunity to present our best trainees who we are extremely proud of. It is also an opportunity for us to meet with and learn from other chapters and contractors from across the country.

“The new generation of trainees wants to incorporate technology more into their daily work and during training.

“They all want to come to this industry because they are aware of the opportunities that are available to them. They know the construction industry is a viable career that can sustain them and provide for their families.”
“Preparing for this competition helped me in my day-to-day performance by helping me refocus on the way I prioritize the order in which the tasks should be completed. I think this competition will help me as I continue my career by being a reminder that I can accomplish great things through hard work and always striving to maintain high standards.

“I had worked in the construction industry for a brief time before becoming a firefighter, and decided to return to the industry as I enjoyed all the different projects and being able to see them from start to finish. A career in construction also allows me to be able to spend more time with family.”

**EMPLOYER: GATCH ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS INC.**
**SPONSOR: CHARLESTON ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION**

“Bryan is an energetic, industrious and conscientious individual who has proven himself time after time to be a top performer by paying attention to details,” says Butch Clift, program coordinator for the Charleston Electrical Contractors Association, an affiliate of the ABC of the Carolinas Chapter. “His professional knowledge, self-motivation and tireless efforts in his daily work do not go unnoticed by others. He is completely self-reliant. He pre-plans his work, reviews the project plans and specifications in the early stages of the job, and communicates any concerns to avoid discrepancies before they create monetary or time-delaying impacts to the project. Bryan is also committed to a safety culture and delivering a quality product. He is a model employee, displaying a positive can-do attitude that has a positive effect on those around him.

“The NCC acknowledges and recognizes the important value of our young employees and considers them the future of our industry. It also makes the industry more attractive for high school students and future enrollees into the apprenticeship program.”

According to Clift, apprentices coming into the industry are “hardworking, have a willingness to learn and a positive attitude, and understand what the future can bring for someone who is committed to devoting the time for training, knowing that it will be the groundwork for their future in the industry. They are eager to learn and are looking for a career and a future in the industry, not just a job.”
JOEL DUTTON
Cedar Hill, Texas
Pipefitting – Gold Medalist

“Preparing for the competition helped me slow down and focus on the hows and whys. It can become very easy to just come to work and focus on completing a task, but in my time studying, I learned things that gave me a greater appreciation for the systems that we at TDIndustries design, install and service. I learned how to view each job in the micro and macro, which gives so much more purpose to what we do day in and day out.

“I think the competition was a great mountaintop moment that I will always be able to look back on to be reminded of what hard work can accomplish. Knowing I was able to go out there and not only compete with the best, but win, is an amazing, yet humbling, achievement. Moving forward, this accomplishment will now become one of the many things that fuel my pursuit of excellence. I believe in doing everything with excellence, and if I continue my career with that mindset, then the sky is the limit.

“For me, what sets construction apart is how open the market is and how much education is waiting on those who are willing to give it a shot. TDIndustries is a great example of a company that is willing to go above and beyond in taking someone who is green to a trade and giving them the skills necessary to one day run jobs and even run major divisions of the company if they are willing to put in the time and effort. Pipefitting and welding allow me to be artistic because I have to be able to see what no one else may be able to and create it. Coming from an artistic background, I have learned how to visualize, design and create. This has helped me excel in these trades because I have an eye for details that many people may miss.”
“Receiving a medal in the competition is obviously a great addition to my résumé, but more importantly it showed my company that I am an asset to them. It allowed my company to see that I am someone who has the capability to handle pressure and adversity along with the ability to work through it. Hopefully that will provide me with a step in the right direction to advance myself within Interpipe Contracting, Inc.

“Preparing for the competition allowed me to see that preparation is key to any task. Knowing what I wanted to accomplish and having practiced the methods allowed my work to be installed without second guessing my decisions. All the prep work allowed me to remain calm and focus on the task at hand, which is key to everyday work. The less you can scramble throughout the day and stay on task, the more productive you become.

“My first year with Interpipe Contracting was spent working as a pipe tradesman doing underground utilities. All the work was outside in ditches and your paycheck depended on the weather. I really found that I wasn't challenged doing that work, so I pursued becoming an apprentice. Once I started at the ABC San Diego Chapter, I found plumbing was a constant challenge with many more aspects than site utilities. There hasn’t been a day since starting my apprenticeship that I haven’t been able to learn, whether it’s new installation methods or new code aspects that come up in my day-to-day activities. I feel that you have the ability to always learn something new in plumbing and that really attracted me to the trade. I also like the fact that the world is always going to have a demand for plumbers, so I feel secure in learning a trade where the work is constantly needed.”

“Rolf has shown great discipline and dedication toward completing the ABC San Diego Training Trust Plumbing program,” says Tracey Barrett, director of education for the ABC San Diego Chapter. “He completed the program at the top of his class, with all As, and received outstanding evaluations from his contractor throughout his program. In addition to his studies and his full-time job for Interpipe Contracting, Rolf took on the challenge of studying and training for the NCC to put his skills to the test and better himself. This is the kind of employee who can be valued anywhere. You can teach skills, but you cannot teach attitude and work ethic.

“This event validates our career training process when our apprentices bring home medals year after year against the top competition in their craft. ABC is committed to developing a world-class construction workforce, and we are thrilled to provide the best craft trainees and apprentices an opportunity to showcase their abilities.

“NCC competitors develop a lifelong competitive mindset. Construction isn’t an ‘in and out’ job. This is a career field. You need to continue to work on your skills to build your career. A competitive spirit is something you need to develop. If you let up at all, there is someone looking to take your job or your business. This is true in every competitive industry. People who are constantly looking to improve their skills will always survive and thrive. The hardware in the form of the medals and trophies is nice, but the real payoff is in the contribution to long-term career and business success.”

Maggie Murphy is digital editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email murphy@abc.org, visit constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
How do you tap into employees’ most valuable talents and talk to them about career advancement?

**JERRY HOOG**
President & CEO
Bartlett Cocke General Contractors
San Antonio, Texas

One of our company’s greatest strengths is that it is employee owned. Our more than 85 shareholders come from every level, which means we have people on every job who have a personal stake in its success.

We also empower our employees, many of whom have been with us for more than 25 years, at the project level by implementing a flat organizational chart and giving them more control in the decision-making process. This approach has saved our clients millions of dollars.

Additionally, new employees attend a weeklong boot camp to immerse them in our company and provide them with resources for career advancement. We also recently launched the Bartlett Cocke General Contractors Leadership Development Academy—a 10-month program that builds leadership skills by pairing operational staff with senior-level managers and executives—to teach them how to oversee multiple projects and manage jobsite expectations. Other training focuses on safety, scheduling, estimating, preconstruction and site logistics planning.

**MARK HODSDON**
President
Palmer and Sicard, Inc.
Exeter, N.H.

Palmer and Sicard, Inc. is 100 percent employee owned, so it is a very important part of our culture for employees to feel that they have opportunities for career advancement. We believe it is our role as an employer to provide training and education to all of our team members in many different facets to help them acquire the skills and tools they need to do their jobs most effectively.

We developed one of our most recent training programs in conjunction with a local community college. The leadership and supervision training is for everyone who manages people within our organization, from field foremen to the president. The 11-month program helps employees at all levels understand how we affect one another upstream and downstream in our process, as well as to open effective lines of communication across the company.

There is always a fear in spending the money to train someone only to have them leave and go work for a competitor, but the bigger question is what will it cost us if they stay and we do not train them?

**TODD S. MORGAN**
Founder, President & CEO
Comprehensive Energy Services, Inc.
Orlando, Fla.

Our mission statement includes: “Providing the best place to work for our employees” and “Growing our employees and CES.” By doing this, we attract, retain and grow the best people in our industry. This has been key to our continued sustainable growth and success during the last 25 years.

We attract and retain people by providing a great place to work and are proud to have been regionally named as a “Best Place to Work” for the ninth straight year. We grow our people by providing opportunities generated by the growth of CES, the extensive training opportunities we offer, mentoring, work experience and, very importantly, “career pathing.”

Our COO has taken career pathing to a whole new level within the past year. Getting to know all of our people is critical to the process (e.g., what makes them tick, what untapped talents they possess, where they want to grow and what they are passionate about). From this input, we can align their talents and growth potential with our organizational needs.
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Brooke Wenger, director of business development for Maryland-based Triad Engineering, Inc., received the 2016 Young Professional of the Year Award last November during Associated Builders and Contractors’ Leadership Week in Dallas.
When Brooke Wenger started at Triad Engineering, Inc., Hagerstown, Md., as a marketing coordinator nearly a decade ago, she was terrified of going to networking events. She let nerves and the fear of not knowing anyone get to her, not to mention the idea of having to talk in front of a crowd.

Today, as Triad Engineering’s more seasoned director of business development, Wenger spends the vast majority of her time out of the office attending meetings and events, serving on committees, following up on project leads and building relationships with potential business partners.

“You can’t be afraid of what, or who, you don’t know,” Wenger says. “I still get nervous, but I don’t let it show. Obviously someone thought enough of me to put me in this position, and I do it well.”

She also encourages colleagues to come along to networking events, promising to provide a guiding hand and work through the natural silences that occur when people get to know each other. “It’s not even necessary to talk about work. We’ll find a connection and build that relationship.”

In short, comfort zones lead to stagnancy; pushing outside those boundaries results in growth. Wenger is committed to the latter, and she has the career advancement to prove it. Most recently, she was named ABC’s Young Professional Of the Year Exemplifies the Value of Stepping Outside Your Comfort Zone

BY JOANNA MASTERTON
Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) Young Professional of the Year—an award that recognizes career achievements, leadership and industry vision among ABC member employees under the age of 40.

“Brooke’s passion for helping others and developing our future leaders is a testament to her devotion to our association and the merit shop philosophy,” says Zak Wolpert, who handles business development for Kinsley Construction, York, Pa., and is chairman of the ABC National Young Professionals Committee. “Her relentless determination has resulted in the formation of a successful young professionals program at the ABC Cumberland Valley Chapter, persistent growth and recruitment for the national program, and support of ABC’s core values and strategic initiatives.”

Embracing Challenges

Wenger learned the value of challenging herself right off the bat as a Penn State graduate. Unsure of how to use her associate’s degree, she answered a newspaper ad for an administrative position with a small land-surveying company, but realized within six months that life behind a desk wasn’t fulfilling. When a field worker called in sick, her manager offered to teach her how to run a rod as a member of the survey crew.

Wenger worked there for seven years, all the while furthering her education: first trying civil technology at a community college and eventually earning a four-year business administration degree from Penn State. Within the company’s close-knit, six-person staff, Wenger had the advantage of direct access to the owner.

“He was interested in giving me the opportunity to learn,” she says. “And from a personal standpoint, he showed me how business owners should invest in people. They aren’t just a dollar sign.”

Armed with a business administration degree, and ready to give up the manual labor side of the industry, Wenger pursued a marketing position with Triad Engineering—a huge jump from a staff of less than 10 to a 150-employee engineering consulting and design firm with seven locations throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. She embraced the challenge and put her general knowledge of construction sites to use preparing proposals while expanding her skills as a people person.

“At first it was intimidating to think of this as a sales job, but business development at Triad Engineering is impressive and show her remarkable ability to connect. It has been an honor to watch Brooke grow and succeed personally and professionally.”

Through ABC, I’ve gotten endless support and camaraderie and the opportunity to share ideas with people across the nation. I can pick up the phone or write an email, and ask if they’ve dealt with something and how they handled it.

(continued on page 34)
MEET THE FINALISTS

ABC’s Young Professional of the Year Award recognizes member company employees under the age of 40 who embody the bright future of the merit shop construction industry. Three finalists were selected from more than 30 nominations based on their career achievements, leadership, and vision for enhancing the commercial and industrial construction industry. Here’s a look at the runners-up to 2016 award-winner Brooke Wenger of Maryland-based Triad Engineering, Inc.

Andrew B. Lopez
Vice President
Cajun Industries, LLC
Baton Rouge, La.

From intern to executive: Cajun initially hired me as a college intern after bartending at an event. I have become a leader in the organization through hard work, dedication and merit. Without a shadow of a doubt, my story would not have happened if Cajun did not value the merit shop philosophy.

Entrepreneurial achievement: The biggest accomplishment of my career was the successful founding, growth and development of Bennett Builders, LLC. My partners and I took a small initial investment and built a merit shop general contracting business averaging $20 million to $30 million in annual volume while staying true to our core values. The business ultimately was sold to a large international oil and gas company in 2013, serving as its conduit to the North American market.

Not afraid to speak up: I have tried to use my influence to challenge employees, inspire the younger generation and educate the community on the virtues of ABC, which my grandfather first instilled in me as a young boy. I have consistently lobbied pro-ABC legislation in the Louisiana Legislature, and in 2011 testified in front of the state House and Senate labor committees in favor of an open competition bill that Gov. Bobby Jindal (R) signed into law.

Intended impact during the next decade: My hope is that through service to the industry I give more than I take, educate more than I ignore and inspire more than I discourage. As an active member of ABC, I aspire to help preserve one of the last true free enterprise industries in this country.

Rob Griffith
Vice President
Gaylor Electric, Inc.
Lafayette, Ind.

Putting others first: In 2009, I sold my family’s business to Gaylor Electric in order to create more opportunities for my valued employees. Being able to provide my team members with the tools, education and support to become what they aspire to be has continued to be a personal motivator. Seeing those around me find success and reach their full potential is my greatest professional accomplishment.

A merit shop mindset: My family found ABC to be one of the only trade associations that aligned with our vision and values. In 1996, I committed to ABC’s four-year electrical apprenticeship program, where I honed my views about performance, integrity and merit. Today, I’m honored to be chairman of the ABC Indiana/Kentucky Apprenticeship Trustees. I take pride in supporting a philosophy that encourages open competition and awards individuals on their personal merit.

Facilitating professional development: In 2013, I helped design and implement an individual craft assessment program that calculates areas of field knowledge and includes a training program to enhance skill sets. I also led the development of an 11-month supervision management program. By developing individual education plans for every employee and assigning personal mentors, Gaylor Electric can cultivate a future of inspired management.

Intended impact during the next decade: My goal is to help recruit and develop high-quality individuals through trade education and technology innovation. I know firsthand that a trade can change your life. A career shaped by years of passion and perseverance should never be viewed as settling.
really about meeting potential clients and keeping our valued partners happy,” Wenger says. “I meet many people who have been in the industry way longer than I have, so my learning style gravitates toward hands-on, personal interactions. I rely heavily on people whom I view as mentors to help me develop skills and strengthen my weaknesses by meeting with them one on one or asking to tag along to see their methods up close.

“My direct supervisor right now has been a huge supporter and gives me the confidence I don’t always have,” she adds. “I want to be able to be that person to somebody in my career.”

WHEELS IN MOTION

The wheels are clearly in motion on that front. Wenger’s job responsibilities include training and mentoring business development staff and ensuring consistent activities across Triad Engineering’s corporate footprint. And her involvement in industry organizations—from the ABC Cumberland Valley Chapter’s Young Professionals Group and an ABC National Peer Group to the Central Pennsylvania Chapter of the Society for Marketing Professional Services and the Contractor’s Committee for the United Way Day of Caring—provide ample opportunities to impact young men and women and promote AEC careers.

“With all the evidence of a generational gap of AEC personnel, I feel some responsibility to help alleviate the situation,” Wenger says. “The younger generation needs to know having a lifelong career in the AEC industry is a very attainable option. If we can mentor and train young professionals already in the industry, we start to close the gap.”

Case in point: Directly after receiving the Young Professional of the Year Award at ABC’s Leadership Week in Dallas, a young woman participating in the ABC Student Chapter Construction Management Competition told Wenger she was an inspiration for all women in the industry.

“She stood there and waited for me—just to say that,” Wenger recalls. “I wish I wasn’t so overwhelmed right then and had a longer chance to chat with her. But that moment will stick with me forever.”

Fortunately, Wenger has a lifetime to mentor the most important person in her life: her 5-year-old daughter Braelyn.

“I’m proud of being a working mother and hopefully a good role model for my daughter to see she can do anything she dreams. I strive to share all I can with Braelyn so she learns there are no limitations other than the ones you set for yourself.”

Joanna Masterson is senior editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email masterson@abc.org, visit constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.

Nominate your company’s most promising leaders for the 2017 ABC Young Professional of the Year award. Visit youngprofessionals.abc.org for more details.
Q: Where do you go to find and recruit the next generation of skilled craft workers?

D.N.: Where do you go to find and recruit the next generation of skilled craft workers?

Amanda Novak, Human Resources Director, The Tri-M Group, LLC, Kennett Square, Pa.

Amanda Novak is the Human Resources Director at The Tri-M Group, LLC. The next generation of talent has required The Tri-M Group to become more dynamic in its recruiting efforts because not as many students are entering the trades. The Tri-M Group is partnering with schools and speaking to students as early as middle school to educate and promote a career (rather than just a job) in construction.

Most of Tri-M’s upper management has come up through the field, so we use their work history as examples to educate students on all the different career opportunities that exist in the construction industry and within our organization specifically.

We provide marketing materials highlighting the different career paths for the students to take home to their parents because we’re finding parents have a huge influence on the path the next generation of employees takes.

We also remain very active in local technical high schools and colleges and develop relationships with the instructors so they can funnel their talent directly to us.

Denise Baker, President, D.R.B. Electric, Inc., Albuquerque, N.M.

Denise Baker is the President of D.R.B. Electric, Inc. D.R.B. joined Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) in 1992 and hires the majority of employees through ABC’s electrical apprenticeship program. We feel the combination of education and on-the-job training is an excellent resource for the next generation of skilled craft workers.

Students, with or without any past training in a craft, enter into the program and take courses at our local community college, in addition to hands-on training at the ABC facility. During this time, they are paired with local ABC member companies where their hourly wages are increased at set intervals as they progress through the training. At the end of the four-year program, students are ready to take their certification exams and continue with the company, or they are ready to go out and start their own companies.

ABC and its member companies dedicate themselves to the education and training of all apprentices as a collaboration to ensure that we have the most highly trained individuals coming into the industry.

Kirby Wu, President, Wu & Associates, Inc., Mount Laurel, N.J.

Kirby Wu is the President of Wu & Associates, Inc. As a general contractor, Wu & Associates is constantly seeking talent across the entire construction spectrum, including construction managers, design professionals, administrative staff and skilled tradespeople.

As the industry is projecting serious declines in the workforce, we strategically search for candidates who are uniquely motivated to expand their careers in a new direction. This targeted pool includes high-performing, entry-level graduates, design professionals seeking a career change to construction and others who want to feed their innate drive for success in a new setting.

This strategy allows us to groom motivated individuals within the structure, discipline and expectations of our company culture.

We have been most successful reaching candidates through referrals from colleagues, industry associations and social media outlets such as LinkedIn. By keeping our culture strong and our brand fresh, those who know and interact with us are able to spread the word about who we are.
2010 graduate Krystal Boone began teaching full time at the Academy of Construction and Design in Washington, D.C., after earning a bachelor’s degree in education from Bennett College in 2015, followed by her craft instructor certification.
Last May, Paul Tse, whose family moved to Maryland from Hong Kong when he was 10 years old, found himself in the unique position of testifying in front of the U.S. House of Representatives to explain how he’s living the American Dream—thanks to a career in construction.

As a 30-year-old project manager with Shapiro & Duncan, Inc., Rockville, Md., Tse went before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce as a staunch advocate for career and technical education (CTE). The statistics speak volumes: The construction industry will face a shortage of 1.6 million skilled workers by 2022, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. But for Tse, and many other young people, the opportunities afforded by CTE are more personal.

“I struggled as a student. I had attendance problems and lackluster grades. I fell into the wrong crowd and lacked any type of direction,” Tse stated in his testimony. “My life took a dramatic turn when a family member, who was a roofer, suggested I look into the skilled trades as a career path. Like many of my peers, I had been relentlessly pushed to attend a four-year college, as anything else was seen as settling for failure.

“With the help of my guidance counselor, I found a local CTE program at Thomas Edison High School of Technology and nervously decided to enroll in an HVAC program my senior year.”

Within a week of graduation, Tse had offers to join two local companies as an apprentice. “Even before my peers packed up their cars and headed out for freshman move-in day, I accepted a position with Shapiro & Duncan and got right to work,” he said.

On-the-job training transferred what Tse learned in evening apprenticeship classes at Montgomery College to real-world projects, with the final result being an HVAC journeyman’s license. With the support of Shapiro & Duncan, he got his post-secondary education at no cost and earned four years of salary and 32 college credit hours during that time.

Tse worked his way up the ladder from a field foreman running small projects to managing the award-winning...
INova Women’s and Children’s Hospital in Falls Church, Va. He is currently the project manager for the mechanical and plumbing components of seven buildings within the Dulles Corridor Metrorail maintenance facility (owned by the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority).

Tse’s struggle-meets-success story parallels many others in the industry, with the crucial factor being a person—or an organization—caring enough to guide individuals toward construction careers.

“Instead of pushing kids down the ‘traditional’ path of college prep, we should be pushing kids to explore learning opportunities and prepare them for college and a career,” Tse testified. “Whether the destination is an engineering degree from the University of Maryland or a journeyman’s license from the state of Maryland, high schoolers should have equal opportunities to prepare for either pathway.”

Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) is working to address the industry’s worker shortage through more than 800 apprenticeship, craft training and safety training programs set up by its chapters around the country. Read on for examples of some recent initiatives supported by ABC chapters and member companies that are reaching out to students and adults from all walks of life.
“CTE programs in our area are a valuable resource for new hires. Over the years, we have invested leadership time serving on advisory boards and in board of director positions. We provide office, shop and jobsite tours, as well as participate in job fairs, provide classroom instruction, and donate materials and equipment to support the programs. Relationships are a two-way street, and you generally don’t get more out of them than you put into them.”

– Mark Drury, vice president of business development, Shapiro & Duncan

**LIGHTING A SPARK WITHIN STUDENTS**

Time and again, industry members who grew up taking drafting and industrial arts classes cite the dearth of vocational training offered in public schools as the culprit of the skilled trades gap. The nation’s capital is a prime example. When John McMahon, chairman of Miller & Long Co., Inc., Bethesda, Md., was going through the D.C. public school system in the late 1950s, a mechanical drawing class ignited an interest in drafting that eventually turned into a construction degree from the University of Florida.

“The public school system gave me a kick in the pants that I didn’t even realize at the time, but has made me a very successful individual,” McMahon says.

The problem is, all those high school courses have been stripped from the system, yet contractors in the D.C. area are constantly under siege for not hiring enough district residents and minorities.

“The bottom line is we hire employable people,” McMahon says. “What were they doing to provide those people? Nothing. They had it all backwards by abandoning vocational training.”

So 11 years ago, Miller & Long and a group of high-profile developers and contractors—Clark Construction Group, LLC, Donohoe Construction Co., GCS, Inc., JOBS Coalition, M.C. Dean, Inc., PN Hoffman, Property Group Partners, Shapiro & Duncan Mechanical Contractors, Sigal Construction and United Bank—took matters into their own hands with the creation of the D.C. Students Construction Trades Foundation’s Academy of Construction and Design (ACAD). The idea was to build an NCCER-accredited vocational school within Cardozo senior high school to set an example of what’s possible when a supportive learning environment puts students on the fast-track to employment, certification or further education.

The program worked well for a while, but eventually plateaued due to the challenges of existing within a massive public school system with constant changes in management. For the 2015-2016 school year, ACAD transitioned to a 10,000-square-foot skilled trades training facility on the campus of IDEA Public Charter School, where McMahon says their philosophies are better aligned and the program can better control its own destiny.

About 90 students participated in the first year at IDEA, which represents about one-third of the school’s population. Ninth-graders took an introduction to construction class covering math, science and safety. This school year, as 10th-graders, they’ll complete more in-depth NCCER curriculum, including carpentry and electrical.

As ACAD’s director, Shelly Karriem makes it her mission to keep the kids’ eyes on the prize, which often means pushing through reading, math and science coursework in order to be able to do hands-on building projects. Two years ago, students built a micro-house outside Cardozo that was later transported to IDEA so they could finish the interior. This year, Karriem plans to get an earlier start on

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hands-on projects, such as picnic benches for the school campus, to keep kids engaged.

“In education, the ninth grade year is make or break,” she says. “If we’re going to lose them, it often happens that year, so we need to make something meaningful that they can touch, see and buy into.”

Adds McMahon: “There’s a natural instinct to build in all of us, but the example has to be set throughout your life. This type of learning motivates them to improve their academics overall.”

ACAD has sustained a greater than 90 percent completion rate since 2005, with about one-third of graduates hired for industry jobs leading to apprenticeship and on-the-job training, and the remaining two-thirds heading off to college.

One graduate, who was once thought to have learning disabilities, has been working at Miller & Long since 2011. Another young woman is working with Clark Construction while taking classes at the University of the District of Columbia. Another graduated from college debt-free with the support of M.C. Dean, where he now works as a project manager. A 2010 graduate went on to Bennett College and then returned to teach for ACAD. Others have gone on to Delaware State University and begun apprenticeships with GCS, Inc. in Washington, D.C.

Karriem knows all this because she has had the same cell phone number for 15 years and is generous enough to give it to graduates so they can call in times of celebration and in times of need.

“This program operates inside the walls and outside the walls of the school,” she says. “They call to give me updates. And if I can’t meet their need, that’s when our network of foundation members comes into play. Nine times out of 10, somebody can help.”

One ACAD graduate who had been homeless received a college scholarship, but was denied housing because he didn’t have a fixed address. “One of the biggest developers in town went to the president of the school and said...
Greater Michigan Construction Academy Expands Training as Nation’s First ACCET-Accredited Vocational Program

**THIS FALL, THE ABC-affiliated Greater Michigan Construction Academy (GMCA) is kicking off a new electrical training program in Saginaw Township Community Schools and will follow it up with another program in 2017 for students in the areas surrounding Frankenmuth, Mich. GMCA already has been offering skilled trades training at Midland Public Schools for two years. Students entering the program as juniors earn two years of the required four-year equivalency to become an apprentice by the time they graduate—at no cost.**

GMCA has been able to expand its reach since being accredited as an institution of higher education by the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education & Training (ACCET) in April 2015. GMCA is the first vocational school in the country to achieve this designation. It applies to carpentry, electrical, HVAC, industrial maintenance mechanic, instrumentation, insulation, ironwork, masonry, millwright, pipefitting, plumbing, sheet metal and welding programs at GMCA’s Midland and Lansing campuses. The accreditation process took three and a half years at a cost of about $5,000.

“ACCET requires a number of different policies and procedures that have contributed to GMCA’s success as a top-notch facility,” says Stephanie Davis, GMCA’s vice president of workforce development and training. Examples include up-to-date educational programs, fair enrollment practices, community involvement, and student counseling and motivational services.

“This accreditation opens the door for more students, as we will be able to accept federal funding,” Davis says. “The students who come through our academy appreciate the 75 percent of hands-on training that the curriculum offers. We are excited to watch the program grow.”

In addition to the public school system, GMCA is hard at work in the community—collaborating with the Saginaw County Business & Education Partnership to create a Safe Neighborhoods program that helps ex-felons get back on their feet, as well as partnering with the Saginaw Community Action Committee on an Urban Builders Academy for impoverished residents.

This summer, GMCA joined forces with Lansing-based Consolidated Electrical Contractors and Homeless Angels to offer an entry-level class exposing the homeless community to training opportunities in carpentry, electrical, plumbing and welding so they can build a skill set and find employment. Participants in the Building Opportunities for People program will receive an NCCER Core Certification, as well as build benches to be placed in the community as part of a group project. They also will have access to employers looking to hire apprentices.

“In designing this program, we wanted to ensure that the investment we made would reap long-term benefits for all involved,” says Corey Hannahs, vice president of operations at Consolidated Electrical Contractors. “Providing students with construction skills will give them tools they can use for employment anywhere they want to go and those skills can never be taken away. It is our hope that this program gives these individuals and their families an improved path to a more sustainable way of life.”
‘I’m backing this kid. Give him a room,’” McMahon recalls. “Our members don’t hesitate. They want to look after these kids.”

That means everything from hiring graduates and bringing students on jobsites to sending interns off to college with financial gifts and even sponsoring students on a trip to help build a school for orphaned children in Jamaica. “They give money, but this is really about building children’s lives. Anybody I’ve ever called grasps the importance and wants to be part of it,” McMahon says.

Local industry members also pack the room at ACAD’s annual Meet the Future Luncheon, where awards and scholarships are given out for academic and technical achievements, and the students come dressed in professional clothing with business cards and elevator speeches to test on the 200 businessmen and women in attendance.

“The real reward is lighting a spark in the kids who were seemingly destined to go nowhere,” McMahon says. “It’s about showing somebody we care about them and this is something they can do. Our vocation has been so successful for us, and we owe that experience to another generation.”

FILLING THE ENTRY-LEVEL TALENT PIPELINE

It’s also critical to reach out to adults who are in a position to change careers. The ABC Illinois Chapter is doing just that through an electrical boot camp in coordination with the Jane Addams Resource Corporation (JARC), Illinois Department of Commerce and Illinois Department of Employment Services (IDES).

As a registered Eligible Training Provider under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the ABC Illinois Chapter partnered with JARC to create a pre-apprenticeship program offering NCCER Level 1 electrical training—plus financial planning and résumé writing assistance—to unemployed residents of Cook County in the first half of 2016. Tuition was covered by a grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce.

IDES gauged interest in the program from people receiving unemployment benefits and the response was astounding: The ABC Illinois Chapter fielded more than 700 phone calls and emails within 24 hours. About 100 residents meeting eligibility requirements came to an orientation; that group was whittled down to 34 who came in for interviews and drug testing. The final class began with 21 students, 18 of which successfully completed the Core and Level 1 coursework.

“I was so impressed with the students’ level of responsibility and their enthusiasm for learning,” says Steve Foltin, vice president of education and safety for the ABC Illinois Chapter. “Many came from up to two hours away to attend class three days a week. They were always on time and demonstrated positive attitudes.”

That solid work ethic was put on display at a career fair in May. Importantly, under the grant program, hiring contractors are eligible for on-the-job training (OJT) money that offsets the first 16 weeks of the new employee’s salary.

“Contractors were excited about the opportunity to hire from a pool of candidates who had already proven to be motivated, reliable and drug free,” says ABC Illinois Chapter President Alicia Martin.

Two people were hired on the spot, eight were placed in jobs this summer, and a few more are still in the interview phase. Several contractors are using the OJT funding to continue their new hires’ Level 2 apprenticeship training with the ABC Illinois Chapter.

Manhattan Mechanical Services, Manhattan, Ill., added two boot camp graduates to its workforce on very short notice to meet upcoming needs.

“Although they were trained in electrical and I’m a
mechanical contractor, these two students excelled and jumped right in,” says Tom Wanamaker, Manhattan Mechanical Services’ workforce development manager. “They possess attributes I demand, such as punctuality, a willingness to learn and an ability to contribute to the team on day one.

“JARC walked me through the wage reimbursement process and made the entire process seamless,” Wanamaker adds. “This opportunity helps our organization fill the talent pipeline at the entry level. I look forward to leveraging this relationship as we continue to expand our diverse workforce.”

Plans are in the works to offer another boot camp this fall so the ABC Illinois Chapter can continue to grow its “family.”

“The students referred to themselves as part of the ABC family, and so did we,” Martin says. “Each had a unique story to tell of why they were on unemployment and some had very impressive credentials. Each left the program feeling empowered and proud of their
accomplishments. There are too many heartwarming stories to share.”

**REDUCING RECIDIVISM WITH MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT**

This summer, the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services awarded more than $7.1 million in grants for communities to help former and current inmates learn vocational and life skills. About $755,000 is going toward core construction and safety training via the ABC Cornhusker Chapter, which has offices in Lincoln and Omaha, Neb.

During the two-year grant cycle, which ends in June 2018, the goal is to train 1,200 inmates in OSHA 10-hour for construction and general industry, as well as first-aid/CPR. Upon completion, the goal is to put 245 individuals in a nine- to 12-week NCCER Core Curriculum program, after which they will move into a craft training program. The trades being taught at each of the six targeted correctional facilities will be determined on a case-by-case basis, likely focusing on carpentry, electrical, HVAC, drywall and masonry.

Interested inmates must fill out an application, and then undergo vetting and processing procedures with wardens and re-entry specialists to ensure they are appropriate candidates. Until the inmates’ release, all training will occur within the corrections facilities, with instructors provided by the ABC Cornhusker.
Chapter, many of whom work for ABC member companies or are retired journeymen or industrial education teachers.

“The end goal is meaningful employment for these individuals to reduce the possibility of recidivism,” says Anne Klute, president of the ABC Cornhusker Chapter. “With proper training, or at least a start on their training in the trades, the hope is that individuals will have an opportunity for successful employment when released. We hope they continue in apprenticeship training so they can earn while they learn.

“Most companies I have spoken to who have hired past offenders have found they are very dedicated to the job, so it’s a win for the industry,” she says.

Chris Sills, president of Omaha-based Midlands Mechanical, Inc., has found success removing criminal offenses as a barrier to employment. Instead, the company measures all candidates based on an interview, personality profile and basic skills testing (e.g., math and spatial skills).

“We try to recruit folks with the right attitude and the natural ability to learn the trade,” Sills says. “We look at the person as an individual and look for drive and determination.”

In short, criminal status is of no concern unless the offense could somehow hinder the work. With that outlook, Sills has found ex-offenders tend to respect the fact the company is willing to hire them, so they’re willing to work for it and redeem themselves. One man the company brought on board was in jail for shoplifting; now, he’s one of Midlands Mechanical’s best, and highest paid, employees.

“A lot of felons are fairly crafty and have good problem-solving skills and reasoning. It may sound humorous, but it’s true,” Sills says. “A lot of them were young and dumb. They’ve never really had a good helping hand to steer them in the right direction. When we show them the path and that they can be successful, contribute to society and earn a good living, they really step up.”

Joanna Masterson is senior editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email masterson@abc.org, visit constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
“RIGHT AFTER I clock in, I get with my pipefitter and foreman, and we talk about the work we will do that day. My fitter and I talk about the work ahead of us, how we will work safely, and then we do our safety task analysis,” says Cheryl Briscoe, a craft pipefitter helper at Houston-based S&B Engineers and Constructors, which co-sponsors a specialized, accelerated craft training program for non-traditional local workers.

In 2014 and 2015, Associated Builders and Contractors, Associated General Contractors and NCCER forecasted a shortage of skilled construction workers in the tens of thousands due to the Great Recession and a decrease in the number of high schools offering vocational-technical training. The exodus from the industry and the slow refilling has contributed to the shortage of skilled construction workers.

For S&B, like many other construction companies, it was evident that traditional student and craft training programs would not produce skilled workers fast enough. After a review of several types of training programs in the Houston area, it was clear a successful training program not only needed to provide accredited training, but also had to take into account the diverse population, the social structure of families and the financial pressures imposed on families today.

Keeping these factors in mind, S&B created a pilot program that provided accelerated, accredited training for female pipefitters. Today the Women’s Training Program is a full-fledged collaboration among S&B, United Way Thrive and Texas Workforce Solutions, with each organization bringing something special to the training program.

The program was piloted on an S&B construction project in Mont Belvieu, Texas. THRIVE and Workforce Solutions developed screening tools to identify candidates who would work well in a construction environment. S&B then interviewed those candidates and identified 20 prospects. Each candidate was offered full-time employment and enrollment as a trainee in the program. As a full-time employee, each trainee received a helper 3 hourly wage ($16 per hour) and health care benefits.
S&B conducted technical training using NCCER’s Contren, with Level 1 pipefitting modules covering Basic Safety, Introduction to Power Tools, Pipefitting Hand Tools, Field Routing and Vessel Trim, Identify and Install Valves, and Rigging Practices. Training was conducted via a rotating schedule in which trainees were in classrooms/labs and then moved to the field where they performed construction work under the supervision of an assigned journeyman pipefitter. S&B provided soft skills courses such as those relating to working in teams, interaction with supervision and coworkers, and business ethics.

In addition, THRIVE conducted a course on personal financial management to strengthen students’ resolve. This helped alleviate stress associated with the students’ additional income and prevented work performance issues.

**POSITIVE RESULTS**

The goal of the Women’s Training Program was to transform trainees into qualified pipefitter helpers. While S&B did not retain and train all enrollees who started the program, a few numbers and stories stand out from the program.

Sixteen of the 20 trainees completed the program. Only one of the 16 graduates has left S&B; however, she is working for another employer in the construction industry.

- All 16 graduates are continuing their enrollment in craft training with the intention of becoming a fully accredited, journey-level pipefitter.
- No loss in production was experienced during the implementation of the program.
- When graduates were asked what they liked about the program, it was no surprise that training and obtaining knowledge of the construction industry were tops. A surprise was the benefit of the THRIVE Financial Coaching. Collectively over the 12-week period, women were spending $1,775 less each month as a result of the coaching. In addition, the trainees have paid off more than $10,500 of outstanding debt and have saved more than $3,400.

**WHAT NEXT?**

“Our biggest measure of success is that we were able to move under-employed and unemployed individuals from the bottom rungs of the economic ladder to a position where they can earn $18 to $32 an hour. In addition, we were able to add 16 more qualified pipefitter helpers to the construction industry,” says Mike Stilley, S&B’s director of training and development.

Stilley says a second and third course at another S&B construction project and a plant maintenance project may be on the horizon.

The shortage of skilled, qualified construction workers is a real problem for the industry. The Women’s Training Program model is not the only way to address the shortage, but one of many innovative, contemporary ways to start chipping away at it.
A National Craft Championships fire sprinkler competitor demonstrates his skills during ABC’s Workforce Week in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
You have only six hours to complete the project. You’re working against the clock and against your competitors, and the judges are watching your every move. You’ve only had one night to consider what your scope of work might be. The cameras are rolling. This is it. At Associated Builders and Contractors’ National Craft Championships (NCC), the pressure is on.

During the first week of March at the Greater Fort Lauderdale Broward County Convention Center, a field of more than 200 craft trainees competed for top honors in 15 competitions representing 13 crafts. The competitors first took an intense, two-hour written exam, followed by hands-on practical performance tests in carpentry, electrical-industrial, electrical-residential, fire sprinkler, HVAC, instrumentation fitting, insulation, millwright, pipefitting, plumbing, sheet metal, pipe welding, structural welding, masonry and a journey-level team competition. The written exam counted for 25 percent of each competitor’s score, and the practical demonstration counted for the other 75 percent. (See the full list of winners on page 36.)

Now in its 29th year, this flagship event showcases that skilled craft professionals are the backbone of construction businesses and an essential asset to the national economy. Press coverage from the NCC communicates that a career in construction is a great choice and that there is a growing demand for skilled labor across the country.

Photos by Jerry Thompson
For these competitors, being invited to vie for top honors represents the pinnacle of achievement. They are going for the gold, the bragging rights and the recognition. They are the mentors and role models for future generations.

This talented pool of craft professionals arrived at the 2016 NCC from all walks of life—some wide-eyed and new to this kind of exposure, and others calm and collected. Some are pursuing a second career path, while some are barely old enough to vote. Some had followed a traditional apprenticeship track, while others had recently left an unfulfilling office job. But all had one thing in common: They completed the event feeling confident they'd chosen the right career.

Felix Arroyo, an electrician with Cox Electric, Seffner, Fla., has worked in the industry for five years. The son of a single parent, he realized that he'd have to work hard for anything he wanted in life, and that everything of value must be earned. In middle school, he started repairing car audio systems for extra money, which sparked an interest in the electrical trade, and he began pursuing training in high school.

"Being able to go to the 2016 NCC was the highlight for me," he says. "Knowing that I was competing against the best in the United States was valuable in itself. It's important to the tradesmen to know their hard work is recognized and important for the growth of the community."

Gold medal winner Lindsey Irvine, now a pipe welder with JV Industrial Companies, La Porte, Texas, for the past year and a half, graduated from college with an associate's degree. Then, after working as a shift manager at a fast food restaurant for about a year, she decided to join a welding program. She calls it one of the best decisions she could have made in life. "I lucked out with an amazing teacher, Scottie Smith. He had connections with different companies, so we were almost guaranteed a job as long as we had the right attitude and skill."

Mario Munoz, now an electrician with Helix Electric, Cerritos, Calif., was working as a banker when the recession hit. His entry into construction is a serendipitous one. While taking a lunch break during a day-long unemployment benefits reapplication process, a quirk in his navigation system pointed him toward the local ABC chapter. That day, after the unemployment seminar, Munoz headed straight to ABC's office and applied for its training program.
“The rest is history,” he says. “The highlight of the NCC was entering the main stage and having hundreds of people clap for us. I felt like what I was doing mattered, and it motivated me to compete at my best.”

Munoz says the competition has value for the industry long after ABC’s annual Workforce Week, when NCC takes place. “Outsiders are able to see what ABC is capable of, and it allows us to build a reputation,” he says. “It also motivates the youth to enroll in trade programs, which keeps the construction industry sharp. Finally, the event brings many companies together under an umbrella of common goals. This creates networking, sales, jobs and even friendships.”

Salvador Mellado, a workforce development manager in the Houston office of Performance Contractors, Inc., serves as an NCC sponsor and mentor for several structural welding competitors. He has been working in the industry since 2008; prior to that, he was in the sales and finance field.

As the story goes: “I noticed one of my client’s paycheck stubs, and I asked him what he did for a living. Two weeks later I was on my way to California to start my new career.” Mellado started off as a boiler-maker helper, then switched to millwright, civil engineering and rigging until he found his passion in pipefitting.

“At that time, I was not aware of the incredible education opportunities ABC offers,” Mellado says. “Now I’m in workforce development, and one of my goals is to inform as many people as I can how they can better their lives through construction and education.”

In Fort Lauderdale, the highlight of the competition for him was observing the practical exam. “Every competitor had a spark in their eyes. They were full of excitement and determined to show the nation they are the best at what they do.”
excitement and determined to show the nation they are the best at what they do,” he says.

**LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES**

Pulling off a high-caliber, well-executed competition takes a committed crew of volunteers whose passion equals that of the competitors. The NCC Committee—which includes many long-time volunteers as well as some recent past competitors—rallies year after year to set up a village of competition stations that span the massive exhibit hall. Each of the NCC project managers creates a project plan for each craft. Months of planning and labor are dedicated to the event, and then almost in the blink of an eye, it’s time to pack everything up again for the next year.

NCC Committee Chair Mitch Clark has been in the industry for 35 years and been a part of the NCC for 18 years. When he’s not focused on managing the event, he serves as an HVAC project sales representative for Comfort Systems USA Southwest, specializing in commercial and industrial properties in the Phoenix area.

He has seen the competition grow leaps and bounds to become ABC National’s most significant yearly event. “It’s exciting to see these competitors of all ages and abilities, and the different crafts that come into this event and watch them blossom,” Clark says.

Jim Elsey, general manager of pump manufacturing company Summit Pump, Green Bay, Wis., has served as a judge of the NCC millwright competition for 10 years. His experience in the industry dates back much further—he began his career as a mechanical and nuclear engineer for the U.S. Navy, and then worked for Ingersoll Rand where he supervised millwrights.

“I came to hold a lot of respect for that profession and that trade. I admire the precision with which they work with micrometers, lasers, gauges and alignment equipment,” Elsey says. “These guys take great pride in what they’re doing.”

Elsey then worked with GE for nearly 20 years designing equipment, pumps and compressors before he joined Summit Pump. When a colleague had to drop out as an NCC judge due to a double knee
HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The 2017 National Craft Championships (NCC) will be held Feb. 28–March 3, 2017, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in conjunction with ABC’s 2017 Workforce Week.

**Register a competitor.** Participation in the NCC is not limited to ABC chapter-sponsored training programs. All eligibility requirements can be found on nationalcraftchampionships.org. ABC chapters and members must complete an intent-to-compete form specifying the number of competitors per craft who are planning to compete by Dec. 1. Competitor registrations are due Jan. 6, 2017.

**Volunteer as a judge.** Judges must have recognized experience and expertise in their craft. They must be onsite the day of the hands-on performance test and available to attend an orientation session.

**Become an event sponsor.** NCC sponsorship opportunities can be tailored to meet a company’s goals. Sponsors interested in donating a combination of cash and materials or tools for the hands-on performance tests must commit to providing the ABC requested quantities to ensure each competitor in a craft works with the same materials/tools. Sponsor benefits may include logo placement, advertisements and exhibit space.

**Spread the word.** One of the easiest ways to support the NCC is by sharing news and information about the event with colleagues, employees, project partners, local schools, social media networks and other media outlets.

For more information, visit nationalcraftchampionships.org, email nationalcraftchampionships@abc.org, like facebook.com/ABCNational or follow @ABCNational.
operation, Elsey stepped up to the plate, not knowing what he was getting into.

The challenge turned out to be right up his alley.

“Once I finished my first event as a judge, I thought, ‘OK, I’ve got this,’” Elsey says. “It takes me back to my roots. I always tell people I do it because I’m giving back to the trade. It’s a way to encourage young people to know they’ve made a good decision in their chosen profession.”

The need for millwrights has grown significantly as the economy recovers and experienced professionals retire, and he wishes to keep up the caliber of the trade through events like the NCC.

WHY CONSTRUCTION?
The ultimate goal of the NCC is to elevate the profession in the minds of parents, educators and the general public.

“So many parents will say you can’t be anything unless you go into a traditional four-year college,” Elsey says. “But some people just aren’t made for college. There is no shame in that. Whether you’re a plumber, electrician, carpenter or mason, if you do it right, you can make a doggone good living. You can make more money than someone who has a liberal arts degree,” he says.

“I try to reinforce this in my professional network. People need to stop saying someone is ’just a carpenter’
or ‘just a mechanic.’ A good tradesperson can make $90,000 to $100,000 a year.”

Anyone is trainable for an excellent career path in construction, no matter their background, Elsey says. Employers need to think creatively to encourage folks to consider the profession even if it doesn’t fall in line with their previous education track.

“When I go see my customers, in my daily work, we talk about how to find good people. And I always say: I hire for attitude first, and the rest can be trained.”

Mellado instills this same mindset at Performance Contractors.

“The opportunities for a successful career and an outstanding livelihood are endless,” Mellado says. Anyone can come into our industry and, with hard work and dedication, can become as successful as they want to be.

“I have heard too many times: ‘If you don’t want to go to college, work construction.’ That is erroneous. Education starts when you come into the industry. We must continue to push certification through education, and continue to develop innovative programs to supplement the existing craft training that we have available now.”

Also, the public relations campaign must start with very young students; by high school and college age, many people have already excluded construction as an option.

“Every contractor and craftworker can invest in the youth—be involved with local school programs, competitions, students and their parents. We can show them that construction is not a job, it is a career,” Mellado says.

Another reason to promote careers in the industry is purely practical: money.

“I would recommend a career in the construction industry for the financial security,” Munoz says. “Although popular media and history books take a jab at the construction industry by saying it’s volatile, the ability to remain employed consistently is up to each individual. I take my training in school and on the job very seriously and strive to become better each day. As such, I’ve been rewarded with constant employment even in times of construction drought. The construction field as taught by ABC is definitely merit-based and rewards the ambitious.”

Munoz says exposing parents and children to the construction industry makes a lasting impression.

“Families are a great motivator. If a family is involved in
the student’s education, whether they are a competition spectator or helping in the school itself, the added motivation is a catalyst for success.”

The millennial workforce—the generation that should be targeted for construction jobs—tends to be more open-minded than the baby boomer generation about where, when and how they work. This translates well for the construction industry. Travel, flexibility, lack of debt, on-the-job training and entrepreneurship are all selling points for younger trainees and employees.

“I think anyone looking for something besides an office job needs to check out construction,” Irvine says. “It allows me to work outside with my hands, and traveling allows me to see many great people and places. It also pays more than most jobs.”

Teachers and mentors play an essential role in encouraging students.

“I think we need to have more teachers in schools with a passion in their field getting students inspired like I was to become a traveling pipe welder. Also, companies should keep implementing programs for consistent education for new craft professionals to polish their skill,” Irvine says.

Elsey takes that to heart. Even though judges can’t communicate directly with the NCC competitors during the big event, all the volunteers have a chance to congratulate the winners at the end and encourage them to carry the positive message home to their companies and peers.

“I tell them: ‘You’ve made the right decision to do this.’ If you work hard at this, and hone your skills, you can make a good living—and make yourself invaluable,” Elsey says. “Maybe even more importantly, you’ll build a rewarding and interesting career.”

Clark says the competitors have a duty to self-promote and market their success stories beyond the NCC event itself. “I suggest they stay involved in their local and community groups to continue training. Talk to your younger peers and family members as they are leaving high school or considering vo-tech training. Tell them about ABC.”

In short, the craft skills shortage is real, and everyone must be a spokesperson.

“We are short a million craft professionals in this country. For our nation to grow, we need to get more people involved in the training programs out there—both online and through ABC’s chapters. We need to keep that pipeline full,” Clark says. 

Lauren Pinch is managing editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email pinch@abc.org, visit constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
Members of Associated Builders and Contractors build our communities. From schools, hospitals and airports to bridges, military installations, industrial facilities, skyscrapers, professional sports venues and the playground down the street, we build the structures where Americans work, play, heal and learn—and the infrastructure to get us there.

We believe in free enterprise and what we call the merit shop philosophy: that projects should be awarded based on quality, skill and achievement.

We’ve been setting the standard for safety, performance and integrity in the construction industry since 1950, and every day we continue to raise the bar.

Together, we are building something great in America. We’re building communities.

Visit ABCMeritShopProud.org and learn how ABC members develop people, win work and deliver that work safely, ethically and profitably for the betterment of our communities.

#ABCMeritShopProud
AND THE WINNERS ARE...

ABC congratulated the winners of its 2016 National Craft Championships during the March 4 Careers in Constructions awards ceremony held during the association’s Workforce Week in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

**CARPENTRY**
**Gold:** Juan Palafox  
**Employer:** Joeris General Contractors  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC South Texas Chapter

**Silver:** Justin Hillegas  
**Employer:** Klover Contracting, Inc.  
**Training Sponsor:** Klover Contracting, Inc.

**Bronze:** Matthew Stock  
**Employer:** Wohlsen Construction Company  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC Keystone Chapter

**Safety:** Matthew Stock  
**Employer:** Wohlsen Construction Company  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC Keystone Chapter

**ELECTRICAL-INDUSTRIAL/ COMMERCIAL**
**Gold:** David Blickenstaff  
**Employer:** Prime Electrical  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC of San Diego

**Silver:** Clayton Moss  
**Employer:** Helix Electric  
**Training Sponsor:** Helix Electric/ABC Nevada

**Bronze:** Eli Hannoy  
**Employer:** Gaylor Electric, Inc.  
**Training Sponsor:** Gaylor Electric, Inc.

**Safety:** Eric Lopez  
**Employer:** Lectrifi, Inc.  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC Los Angeles/ Ventura Chapter

**ELECTRICAL- RESIDENTIAL/ COMMERCIAL**
**Gold:** Jonathan Christenberry  
**Employer:** Gaylor Electric, Inc.  
**Training Sponsor:** Gaylor Electric, Inc.

**Silver:** Christopher Thompson  
**Employer:** Beck’s Hybrid  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC of Indiana/ Kentucky

**Bronze:** Grant T. Fanninmond  
**Employer:** Watson Electrical Construction Co., LLC  
**Training Sponsor:** Watson Electrical Construction Co., LLC

**Safety:** Jose Gaspar  
**Employer:** Cox Electric  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC Florida Gulf Coast Chapter

**FIRE SPRINKLER**
**Gold:** Nathaniel Lee  
**Employer:** Cox Fire Protection  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC Florida Gulf Coast Chapter

**Silver:** AJ Black  
**Employer:** Wiginton Fire Systems  
**Training Sponsor:** Florida Automatic Sprinkler Training, Inc. (FAST)

**Bronze:** Douglas Nelson  
**Employer:** Cox Fire Protection  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC Florida Gulf Coast Chapter

**Safety:** Jarred Sutliff  
**Employer:** Cen-Cal Fire Systems Inc.  
**Training Sponsor:** American Fire Sprinkler Association

**HVAC**
**Gold:** James Lamonte  
**Employer:** Collier’s Heating and Air Conditioning  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC of Indiana/ Kentucky

**Silver:** Austin Ettredge  
**Employer:** TD Industries  
**Training Sponsor:** Construction Education Foundation

**Bronze:** Cody Brown  
**Employer:** Polk County Heating & Cooling  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC of Iowa Apprenticeship & Training Trust

**Safety:** John Masgalas  
**Employer:** Remco, Inc.  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC of Iowa Apprenticeship & Training Trust

**INSTRUMENTATION FITTING**
**Gold:** Ben McDermott  
**Employer:** Intertes States Construction Services  
**Training Sponsor:** Interstate States Construction Services

**Silver:** Ryan Phillip Diez  
**Employer:** Triad Electric and Controls  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC Pelican Chapter

**Bronze:** Derek Ray  
**Employer:** ISC, LLC  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC Pelican Chapter

**Safety:** Ben McDermott  
**Employer:** Interstate States Construction Services  
**Training Sponsor:** Interstate States Construction Services

**INSULATION**
**Gold:** Jacob Nelson  
**Employer:** Iowa Insulation Inc.  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC of Iowa Apprenticeship & Training Trust

**Silver:** Ryan Ishbell  
**Employer:** L & C Insulation  
**Training Sponsor:** ABC of Wisconsin Apprenticeship & Training Trust
Bronze: Eric John
Employer: Starcon International
Training Sponsor: Starcon International

Safety: Ryan Isbell
Employer: L & C Insulation
Training Sponsor: ABC of Wisconsin Apprenticeship & Training Trust

MASONRY
Gold: Jerome Brown
Employer: Central Broward Construction
Sponsor: Florida Masonry Apprentice & Educational Foundation

Silver: Jabari Francis
Employer: Boston Block
Sponsor: Florida Masonry Apprentice & Educational Foundation

Bronze: Thomas Kemp
Employer: Central Broward Construction
Sponsor: Florida Masonry Apprentice & Educational Foundation

MILLWRIGHT
Gold: Douglas Thompson
Employer: Cianbro
Sponsor: Cianbro

Silver: Michael Hachey
Employer: Cianbro
Sponsor: Cianbro

Bronze: Jacob Henson
Employer: RPM Services, Inc.
Sponsor: ABC Texas Gulf Coast Chapter

Safety: George Cisneros, Jr.
Employer: Turner Industries
Sponsor: ABC Pelican Chapter

PIPEFITTING
Gold: Paul Bryan
Employer: MW Mielke, Inc.
Sponsor: MW Mielke, Inc.

Silver: Jonathan Isaac
Employer: MW Mielke, Inc.
Sponsor: MW Mielke, Inc.

Bronze: Travis Asher
Employer: United Group Services
Sponsor: United Group Services

SHEET METAL
Gold: Daniel Noschese
Employer: Performance Contractors Inc.
Sponsor: Performance Contractors Inc. and ABC Greater Houston Chapter

Silver: Jose Morua
Employer: Jacobs
Sponsor: ABC Greater Houston Chapter

Bronze: Thomas Emery
Employer: LPR Construction Co.
Sponsor: LPR Construction Co.

Safety: Trever Broderick
Employer: Manhattan Mechanical Services
Sponsor: Manhattan Mechanical Services

TEAM COMPETITION
Gold: ABC of Iowa Apprenticeship & Training Trust
Silver: Cianbro/Starcon International
Bronze: ABC Illinois Chapter

Silver: Christian Rohland
Employer: JPI
Sponsor: ABC Southern California Chapter

Bronze: Daniel Harbison
Employer: Budiac Plumbing, Inc.
Sponsor: ABC of Wisconsin Apprenticeship & Training Trust

Safety: Travis L. Greenway
Employer: Worth & Company Inc.
Sponsor: Worth & Company Inc.

PLUMBING
Gold: Travis L. Greenway
Employer: Worth & Company Inc.
Sponsor: Worth & Company Inc.

Silver: Camron T. Bratford
Employer: The Robins & Morton Group
Sponsor: The Robins & Morton Group

Bronze: Adam Davis
Employer: Cianbro
Sponsor: Cianbro

Safety: Janay Jerry
Employer: KBR
Sponsor: KBR

WELDING-PIPE
Gold: Lindsey Irvine
Employer: JV Industrial Companies
Sponsor: JV Industrial Companies

Silver: Michael Noschese
Employer: Performance Contractors Inc.
Sponsor: Performance Contractors Inc. and ABC Greater Houston Chapter

Bronze: Adam Davis
Employer: Cianbro
Sponsor: Cianbro

Safety: Janay Jerry
Employer: KBR
Sponsor: KBR

WELDING-STRUCTURAL
Gold: Michael Noschese
Employer: Performance Contractors Inc.
Sponsor: Performance Contractors Inc. and ABC Greater Houston Chapter

Silver: Jose Morua
Employer: Jacobs
Sponsor: ABC Greater Houston Chapter

Bronze: Thomas Emery
Employer: LPR Construction Co.
Sponsor: LPR Construction Co.

Safety: Trever Broderick
Employer: Manhattan Mechanical Services
Sponsor: Manhattan Mechanical Services

TEAM COMPETITION
Gold: ABC of Iowa Apprenticeship & Training Trust
Silver: Cianbro/Starcon International
Bronze: ABC Illinois Chapter

Silver: Gerardo Diaz
Employer: Certified Air Conditioning
Sponsor: ABC of San Diego

Bronze: Travis Asher
Employer: United Group Services
Sponsor: United Group Services

Safety: Keith Phelan
Employer: Starcon International Inc.
Sponsor: Starcon International Inc.

Silver: Gerardo Diaz
Employer: Certified Air Conditioning
Sponsor: ABC of San Diego

Bronze: Tom Burns
Employer: American Heating
Sponsor: ABC Pacific Northwest Chapter

Safety: Gerardo Diaz
Employer: Certified Air Conditioning
Sponsor: ABC of San Diego

Silver: Gerardo Diaz
Employer: Certified Air Conditioning
Sponsor: ABC of San Diego

Bronze: Tom Burns
Employer: American Heating
Sponsor: ABC Pacific Northwest Chapter

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Employer: American Heating
Sponsor: ABC Pacific Northwest Chapter

Safety: Gerardo Diaz
Employer: Certified Air Conditioning
Sponsor: ABC of San Diego
Scott Walters, a superintendent for Michigan-based Dan Vos Construction Company, is ABC’s Craft Professional of the Year.
FOR THE
LOVE
OF THE
WORK

ABC Craft Professional of the
Year Scott Walters Is Part Project
Orchestrator, Part Staff Mentor

BY JOANNA MASTERSO\n
PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS ISN’T always about
climbing the corporate ladder. Sometimes it’s best
illustrated by someone who forgoes promotions to do
what he truly loves and is undeniably good at.

Scott Walters is that guy for Dan Vos Construction
Company Inc., Ada, Mich. He has been with the
company for 28 years, starting out as a carpenter and
becoming a foreman after five years on the job. From
there he transitioned to superintendent—a position he
has been content to occupy ever since.

“The opportunities for advancement through Dan Vos
have always been there for me; it was a quick road to
superintendent right off the bat,” Walters says. “I have
been offered positions to move into estimating or project
management, but I decline because I like being in the
field orchestrating projects and training others. Five years
from now I still see myself teaching people and building
stuff from the ground up. It’s satisfying.”
This pure love of the work—and incredible track record of job performance and mentorship—earned Walters the 2016 Craft Professional of the Year award from Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC). Now, the rest of the construction industry is getting a sense of what his colleagues have known for a long time: Walters’ attention to detail and commitment to his responsibilities set him apart from his peers, and he leads by example in the sense that no project or task is too trivial for his full attention.

“Scott is one of the best mentors we have, and he embodies the ABC mission on a daily basis, in both his craft and the way he leads people,” says Dan Blundy, vice president/project executive for Dan Vos Construction Company. “Many of our new field employees try to model themselves after him knowing his success with any project put in front of him, whether it’s a medical facility, multimillion-dollar pharmaceutical plant or a church.”

Adds Project Manager Norm Styck: “It is rare to cross paths with a superintendent who exhibits such a broad-based knowledge of all construction trades.”

PUTTING THE TEAM ABOVE ALL ELSE

Walters’ love of craftsmanship dates back to high school, where he took woodworking classes for three years and was named state champion in a wood show. Looking back, Walter says his shop teachers were instrumental in mentoring him and guiding him toward a career as a craft professional.

Post graduation, he pursued finish carpentry as a furniture-maker, but after a few years he realized the factory setting didn’t allow his creativity and problem-solving to flourish. Walters’ supervisor was understanding of the other opportunities out there and encouraged him to reach out to Dan Vos Construction.

Now, Walters is proud to help others along on their career path. On larger jobs, he typically identifies younger lead men or women who are looking to take that next step and brings them into meetings so they can see how project issues are handled.

“You can’t only be involved in what’s going on right now; you have to be looking at what’s coming up as well,” Walters says. “I mentor them to keep looking forward and I encourage them to look for other ideas.
ABC presents the Craft Professional of the Year award to an individual who exhibits outstanding skills and leadership, demonstrates a passion for his or her trade, takes pride in hands-on work and gets satisfaction from a job well done. Get to know this year’s finalists below.

To nominate someone for next year’s award, visit abc.org/workforcedevelopmentawards.

Bryan Feller
General Superintendent (Electrical)
Gaylor Electric
Noblesville, Ind.

Interpretation of the merit shop philosophy: “My favorite saying is ‘gravity holds you down, but nothing holds you back.’ If I want to be the best journeyman, I can be that person. The same is true of management positions. It’s all there for anybody who wants to take it.”

Biggest motivation: “The results I get working with, mentoring and training people, whether it’s apprentices or supervisors. When they actually ‘get it’ is when I feel my reward. I love looking into the crystal ball and seeing what paths you can take to achieve that future.”

Coping with the labor shortage: “It’s easy to seek workers, but harder to retain them. We fix that by getting them engaged from day one. We make them feel like they have a purpose and a long-term plan with a path laid out in front of them.”

Christopher Goodwin
Foreman (Plumbing)
Comfort Systems of Virginia, Inc.
Chesapeake, Va.

 Desire to learn: “There’s no stopping point for education. I’m not only going to learn how to put something in, but I also want the knowledge on why it’s going in and why it works from point A to point B.”

Importance of collaborative problem-solving: “I’m not one of those foremen who shuts people out. My way might not always be the best. I want everybody’s opinion.”

Advice to younger generations: “Put the computer games down and go learn. I went through a four-year apprenticeship and came out running jobs. You don’t know how to do anything until you put your hands in it. Anybody can take something apart; putting it back together is what’s important.”

Mike VanBemden
General Superintendent (Carpentry)
Kent Companies, Inc.
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Best part of his job: “Looking out over a room of employees and knowing I’ve been able to help them reach their goals, whether it’s growing an 18-year-old into a foreman or helping someone already established in their career develop a skill set so they’re more valuable to the company.”

Merit shop advancement: “If you put in hard work and are dedicated, there are rewards out there, whether it’s a promotion or increased pay. A lot of people want to lead in the field. It’s possible to get there by mastering your craft skills each step of the way. It doesn’t happen overnight; it takes years of practice and striving to go the extra mile.”

A family of perfectionists: “If you’re going to do something, you should do it to the best of your ability. That attitude came from pouring concrete with my father, who was pretty meticulous. When you pour a concrete wall, the intent is to be plumb, straight and true. I’ve instilled the same appreciation for craftsmanship in my son, a third-generation member of our team.”
PAYING IT FORWARD

It’s not easy to pass on one’s passion for something to other people in a way that makes them want to learn more, but that’s exactly what John Lupacchino of Gaylor Electric, Noblesville, Ind., has been doing for Gaylor University for the past 22 years and the Indiana/Kentucky Chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) for the past 17 years.

Just take it from one of his students: “John has a passion for all students to learn the curriculum and to become a safe and successful electrician,” says William B. Foster, a project engineer for Gaylor Electric. “He is the most knowledgeable, enjoyable and enthusiastic instructor I’ve ever had.”

Based on these accolades and Lupacchino’s real-world teaching applications and positive attitude, ABC National named him its 2016 Craft Instructor of the Year. As part of the award, he received $10,000 from NCCER and the Trimmer Construction Education Foundation.

Lupacchino has more than 31 years of electrical construction experience, starting as an apprentice and progressing to journeyman, supervisor, project manager and now design engineer. In this role, he is responsible for estimating, quality assurance, engineering design, and code interpretation and compliance. He is a master electrician or certified electrical contractor in more than 65 jurisdictions, as well as an NCCER-certified craft instructor and a LEED-accredited professional.

In addition to persistence in furthering his own knowledge, Lupacchino is actively involved in Gaylor’s personnel development. Specifically, for the past year and a half he has been instrumental in creating a set of “Did You Know” continuing education documents that employees can access via Gaylor’s website.

“The bottom line is John is a dedicated craftsman committed to improving people and the industry. He pays it forward by providing instruction to others on how they can perform to the best of their ability,” says Chuck Goodrich, president of Gaylor Electric. “Because of John’s expertise and instruction, Gaylor Electric has a high retention rate of employees who want to learn and who ensure every project prioritizes quality.”

Joining Lupacchino as finalists for the 2016 Craft Instructor of the Year award were Bryan McClure of LPR Construction, Loveland, Colo.; Dan Sterry of TIC – The Industrial Company, Englewood, Colo.; and William Stobie of Wayne-Finger Lakes Board of Cooperative Educational Services, Newark, N.Y. For more information on nominating someone for next year’s award, visit abc.org/workforcedevelopmentawards.

they can bring to the table that set themselves apart from the next person.”

Walters is a proponent of cross-training, too, as Dan Vos Construction has steel, concrete, carpentry and drywall crews. “I show them they can do all these and it makes them more valuable to the company,” he says.

The role of mentor has become so natural to Walters over the years that he admits he often forgets he’s doing it. To him, it’s just a fun, rewarding part of the job. But for the project leads and foremen, Walters’ professionalism, positive attitude and extensive skill set make him a trustworthy leader who exemplifies that it’s not about “you, I or them,” but rather the team.

“On my first day of work, Scott showed me not just how to be a good carpenter, but how to be a great carpenter,” recalls Brian Kuhlman, now an operations manager at Dan Vos Construction. “The attention to detail Scott has is incredible. He has the foresight to prevent most issues before they happen and has a solution planned out in case they do.”

INSPIRING OTHERS TO GO THE EXTRA MILE

Walters’ resolve ties into Dan Vos Construction’s philosophy: “Do what we said we would do.” When faced with an option to postpone work due to factors beyond his control, Walters challenges himself and younger talent to devise a way to push forward and stay on task.
For example, on a manufacturing renovation and expansion job for Perrigo in Holland, Mich., the steel delivery wasn’t on time so Walters suggested pouring the concrete floor first. “We flip-flopped the order of the schedule to make sure the subcontractors could keep working. I got a lot of compliments from them because they know I’ll schedule things out so they can stay busy.”

Structural designs are always changing as well, with architects using angles and radiuses to set their buildings apart. Though they look pretty on paper, complex architectural features can be challenging for subcontractors to put in windows, drywall, etc. Walters dealt with a huge radius on the Susan P. Wheatlake Cancer Center for Spectrum Health in Reed City, Mich., completed in 2013.

“I had the pleasure of working with Scott on the new cancer center. He has a great authority on his projects and all field personnel know they can go to him for answers,” says Timothy C. Jones, a project manager for Dan Vos Construction Company. “Scott doesn’t manage from the trailer, but rather is out on the site interacting with the subcontractors. His ability to get the right people in the room for coordination is second to none. Quality, on schedule and on budget is the type of project you get every time Scott is leading it.”

Adds Jonathan Mattson, a project engineer for Dan Vos Construction Company: “Scott inspires subordinates to go above and beyond by holding himself to the same high standard he expects from others. Personally, I find myself going the extra mile because I don’t want to let him down.”

Based on project results, many other colleagues feel the same way. In the last five years, Walters has supervised more than $99 million in construction without any lost-time accidents.

“The people I work with are the reason I’ve stuck with construction for so long. I’m always being challenged to go out there and do better work,” Walters says. “I feel very proud to be in this position. When you work hard and produce a quality product, you’re rewarded.”

Joanna Masterson is senior editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email masterson@abc.org, visit constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
In addition to his role as prefabrication manager at ACI Mechanical, Shon Smith teaches sheet metal apprenticeship classes and is vice chairman of the ABC National Craft Championships Committee.
SHON SMITH MAY have taken a roundabout way to the construction industry, but now that he’s here, his path is clear: take on more leadership responsibilities and create opportunities for others to succeed.

Smith graduated high school in 1994 and, at the urging of family and friends, went on to college. After two years of indecision regarding what degree to pursue, he joined the Navy and spent the next three and a half years in Hong Kong.

“The military system—always having a procedure and understanding chain of command—grounded me and made me understand that there’s more to life than what’s in my little circle,” Smith says. “I was a C student in high school, but the military made me understand you’ll get what you work for. The more you apply yourself, the better you’ll do.”
Smith has embodied that philosophy since exiting the military in 2000—morphing from a directionless student into one of the nation’s top sheet metal craftsmen, and then into a prefabrication manager, apprenticeship instructor, and liaison for various community and industry groups working to create more construction career pathways. To cap it off, last fall Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) named Smith its inaugural Young Professional of the Year.

“When you look at all Shon does to promote our industry, I couldn’t think of anyone more deserving of the honor,” says ACI Mechanical President Mike McCoy. “Here at work, he is one of the people I count on to help us challenge ourselves to always be better tomorrow than we are today.”

THE LATITUDE TO LEAD

Back in Iowa post-Navy, and still unsure of the type of work he wanted to do, Smith landed a job with Proctor Mechanical in West Des Moines.

“I started in the sheet metal shop, then started an apprenticeship, and it just clicked with me. I loved working with my hands,” he says. “I was kicking myself for not finding it sooner.”

Smith stayed with Proctor Mechanical for a decade before joining ACI Mechanical, Inc., Ames, Iowa, three years ago. He was eager to grow with a larger firm, and ACI gave him the opportunity to help develop the newly created position of prefabrication manager. He now coordinates preconstruction between engineers and project managers to determine what can be built in the firm’s sheet metal and pipe welding shops, which he also oversees.

“I don’t have a typical day; I could be anywhere at any time,” Smith says. “I spend a lot of time at the shops and in the office, but I also try to spend time in the field to build camaraderie so it’s easier when those workers have to install what we build in the shop.”

He also teaches apprenticeship classes one to two nights per week, exposes local high school students to possible careers in the construction industry, serves on several task forces at ABC of Iowa, and volunteers as vice chairman and sheet metal project manager for the ABC National Craft Championships (NCC), which brings together the nation’s top craft...
MEET THE FINALISTS

ABC’s Young Professional of the Year award recognizes member company employees under the age of 40 who demonstrate career achievement, leadership and a vision for enhancing the construction industry. Three finalists were selected from more than 100 nominations, including the winner, Shon Smith of Iowa-based ACI Mechanical, Inc.

Here’s a look at the runners-up—two emerging leaders who personify the bright future of the merit shop construction industry across the country.

Greg Schniegenberg
Vice President
Helix Electric Inc.
Oakland, Calif.

*College connection:* Schniegenberg first connected with ABC while pursuing a construction management degree at the University of Cincinnati. He got involved with the ABC student chapter, spending time promoting construction as a career path to elementary school students. At Helix, he helped create an internship program with a focus on returning to his alma mater. Today, the company has recruited more than 40 interns, all of whom are required to get involved with ABC committees and events. “As a young leader, it is important for us to express our voice and grow professionally through service.”

*Bold business move:* When the construction industry hit the bottom of the great recession in 2009, Schniegenberg wrote a 20-page business plan for the next five years and sent it to his CEO. A week later, he was sitting in the CEO’s office, going through it page by page and getting the support and resources to put the plan in place. Now, the Northern California office is one of the company’s fastest growing divisions and is recognized in the Bay Area for its backlog, manpower and client satisfaction.

*Outlook on success:* “The key to success is hard work, strong relationships and consistency. By working for one of the most successful electrical contractors in the United States rooted in the merit shop philosophy, I have learned that when people work cooperatively toward common goals with integrity and attention to quality and detail, very special things can happen.”

*Life outside of work:* Schniegenberg has two children and is an avid golfer and basketball player. He co-founded the Morgan Amelia Foundation, which supports families and children dealing with a rare form of epilepsy.

Chris Beckering
Vice President of Strategic Business Operations
Pioneer Construction
Grand Rapids, Mich.

*ABC lineage:* Beckering’s grandfather was a founding member of the Contractors & Suppliers Association, which became the ABC Western Michigan Chapter. He grew up in a family business, experiencing firsthand the struggles of running a double-breasted operation and union intimidation tactics. “I believe it is my responsibility to be actively engaged in the fight for freedom within the construction industry.”

*Political passion:* As past chairman of ABC of Michigan, Beckering helped accomplish two major goals: banning government-mandated project labor agreements and passing Right to Work legislation in Michigan. Now, as a board member and co-chair of the Prevailing Wage Repeal Task Force, he is working toward ensuring the repeal of prevailing wage in Michigan.

*One piece of advice:* “Pick the right team. Where you choose to spend your time and the people you are surrounded by can make all the difference in the world. Find an organization that feels like a good fit with great people who will challenge and support you.”

*Life outside of work:* Beckering enjoys golfing and spending time with his wife, Ashley, and their four sons.
trainees annually to complete written and practical examinations in carpentry, electrical, fire sprinkler, HVAC, instrumentation, insulation, millwright/industrial maintenance, pipefitting, plumbing, sheet metal and welding.

“One of the greatest things about ACI is that I have a lot of latitude to decide what’s best for the company and the industry as a whole,” Smith says. “Shon is strategic and committed to improving not only the current way we conduct business, but also the future of the construction industry,” adds Eric Reisner, vice president of Comfort Systems USA, ACI’s parent company. “He deals with issues head on in a straightforward manner. He builds consensus on the various solutions that can be implemented to solve a problem. This has been key to getting programs adopted that involve changing corporate culture.”

FROM COMPETITOR TO VICE CHAIRMAN

Smith’s experience with the National Craft Championships actually dates back to 2008, when he competed as a sheet metal apprentice. Though he won top honors as a gold medalist, what he recalls most from the event was gaining a clearer understanding of what ABC does for apprentices and contractors as a whole. Smith wanted to be a part of it, so he started at the local level with ABC of Iowa’s Craft Championships Task Force and Apprenticeship and Training Trust, and he connected with the University of Northern Iowa ABC student chapter.

At the national level, he has been the NCC sheet metal project manager since 2010. In addition to developing the project that the competitors fabricate and install, he works with suppliers and vendors to incorporate new technology and sheet metal components into the event. At the 2016 NCC, which took place March 1-4 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., there were 13 sheet metal competitors, and Daniel West of Kruck Plumbing & Heating Co. Inc., Boone, Iowa, took home the gold medal.

This was also Smith’s first year as vice chairman of the NCC Committee, responsible for supporting ABC National Craft Championships Director Lisa Nardone and committee chairman Mitch Clark of Comfort Systems USA.

“My goal was to make sure any roadblocks were moved out of the way so we could have a successful competition,” Smith says. “As the event gets bigger—with more than 200 competitors this year—there are so many moving parts and I help make sure those moving parts are secured.”

While the logistical assistance is greatly appreciated, the genuine empathy Smith shares with competitors is one of his biggest assets. “Shon loves what he does
in this role and has a great rapport with the competitors thanks to his experience when he won the gold medal,” Nardone says. “He truly supports the competitors with his enthusiasm and craft knowledge, and he sets an example for what you can do in the construction industry.”

CAPTURING YOUNG PEOPLE’S ATTENTION
Smith enjoys sharing his story at the high school level as well, with an emphasis on painting a more accurate picture of how the construction industry operates.

“Nobody is telling these kids what construction really is; high schools aren’t talking about it and neither are parents,” Smith says. “It’s important to show them what the trail looks like if they come into the construction industry—the money that can be made and that the education is paid for. It helps them look at the industry differently.

“Digging a hole to put a pipe in the ground is no longer just about shovels; it’s about using a multi-million-dollar piece of equipment with technology like an Xbox. It’s about using GPS and robots, and we need to share that to capture their attention.”

Last year, with the help of the local chamber of commerce, Smith and a few of ACI’s field workers spoke to more than 300 high schoolers to spread this message, as well as invited students to walk a jobsite and visit the office to talk about what a project looks like from start to finish. At the end of the 2014-2015 school year, ACI Mechanical hired 16 of the students.

“We want to be proactive and show these kids the opportunities that lay in front of them,” Smith says. “One of the tasks I have charged myself with is changing the perception of our industry. I hope to leave a legacy of reaching out to kids.”

LOOKING AHEAD
At 40 years old, Smith may be aging out of emerging leader and young professional groups at the local and national level, but he’s already thinking about a few employees who can take over reaping the rewards of involvement. He brings his apprenticeship class to the ABC of Iowa legislative reception every year, where they get to speak with state representatives about the things that affect them on a daily basis. Special rates, networking receptions and educational courses for young professionals also are offered at ABC national events, including the upcoming Legislative Week (June 20-23 in Washington, D.C.) and Leadership Week (Nov. 13-17 in Dallas).

And he’s still soaking in the honor of being named ABC’s Young Professional of the Year out of a pool of more than 100 nominees.

“I was blown away by the other finalists (Greg Schniegenberg of Helix Electric and Chris Beckering of Pioneer Construction). Those guys are amazing,” he says. “I have been fairly successful throughout my career, but this is probably my top résumé item—the biggest thing that has happened in my career.”

Given Smith’s track record, and his ambition to lead more people and work with more industry leaders, the honor is likely to be superseded in the not so distant future.

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Between 240,000 and 360,000 military members transition to civilian life each year. The shift isn’t always easy, leaving many veterans unemployed.

To help put them to work, more than 100 construction industry organizations—including Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) and many of its members—pledged in 2014 to employ 100,000 veterans by 2019.

“When it comes to industries in which veterans are uniquely qualified, construction is fantastic because it really brings out a lot of veterans’ skills,” says Lida Citroen, founder of LIDA360 and author of “Your Next Mission: A Personal Branding Guide for the Military-to-Civilian Transition.” Despite being a great fit, connecting veterans with construction jobs proves to be challenging.

Many veterans entered the military shortly after graduating from high school. While their civilian peers entered the job market and began developing skills, veterans were busy with intensive military training. As a result, many lack the knowledge and tools needed to transfer their military training to an applicable civilian career.

Citroen has spent more than 30 years helping companies and individuals enhance their personal branding and differentiate themselves from the competition. Over time, she began specializing in helping veterans.

Sometimes, veterans gain skills in the military that directly relate to construction, such as handling logistics in the Army or being a mechanic in the Navy. More often, their skills sets don’t match up to construction quite as well. Citroen helps those veterans determine the soft skills that indirectly relate to construction, as well as demonstrate their work ethic and trainability, such as dependability, communication and leadership abilities.

“When you hire people off the street, there are a lot of things you don’t know about them that you know about a veteran. They follow orders well, work as a team, communicate well, have tremendous leadership skills and know how to work toward a mission,” says Jamie Van Voorhis, senior manager of workforce development for Jacobs, an international construction firm.

Amber Peebles, president of Athena Construction Group, understands the value of hiring a veteran firsthand. Peebles and her businesses partner are former Marines. Athena Construction Group, based in Dumfries, Va., is the only HUBZone-certified and service disabled-, veteran- and woman-owned construction company in the country, which sets it apart from the competition.
Zachry Group hired Matthew Smith, an Army veteran, after his five years of military service ended.

"Construction is a tough industry, and clients want to be able to partner with companies that can work through the tough times," Peebles says. "Our qualities are an unconscious recognition of what our company is about." In addition to strengthening the company's reputation, Peebles' military experience often helps her career.

"The Marine Corps is a very strong community," she says. "If I need help with an issue I’m working through, I can reach out to my network. That's just standard practice for any veteran."

Understanding the value of military experience, Peebles has veterans on staff from the Marine Corps, Army and Navy. "While having a military background doesn't get you the job, it does put you at the front of the line for consideration."

**Cultivate Relatable Company Values**

Providing a work environment in which veterans thrive can be difficult for a company that lacks leaders with military experience. Veterans can see right through companies that state they want to start programs to support the military, but fail to produce results, Citroen says.

"If a company promotes leadership, integrity and community service—and lives those values—then it probably would be a good fit for a veteran," Citroen says. "It's when companies promote values that aren't authentic that there's a challenge."

To create an environment that will attract and retain veterans, Citroen suggests the following steps.

- **Start off small.** Companies with a huge goal for a huge initiative often haven't set realistic expectations. If the bold objective isn't met, the company feels as though it has failed and moves on to the next initiative.
- **Allocate the right resources.** Come up with a five-year plan with realistic financial and staff commitments. Don't jump right into an 18-month plan.
- **Gain support from the top.** Without a champion in the C-suite, the initiative probably won't be successful.

Veterans who apply to work at Athena Construction Group generally trust the company because it is veteran owned. Veterans also tend to relate to what is expected of them when working for the 100 percent Marine Corps-owned company. "We demand integrity, accountability..."
and a high level of dedication and professionalism. It’s not a culture for everybody,” Peebles says.

“I don’t tolerate much, especially not giving 110 percent. While I’m compassionate if someone is going through a hard time in their life, I don’t enable. I don’t let life’s daily distractions keep people from performing. I have an obligation to the entity, and I have to make sure my decisions and approach to things are consistent so everybody has a future with the company,” she says.

Translate Military Training to Construction

Companies that are a good fit for veterans must learn to understand how military skills can be applied to construction. Jobs held by military members are identified by a Military Occupational Specialization (MOS) code. The key is to align the skills associated with MOS codes and the skills associated with jobs available in construction.

NCCER, a 501(c)(3) education foundation that develops curriculum and assessments for the industrial and commercial construction industry, came up with a solution. It developed the Military Crosswalk, a tool to align MOS codes for each branch of the military with similar jobs in construction to help veterans and employers understand how the skills match up. Veterans can look at the Military Crosswalk for their MOS code to see the jobs for which they are best suited, as well as the jobs’ predicted growth and wage averages. Alternatively, the Military Crosswalk allows an employer to look at an applicant’s MOS code to see if skills will apply to the company’s specific job needs.

NCCER partnered with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to take the Military Crosswalk a step further. They are working on determining the specific tasks veterans learn during training based on their MOS codes to see how those skills relate to topics in the NCCER curriculum. Once that alignment is established, veterans will be able to earn credit through NCCER based on skills already gained during military training.
“The military is thrilled because they want soldiers to get credit for what they have already learned,” says Jennifer Wilkerson, NCCER’s director of marketing, public relations and Build Your Future.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) also recently stepped in to help veterans and service members gain access to NCCER training. It approved GI Bill funding that can be used by those with military construction training or experience to cover the cost of exams for many NCCER journey-level craft and management assessments. The VA will pay for each written and performance assessment whether the student passes or fails. The VA also will reimburse organizations that offer the NCCER assessments, as well as service member or veterans who pay for the assessments themselves.

In addition, NCCER’s publisher, Pearson, pledged to provide NCCER’s Core Curriculum to veterans for free (up to $1 million). The Core Curriculum covers math, power tools, blueprint reading and other basic skills necessary for a career in construction.

Train for Specific Construction Skills

Once a company determines how a veteran’s skills directly and indirectly relate to its job needs, it must begin developing a training program to teach them the remaining skills necessary for the job and put them to work.

Athena Construction Group places employees on jobs that are similar to or just above their skill levels. It also pays for employees to take a safety training program that is part of the Department of Veterans Affairs’ carpentry apprentice program, which takes four years to complete.

At a minimum, Athena Construction Group employees are certified in OSHA 10, first aid and CPR, furniture installation, forklift operators and lift training. “It goes right back to our military background,” Peebles says. “If you’re not working, you’re training.”

Many companies such as Athena Construction Group see the value in veterans’ soft skills and put programs in place to develop their construction skills, but others are hesitant. Though veterans gained plenty of valuable skills during their time in the military, they often lack experience that directly relates to working on a jobsite. Despite contractors wanting to put veterans to work, they can’t afford to hire a person without job-ready skills.

To solve the problem, Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) San Diego Chapter came up with a plan to help veterans develop a valuable construction skill set and quickly make themselves more marketable as an asset to a construction company.

### VETERANS’ SOFT SKILLS

Veterans might not be equipped with the construction knowledge to start working on a jobsite right away, but they typically possess some of the most important soft skills employers value in employees. Following are just a few traits employers can expect from an employee who served in the military:

- Resiliency
- Dependability
- Safety
- Adaptability
- Commitment
- Loyalty
- Attention to detail
- Tolerance for high stress
- Understands chain of command
- Communication
- Follows orders
- Leadership
- Mission-driven
The chapter joined forces with the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) to provide an accelerated safety certification program through classroom learning at the school and hands-on training at the chapter’s training facility. At the end of the course, students earn a Safety Specialist Certificate and are placed in an internship with an ABC contractor member.

“Veterans are a great group to draw from because they are already so familiar with safety,” says Shandon Harbour, vice president of education at the ABC San Diego Chapter. “What they do every day in the military, such as weapon training, is so safety related; they are already so safety conscious.”

Students attend the course for 40 hours per week for 10 weeks. Each week focuses on an aspect of safety or leadership students would need on the job. Topics include EM385, military base safety, electrical safety, scaffolding, PPE and other subjects required for the safety certificate. Classes are taught by multiple instructors who also teach for ABC or UCSD. The last week of class focuses on leadership and developing skills to help participants land a job, such as tips for interviewing and writing a résumé.

Harbour works with ABC members to place the students in internships. She sets up the meetings and informs the companies when the interns will arrive, taking some of the pressure off students for one of their first post-military job experiences.

“The members want to do anything that helps the vets, and they want to support ABC,” Harbour says. “This program works for them because they also need safety eyes and ears on their jobsites.”

This year marked the first time the class was held. Going forward, the ABC San Diego Chapter plans to hold the program twice per year, with the next course starting in March 2016.

Jessica Porter is a contributing writer to Construction Executive. For more information, visit constructionexec.com or jessicalynneporter.com.
How has competing in ABC’s National Craft Championships helped improve your job performance?

Mike Bradley
Field Supervisor/Apprenticeship Teacher
Iowa Insulation
Nevada, Iowa

Competing on a team full of dedicated professionals and winning a gold medal at the National Craft Championships was one of the highlights of my career. With that gold medal came a lot of added recognition and respect, not only from the employees in my own company, but from other trades on the jobs I work. Because of this, I felt an even greater urge to hold myself to the highest standard when it comes to quality of work, collaboration, communication, leadership and customer satisfaction.

I have used the lessons gained during that competition to increase my productivity. Being the apprenticeship teacher at our company, I have actively tried to instill those standards in every one of my apprentices.

I was already very passionate about what I do, but being around hundreds of other people who feel exactly the same makes for a very powerful experience. It makes me believe that there is a bright future ahead for anyone who wants to pursue a career in construction.

Brandon Moore
Tool Room Attendant
Jacobs
Baytown, Texas

ABC’s National Craft Championships gave me the confidence needed to excel in my career. Before competing, you are just another young craftsman honing his trade. After getting invited to compete, you realize that you have the potential to become one of the greats in your craft—not to mention how it feels to bring home a gold medal. It is a good way of knowing that you chose the right career and you have a bright future ahead of you.

Competing in a different environment under a strict time restraint helps you learn to adjust to unfamiliar work conditions and perform well under stress. When you compete, you are offered limited time and resources to complete your task. This helps you learn to prioritize job tasks and make the best of the supplies on hand.

You also learn a lot from meeting competitors from all over the country. You learn what your craft is doing in other states, what opportunities await you all across the map, and you learn to trust your judgment.

Jordan Bretey
Journeyman Fire Sprinkler Fitter
Rapid Fire Protection
Salt Lake City

I think that the process of preparing for the National Craft Championships caused me to push for a higher level of excellence than I might have otherwise. It gave me an incentive to study harder and strive for my highest level of quality. That has continued in my day-to-day work, reminding me not to settle for good, but to strive for the best.

I also think that being a part of the National Craft Championships has enhanced my relationships with the general contractors that know what I did. They are happy to know that they have a professional on their job who cares about his craft and the industry, and not someone who is just showing up for a paycheck.

The entire event was affirming and inspiring—from the keynote talk by John Ratzenberger, to the hundreds of people cheering on the competitors, to the sound of 187 craft professionals yelling “I am a champion.” It was an event that I will never forget, and it motivates me to keep striving to be the best professional craftsman that I can be. ☑️
A Perry Hall High School student applies carpentry measurement skills at the ABC Baltimore Metro Chapter’s four-week Construction Technology Academy.
The average 2015 college graduate owes about $35,000 in student loan debt—the highest level in history, according to government data. Despite lower national unemployment figures, many of these four-year graduates have little guarantee of job placement, making for an unstable future.

Now consider the average construction graduate. After completing an associate's degree or a state-funded, certified two- or three-year apprenticeship program, the average electrician, welder or plumber stands to earn more than $50,000 a year right out of the gate. He or she has little to no student loan debt, and already holds a high-paying job—plus career skills that are in top demand as the baby boomer generation retires. The construction industry is falling short of its workforce demand by almost 1.6 million positions by 2022, based on the latest estimates by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL).

This is the message that construction recruiters and trainers—and employers growing desperate to fill their impending workforce void—are sharing with prospective students. They're not only targeting high schoolers, but also college students who are undecided on their majors, adults whose jobs were lost to the recession, and anyone else who is looking to make a smart career move.

When it comes to shifting an outdated mindset that construction is a dead-end or undesirable job choice, money talks. So do the real-life examples of young tradesmen and professionals who’ve rapidly accelerated their long-term job security by choosing to enter apprenticeship programs such as those offered by Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) in partnership with local contractors that invest time and dollars into training.

AN APPRENTICESHIP FIRST FOR FLORIDA

At Advanced Roofing, Florida’s largest commercial re-roofing company, the need for fresh talent is becoming clear as the economy revives. In 2014, the company earned $71 million, and with seven branches and 300 employees throughout Florida, Advanced Roofing is now hiring—but not just anyone. The company is seeking workers who are in it for the long run.

Entry-level workers are encouraged to enroll in Advanced Roofing's new three-year roofing apprenticeship training program, which it helped start two years ago in cooperation with the state of Florida and ABC's Florida East Coast Chapter. Today, it is Florida’s only state- and federally registered open shop apprenticeship program for the roofing industry.

This year and last year combined, 16 apprentices completed the program.

“Many people have retired from roofing, and we have recently seen the need to hire and train new people,” says Kevin Kornahrens, vice president of Advanced Roofing. “We worked on creating an in-house training
curriculum, but we realized we needed additional support. That’s when we reached out to ABC and the National Roofing Contractors Association for assistance in navigating state rules and regulations for on-the-job apprenticeship training.”

Any roofing contractor can participate—it’s not just for Advanced Roofing employees. In fact, ABC and Advanced Roofing recruited another local company, Best Roofing, to join the industry-wide effort. Best Roofing trained two of its employees this year, and it already has committed to put seven people through the program next year.

The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity predicts there will be more than 6,000 job openings for roofers between 2014 and 2022. While roofing laborers start out making about $12 an hour, they earn on average $18 to $20 an hour after graduating in three years with Roofing Mechanic II or Leadman credentials.

“It’s about investing back. As a 32-year-old company, we recognized we could influence the roofing industry here and help make it a desirable career path,” Kornahrens says.

Apprentices complete the program at no cost. Students must be at least 18 years old, be employed 40 hours a week and be sponsored by a participating company, which pays for the student’s books, materials and fees. Each year of the program requires apprentices to put in more than 144 classroom and lab hours, plus 2,000 hours of on-the-job training. To ensure the craftworkers are serious and committed to the program, they must work for the contractor for at least six months before enrolling in the employer-sponsored apprenticeship.

Advanced Roofing donates materials needed for installing complete roofing systems—plus its in-house crane equipment and company yard for lab work and training mockups.

David Baytosh, a veteran employee of Advanced Roofing, volunteers his time as a trainer with the new apprenticeship program. “It gives the younger guys an opportunity to see the future in our industry. It brings them from helper-level to apprenticeship to mechanic level. It’s a win-win. These employees become more valuable to us in the field. The more talented and productive they become, the more money they make. It’s a great deal for both of us,” he says.

Not only are the students more motivated, but they also bring positive energy to their fellow crew members.

“Our foremen have the apprentices go over with the crew what they learned in class the night before. The whole company is encouraging these guys,” Kornahrens says. The classes are held once a week from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. That means they work all day, go to night class, and then get up early the next morning to work another full day.

“We reward them for these extra manhours by pumping up their salary after each year of training. We like to show
the employees we’re investing in them. They’re not going to get that level of investment at any other contracting company,” he says.

“Construction does have a lot of labor turnover, and it’s tough to get guys in here,” Baytosh adds. “A lot of people are exiting the trades, and it’s difficult to keep people, but this sets the path for them to stay in the industry.”

At the end of the three-year program, the graduates not only hold an apprenticeship certificate, but they also have an OSHA 10 safety certificate, as well as crane and signal coursework under their belts.

ABC’s Florida East Coast Chapter invests more than $1 million a year locally on apprenticeship training, but there would be no results without the participation of employers.

“For every dollar they invest in education, they can get up to $3 in return from increased productivity, lower turnover, reduced absenteeism and less rework. These are all things that are going to help this industry,” says Peter Dyga, president of the Florida East Coast Chapter.

As a recruiter for ABC and its various apprenticeship programs, Ruth Tirado, the chapter’s vice president of education and training, stays on message: It’s not just a job. It’s a career.

“I don’t want to offer these folks a six-month job. This is a career path. It is a life skill that you are going to be able to take anywhere, to any employer.”

And the message works. Compare the cost of private or for-profit education and the interest owed for financial aid with the almost zero cost of an employer-sponsored, debt-free apprenticeship program, and the choice is a no-brainer, she says.

The key is showing off practical benefits within the industry. For example, ABC has begun offering flexible onsite training options. “For contractors that are having a hard time releasing their employees to be able to go to school, we train and certify their supervisors with the NCCER curriculum so they can facilitate the education and the training unit at their own shop,” says Wayne Belanger, director of education for ABC of Wisconsin, which has offered a heavy equipment apprenticeship for more than 15 years.

With the grant, the trust purchased motor grader, wheel loader, excavator and dozer simulators that incorporate the first-person controls and visuals common to gaming. They have a motion platform that moves as if the operator is working on real terrain. Activities include pre-programmed scenarios such as moving a load or grading for a new neighborhood.

“That means that in the simulation, if the machine goes over rough or soft terrain, you feel it. If the excavator’s arm gets too close to something and bangs into something, you feel it,” Belanger says.

In the welding helmets, trainees experience a 3-D virtual reality environment—complete with various types of practice welds and visuals that mirror real life.

The chapter also has a North American Crane Bureau mobile crane simulator.

“All of these simulators develop muscle memory, so that in the real environment, you are not a fish out of water,” Belanger says.

ABC of Wisconsin, Inc. is garnering attention with four new heavy equipment simulators, a crane simulator and two welding simulators that provide the real-world experience all in one place, without damaging expensive equipment or causing environmental degradation during the learning process. The simulators were funded as part of a three-year federal Sector Alliance for the Green Economy (SAGE) grant allocated to Wisconsin’s Department of Workforce Development to “green up” the trades by investing in environmental responsibility in apprenticeship programs.

“Our heavy equipment apprenticeship instructor and I had been talking for years about the idea of using simulators to enhance the existing training. We never really pursued it because the costs were high,” says Wayne Belanger, director of education for ABC of Wisconsin, which has offered a heavy equipment apprenticeship for more than 15 years.

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For more information on ABC’s National Craft Championships and career success stories, visit careers.abc.org, nationalcraftchampionships.org and workforceunderconstruction.com.
water,” Belanger says. The heavy equipment simulators even tie in the productivity aspect of the job—scoring users with a dollar amount for the percentage of work they get done within a particular exercise.

“It has certainly generated interest among our ABC members as a way to introduce the world of construction to high school students and prospective employees,” Belanger says.

One of those contractor members is Wondra Construction, Iron Ridge, Wis., which has supported and trained dozens of craftworkers through ABC’s apprenticeship programs. Recently, Wondra sent four employees of different experience levels, from high school to veteran age, to use the heavy equipment simulators.

“It’s expensive to set up a real situation to let students practice different scopes of work on certain jobsites,” says Wondra Controller Roger Thimm. “In the simulation, you can quickly pop scenarios up and show them different techniques and methods they can practice.”

Also, the simulators give an employer like Wondra the chance to assess a potential craftworker’s strengths and weaknesses. For example, he or she may have stronger hand-eye coordination and attention to detail on a certain piece of equipment, and it’s best to know that before placing that employee behind the controls. In addition, the simulators help with project risk reduction: An employee isn’t learning by trial and error on a real job that has real overhead, accountability and schedule constraints.

“Even when you’re hiring employees with past experience, with the simulators you get to know their capabilities, background and safety experience, because different companies train differently,” Thimm says.

In addition to risk management and safety benefits, the simulators aid productivity, which is top of mind as contractors get busier in the fall season. Tim Feucht, a Wondra Construction foreman and an instructor for ABC’s heavy equipment operator apprenticeship program, says he observes a jump in productivity after the students complete their two weeks of block training on the simulators.

Having completed the apprenticeship program himself 10 years ago, Feucht knows what it’s like to be in the field, practicing the basics. “The guys will often forget what they read in class, but when you put them on the equipment, they can try their skills right away,” Feucht says.

Also, it helps that they’re not sitting in a $300,000 piece of equipment that really moves, or really welds—so the students are just a little more comfortable, he says.

The simulators provide an opportunity to change minds in the local community about the potential of a career in the construction industry. “The contractors I know are super busy, but there’s no young help out there. Anything you can do to train and evaluate people before you even hire them is a big help,” Feucht says.

INDUSTRY-COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS
In Baltimore, the ABC chapter is working to influence impressions of construction at a formative age. Last fall, the chapter began communicating with the principal of Perry Hall High School to create a new four-week summer Construction Technology Academy for job skills immersion.

Michelle Butt, vice president of education and training for the ABC Baltimore Metro Chapter, collaborated with Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) and the Community College of Baltimore County to create an introductory program that provides students with basic electrical, carpentry, plumbing and safety skills. Tool suppliers such as Hilti and Milwaukee provide demos and certification for using power-actuated tools, and contractors such as Green Contracting Company, a large mechanical firm, support the program by providing company tours.

Students also learn basic employability skills, such as work ethics, résumé writing and interview skills.

“The teachers, the students and the contractors got so much out of this pilot program. We’re looking at how we can expand the program into other Baltimore schools,” Butt says. “There’s such a shortage of skilled workers, and companies are understaffed. This is one way to try to capture a new workforce, or at least to give people the opportunity to explore the option of construction.”

At the end of the four-week academy, each student leaves with a certificate from the community college, as well as a binder of credentials and notes from lessons.
they’ve learned. In addition, they’ve completed five short job interviews with five different Baltimore area contractors. While there is no guarantee of a job, one student did get hired directly out of the academy with Tessa Enterprises, Inc. (TEI), Frederick, Md.

Frank Murphy, president and COO of TEI, chaired the chapter’s task force that helped develop the BCPS Construction Technology Academy.

“One of our initiatives has been trying to break down the on-ramps for coming from high school to this industry,” Murphy says. “We saw several good candidates in the program, and we reached out to one of them, Evan Postlewaite, who was quite interested in the electrical trade.” He started in August as an Apprentice 1.

TEI maintained a steady workforce despite the economic downturn and will continue to hire during the rebound, but Murphy says he’d rather not onboard workers who aren’t dedicated to the industry to begin with. Through programs like the Construction Technology Academy, employers can concentrate efforts on students who may stick around.

“We see the challenges of hiring and getting good, qualified people right now,” he says. “The image of the industry hurts us, and we need to dress it up a little bit so it becomes more attractive to the students who may be interested after high school or college.”

GIVING STUDENTS A ‘RUNNING START’
Carla Kugler, education and safety director and NCCER master trainer with ABC’s New Mexico Chapter, says her contractor members are facing similar hiring challenges. She is leading a Running Start for Careers program in “Construction 101” using the chapter’s knowledge base and NCCER’s Core Curriculum resources.

Connecting with local education policymakers and politicians was essential before launching the introductory skills course.

Kugler and ABC New Mexico Chapter President Roxanne Rivera-Wiest took guidance from the past successes of ABC’s TEXO and Heart of America chapters. They sought the support of the Albuquerque mayor, Albuquerque Public School (APS) board and Central New Mexico Community College (CNM) to allow the chapter’s training facility to be used by high school students during the day, when the labs are vacant and its apprentices are out working on jobsites.

Running Start is a coordinated effort to decrease New Mexico’s high school dropout rate by providing students with pre-apprenticeship or career development training. Industries include construction, film, health care, hotels and tourism, finance and medical laboratory services.

The ABC New Mexico Chapter was a perfect fit because of its existing articulation agreement with the community college. All APS students must log two weeks or six hours of college-level classes to graduate, and this NCCER Core Curriculum-based coursework falls in line with the school system’s dual-credit requirement.

Since launching a few years ago, the ABC New Mexico Running Start program has graduated about 50 APS students, who now hold an NCCER card that will give them a head start on their training should they choose to pursue a career in construction.

“We have continued to grow and get funding from city council, Kugler says. “While APS has a graduation rate of 76 percent, students who participate in our program have a graduation rate of 96 percent. We’re very proud of this because you would assume that we would have even more ‘risk-to-not-complete’ students because we’re not as glamorous or sexy as other industries, but we’re actually beating the rest of the population.”

The full-year Running Start program begins in September and is broken into two semesters, ending in late April. It includes 120 hours of classroom time, part of which includes the 72-hour NCCER Core Curriculum.
A WELDER’S PERSPECTIVE

For the five-year period from 2012 to 2017, the construction industry is short 21,000 pipefitters and 13,600 welders to keep up with workforce demands in the oil and gas industry, according to FMI. Open shop welders in the Gulf Region earn anywhere from $35 per hour to $70 per hour. Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) New Orleans/Bayou Chapter is working hard to recruit and train apprentices in the area. Recently, one of its welding graduates, 19-year-old Robert Dragg, was hired immediately by Turner Industries with a six-figure income. Here’s his story, in his own words.

“The first time I struck an arc, I knew it was something I could see myself doing as a career.

Enrolling in a welding class was the best thing I ever decided to do. In the beginning of my junior year, a welding instructor, Chris Weber from the ABC New Orleans/Bayou Chapter, visited my school. As one of the eight Ponchatoula High School students who signed up for the class, I was excited at the prospect of learning what it really takes to be a welder. Although there were eight of us originally, only three of us continued and eventually finished the program.

Before graduation, Mr. Weber offered us an opportunity to come back for the summer months. Shell was sponsoring a program throughout the summer at the ABC school free of charge. At the end of the summer, Turner Industries, partnering with Shell, would then pick graduates to work for them.

The program was 14 weeks long, five days a week, and nine hours a day. At night and on weekends, I had to work for gas, my truck note and my insurance, because my family could not afford to help me. It was difficult, and at times I got frustrated, angry and exhausted. My motivation was the promise that if I completed the program, Turner Industries would offer me a job. On graduation day, I spoke with a man named Dallas Evers. He asked if I could pull on a wrench and when I said yes, he told me to go to the Turner office and I would hire on at Shell Chemical Plant in Geismar, La. I was hired on as a helper and knew I wasn’t quite ready to begin my career as a welder yet, so I went back to the ABC Bayou Chapter for further training.

After graduating at the highest level of welding ABC Bayou Chapter offered, I was able to continue my job at Shell Chemical Plant as a combination welder. September marked one year there. Since graduating school, I bought a brand new home, got engaged to the most beautiful girl I’ve ever known, and went back to the ABC chapter, but this time, as a welding instructor.”

In addition, every year the students complete a hands-on project. The instructor, a carpenter, inspires the importance of math and using angles. One year, the students built sawhorses. Another year, they built a small set of steps that were donated to low-income residents of an area mobile home park.

The year before, it was chicken coops, designed by students in the University of New Mexico’s architecture program with plans created by students in CNM’s CAD program. Then, the Running Start students acted as the trade contractors to build the coops, which were donated to urban farmers.

Students also are exposed to the plumbing and sheet metal trades at the chapter so they can gain a full picture of the jobs available to them.

“The great part is, it doesn’t cost them a thing,” Kugler says. “And they get to keep their core curriculum books as well as earn their dual college credit.”

While the chapter has yet to see one of the Running Start high school students enroll in an ABC apprenticeship program, many open up to the idea of attending more trade or automotive repair courses at the community college.

Contractors including Thompson Construction and Enterprise Builders have assisted as guest presenters, and even as future employers.

“We have actively sought young laborers when we needed help, and then we have gotten them enrolled in ABC’s carpenter apprentice program,” says Thompson Construction President Dennis Thompson, who has been training his workforce with ABC for the past 28 years.

“We were looking for a laborer with some construction experience for a re-roof project, and we hired one Running Start student for the summer.”

THE FUTURE: TOUGH LOVE NEEDED

As workforce woes are front and center for the construction industry, it’s essential for contractors not to act and to invest now.

“Unfortunately, since 2008, the industry has shrunk a lot,” Dyga says. “We had a high of 1,500 apprentices then, and now that we are crawling out of the recession, we are back up to near 500 apprentices. That’s still one-third of the number of students we had in 2008. Here’s the tough love: We are asking our members, what were you doing during the down years? Why weren’t you investing in training your folks during those years?

“You need to be developing your workforce all the time,” Dyga says.

Also essential is having a not-just-anybody approach to training and hiring. Through programs such as Running Start, Jump Start, the ACE Mentor program,
Ready-Set-Build, and a multitude of other state and local initiatives, contractors can narrow their focus to those who have been vetted through introductory coursework.

“The reason local hiring is so difficult is you can’t just hire anybody in construction. They have to be safe, they have to meet certain criteria, and they have to have certain basic skills. So, we partner with community organizations to ensure we are providing a good pool for local hiring, and we make these workers much more appealing for contractors to hire,” Dyga says.

Thimm agrees. “Wondra Construction could have recruiters spend their whole career looking for that ‘perfect employee.’ That employee doesn’t exist. That’s why our apprenticeship training sets us apart; it gives our employees a chance to prove themselves. With our training programs, we feel confident we are giving them chances to produce and improve. That’s why we spend 75 cents per manhour on training. By bringing employees up to speed on jobsites, we increase productivity as much as we can.”

Even contractors that aren’t hiring immediately should begin preparing now by meeting with school board leaders and community groups, and planting the seeds in young persons’ minds.

“You can’t just flip the light switch. It’s a long-term investment,” Thimm says.

“It is our responsibility as an association to bring this training to young folks,” Kugler adds. “Our workforce is retiring or already retiring, and we have fewer and fewer people going into the construction trades. We need more spokespeople who make it more appealing for students. We’ve got to let them know they can make a good living and find solid work in the construction industry.”

Lauren Pinch is managing editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email pinch@abc.org, visit constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
A PLACE TO BUILD A CAREER

NEW ABC CHAPTER TRAINING FACILITIES CATER TO ALL LEVELS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Eight thousand square feet of the Keystone Center for Construction Careers, which opened in April in Manheim, Pa., is geared toward hands-on training.
BY JOANNA MASTERSO

Buildings are pretty great teaching tools in their own right. Many contractors specializing in institutional projects take the time to include students in the construction process—whether giving tours to elementary-age kids or showcasing building methods to AEC undergrads.

The Keystone Chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) realized the value of this when planning the renovation and expansion of its 11,000-square-foot headquarters in Manheim, Pa. Not only could the facility house the chapter’s offices, career development courses and apprenticeship training, but it also could serve as an educational resource by showcasing as many different materials and construction techniques as possible.
The exterior of the 20,000-square-foot addition incorporates six different materials, while the interior exposes a lot of building components that tend to be covered up, such as steel, bracing and ductwork. Additionally, a confined space is built into the floor and the roof is OSHA compliant for fall protection.

“We wanted people who come in and have no background in construction to see the inner workings of a building,” says Dave Sload, director of education for ABC Keystone. “We have 36 different types of light fixtures, and one section of the building has mechanical components painted different colors to highlight what’s what. It showcases what our members do and serves as good visual training.”

Eight thousand square feet of the Keystone Center for Construction Careers, which opened in April, is geared toward hands-on training. There also are three new classrooms, offices, a computer lab and a multimedia room. “Our goal is to be the place for industry training, not just for apprenticeship,” Sload says.

That goal has been front and center at ABC Keystone for quite some time. The chapter has been conducting training since 1978; as early as 2006, it became evident skilled manpower would be a top workforce issue going forward. But when the economy tanked, the chapter’s board of directors had to put plans for a better education facility on the back burner. They resurrected the plan in 2012 and broke ground in June 2014.

The timing couldn’t be better. Apprenticeship enrollments have increased 15 percent during the past year, and career development participation has nearly doubled—with more than 10,000 training hours logged by 1,200 students. Additionally, five-year apprentice enrollments are projected to reach 405 by the 2017-2018 school year, as compared to 305 in 2015-2016 and 220 in 2013-2014.

“Not a day goes by where we have an unsponsored or laid off apprentice looking for a job,” Sload says. “And while we’re not in the heart of Pennsylvania’s gas industry, we need to help train member companies that may chase that work or those that may lose employees to that industry and have to backfill their workforce.”

ABC Keystone currently offers plumbing, electrical, sheet metal, carpentry and HVAC programs. With the completion of the new building, it will be offering welding certifications in early 2016 and pipefitting further down the road. The chapter also is looking to do more trade-specific task training as requested by individual companies; plus management education, safety courses and blueprint reading. “We’re responding more to our members’ needs in South Central Pennsylvania,” Sload says.

In turn, by funding and building the Keystone Center for Construction Careers, ABC member companies responded to the industry’s need to fill the skilled trades gap. The chapter had to raise $2.7 million of the project’s $5.2 million price tag (with the remainder covered by reserves and a loan). During the bidding process, ABC members and suppliers donated $1.4 million through discounts, and another $1,010,000 was raised through cash, pledges and grants, including $100,000 from the Trimmer Construction Education Foundation. The final $285,000 is expected to be accounted for by the end of the year.

“When you have an association with suppliers that don’t do training, they might question why to support an effort like this,” Sload says. “But in true Keystone fashion, people stepped up. I’m so happy with the foresight and passion our members had to see the industry improve its training capabilities.”
In terms of actual project construction, more than 50 ABC member companies were involved. The chapter broke the building into sections so as many companies could participate as possible, including four HVAC firms and three electricians. Benchmark Construction Co., Brownstown, Pa., was the construction manager and Kinsley Construction, York, Pa., was the general contractor. The design team included York-based SAArchitects and Paragon Engineering Services, as well as Lancaster-based Providence Engineering Corp. and R.G.S. Associates.

“It was fun to interact with the field workers onsite who might not have known a lot about ABC before this project,” Sload says, noting the apprentices are happy to be out of the basement and into classrooms with natural light.

“We have been at this same location since 1978, but with the way the addition was put on and how much closer it positioned us to the interstate bypass, we get new recognition from the east and west. I just had a meeting with 27 teachers and guidance counselors to introduce them to careers in our industry, and I’m getting calls from major vendors asking how they can participate in our program.

“The exciting thing is we’re ripe to turn the ship where construction careers are again going to become a viable opportunity for students,” he adds. “We just need to get the message out there that this is a place to come build your career.”

Across the state in Gibsonia, Pa., the ABC Western Pennsylvania Chapter recently replaced its traditional office building—which had low ceilings and offered no parking or large exterior doors—with a 6,000-square-foot facility that’s more conducive to training and is in a more convenient location.

The Keystone Center for Construction Careers features three new classrooms, offices, a computer lab and a multimedia room.

The Trimmer Construction Education Foundation (TCEF) is a nonprofit charitable organization affiliated with Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) that funds efforts to train the construction industry workforce and bring talented young men and women into the pipeline.

Recently, TCEF provided grants to the ABC Central Ohio, Keystone, New Orleans/Bayou and Heart of America chapters to expand the capacity of their training programs.

TCEF also awarded 10 “Build Your Future” scholarships worth $2,000 each to aspiring craft professionals pursuing training through an NCCER-accredited program or state or federally approved apprenticeship program in a merit shop training facility. (Visit workforceunderconstruction.com for the list of winners.) Additionally, the foundation supports programs that highlight construction as a career through the ACE Mentor Program and ABC’s National Craft Championships and Construction Management Competition.

All of these efforts are geared toward solving the severe skilled worker shortage facing the construction industry.

To show its commitment to expanding merit shop training programs and promoting construction careers, the ABC National Board of Directors approved a policy to include an option in members’ dues invoices allowing for a $100 contribution to TCEF.

Non-ABC members that want to help solve the industry’s skills shortage can make tax-deductible donations to TCEF at trimmerfoundation.org.

For those attending ABC’s Leadership Week at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina, sign up for the Casino Night Fundraiser and Reception Nov. 10 benefitting TCEF. For more information, contact Kirsten Krauer at (202) 595-1864 or krauer@abc.org.
Member involvement was key to success on the $750,000 job: 75 percent of project materials and time was donated, with the remainder covered by a mortgage and cash on hand.

The one-floor building features 2,500 square feet for four offices, restrooms, a reception area, a storage room and a conference room with a catering facility. The 3,500-square-foot portion of the building devoted to training includes two classrooms that can hold about 15 students each and a big open space with a 14-foot ceiling and a garage door.

The building is bustling with electrical apprentices every evening, and hosts safety and leadership courses throughout the year. A revived carpentry program will be up and running this fall.

“Our apprentices feel more at home here,” says Katy Rittle, director of education and workforce development for the ABC Western Pennsylvania Chapter. “The big open space can seat up to 50 people for safety or other types of construction-related training. And with the garage door, we can offer programs that require larger equipment to be brought in.”

This renewed commitment to providing quality training facilities is taking shape across the country. Read on for more examples of ABC chapters that have invested in new buildings within the past year to support all levels of professional development.

**TEXAS**

In Texas, two ABC chapters are working to expand training options for both commercial and industrial contractors.

With roughly $22 billion of new work coming to the area, the industrial-focused ABC Texas Gulf Coast Chapter knew it needed to step up the resources it offers trainees. Together with Merit Shop Training Inc. (MSTI) and the Brazosport Safety Council, the chapter came up with a plan to keep one existing warehouse on its 18-acre property and build a 48,000-square-foot building on the back half of the undeveloped land. The groups, which are all housed under one roof in Freeport, Texas, worked in their existing space while the new tilt-wall facility was constructed.

The project broke ground in April 2014 and wrapped up this spring. Harvey Builders, Sorrell Construction, Terracon Consultants and Kirksey Architecture led the design and construction effort. It was financed by a bank loan, chapter funds and one large industry donation.
“We’re a one-stop-shop now,” says Terry McAlister, president and CEO of the ABC Texas Gulf Coast Chapter. “You can get screening and badging in one place, and we have training rooms that owners and contractors can lease out.”

In addition to two drug screening offices and a badging office, the building features a 200-seat computer lab, five classrooms (one of which has an 80-seat tiered auditorium), administrative space with an adjoining boardroom for the three entities, a break room and deli, and several small conference rooms. MSTI also has a computer lab and library for NCCER Knowledge Assessments.

“The huge number of projected workers was one of our main incentives for expanding,” says Becky Rinehart, MSTI’s director of education. “Just getting trainees through the safety council was a challenge in our previous facility. The old building had 70 seats; now we have 200.

“We also have increased capacity for hands-on craft training for certificates that we do in partnership with a local community college,” Rinehart says. “We’re looking to offer new classes, as well as possibly expand the use of our warehouse for other performance assessments in addition to the NCCER rigging practical exams that we already offer.”

About 60 miles north, the ABC Greater Houston Chapter is working to bolster the training capacity of its commercial contractor members. The chapter’s Construction & Maintenance Education Foundation built a training center on the east side of town seven years ago to supplement the industrial training done in collaboration with community colleges. Last year, when it came time to build a new ABC office, the board of directors decided to move from downtown to the west side and include commercially focused training space.

The project entailed a complete gut and redesign of a former multi-tenant office building to hold administrative space, classrooms, a boardroom and a 1,500-square-foot lab for hands-on training. ABC members raised about $200,000 for the $600,000 renovation; the rest was covered by a loan and chapter building fund. Houston-based Burton Construction and PDG Architects led the construction team, with a slew of other members donating labor and materials to help with the project.

The new facility, which opened in April, has allowed the chapter to substantially embellish its management,
leadership and safety training. This fall, it is adding HVAC, plumbing and carpentry programs.

“We’re currently offering those classes at community colleges, but are trying to move some in-house with our own instructors and equipment so we have more oversight and can customize them to our members’ needs,” says Russell Hamley, president of the ABC Greater Houston Chapter. “We’re also allowing other entities—particularly OSHA—to rent the new space for training.”

Additionally, member companies can use the chapter’s conference rooms, and a large lounge space is available for students or members to drop in to do work or socialize before classes or committee meetings. “We want this to be a place where people can conduct ABC business or their own business,” Hamley says.

LOUISIANA
As far back as 2011, the ABC New Orleans/Bayou Chapter started to take a serious look at expanding its 6-acre St. Rose, La., campus due to signs of a major shortage of skilled workers (10,000 to 12,000) to handle the quantity of large Gulf Coast construction projects on the horizon.

“After multiple semesters of turning away individuals for training in all crafts, it became obvious that something had to be done,” says Claire Nettles, vice president of workforce development for the ABC New Orleans/Bayou Chapter. “Through our tripartite agreement with our Education Trust Fund and Campus, LLC, executive staff came up with a rough idea of what needed to be added to our facility to increase capacity.”

The project included two new buildings: a 7,200-square-foot welding facility with 60 new, state-of-the-art booths (for a total of 125), and an additional 10,500 square feet of space for seven classrooms/labs. The project, completed in March, was funded through a loan, a grant from the Trimmer Construction Education Foundation and private solicitations.

The chapter now has the capacity to double its enrollment (previously topped out at 300 students) in electrical, instrumentation, pipefitting, plumbing and welding programs, as well as increase the crafts it offers.

“We have a very active member base that is passionate about developing a skilled workforce,” Nettles says. “Both our apprenticeship and craft trainee student bodies are excited about the growth of the campus.”

MICHIGAN
In 2014, the Greater Michigan Construction Academy (GMCA), affiliated with ABC’s Greater Michigan Chapter, developed an aggressive skilled trades program designed to complement educational and career readiness initiatives for students in and around the Midland County school district. The program is geared toward the HVAC, carpentry, electrical and welding fields, with local contractors and other industry leaders, including Dow Chemical, collaborating on job placement for participants.

Typically, the core and level one craft-specific training program takes two years to complete. Upon completion, students earn nationally recognized certifications.

During the 2014-2015 academic year, GMCA and the Midland County Educational Service Agency collaborated to deliver the HVAC and electrical tracks, but a sufficiently equipped lab was needed to provide nationally recognized welding training to the more than
100 high school students interested in the program. GMCA applied for and received a $317,000 grant from the Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation to cover the cost of constructing 12 welding booths within its Midland Training Center.

Valley Electrical Contractors, Great Lakes Bay Construction, J.E. Johnson, and Answer Heating and Cooling partnered to help build the lab, with additional support from Three Rivers Corporation and Alloy Construction. Work started in July, and it was fully up and running by September. The space features top-of-the-line equipment, adequate room for instruction and all necessary tools.

With the new lab built, GMCA is looking to offer daytime welding classes, as well as add the welding curriculum to its evening classes. It will be able to accommodate 12 new apprentices per class and is looking to offer three to four classes per week.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts a 5 percent increase in welding jobs from 2006 to 2016. In Michigan, welders start at $13 per hour and can earn as much as $26 per hour, according to mitalent.org.

“Creating a top-notch welding lab has been on our list of needs since we moved into our new training facility three years ago,” says Stephanie Davis, GMCA’s director of education and training. “We are excited to be able to offer this type of training—not only as a standalone welding curriculum, but also as hands-on training for a variety of trades that need welding skills to excel.”

Joanna Masterson is senior editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email masterson@abc.org, visit constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
PASSION & PRIDE

ABC's Craft Champions Show What It Takes to Compete Among the Best
A crew of America’s most accomplished craft trainees and apprentices traveled to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., to compete for top honors at Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) National Craft Championships (NCC), held during the association’s Workforce Conference, March 3-6.

By making it through a series of rigorous local competitions, these 187 men and women proved their chops to participate at the national event, where the real pressure was on. The NCC included 15 competitions in 12 crafts: carpentry, electrical (residential/commercial and industrial/commercial), fire sprinkler, HVAC, instrumentation fitting, insulation, masonry, millwright, pipefitting, plumbing, sheet metal and welding (pipe and structural).

NCC was first held in 1987 as a way to celebrate craft training—and considering the standing ovations from the crowd of attendees and the enthusiasm displayed by the competitors, it’s clear the event is still doing its part to demonstrate the pride of the merit shop and the passion generated by a career in construction.

This year, the NCC featured a few new elements. ABC partnered with the Florida Masonry Apprentice and Educational Foundation to offer a masonry demonstration. Also, the event featured a new team competition, with three teams of journey-level craft professionals from five different crafts working to complete a joint project. As always, competitors first took an intense, two-hour written exam and then competed in daylong, hands-on practical performance tests that were evaluated by a panel of volunteer judges.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of the NCC committee, which is composed of volunteers from leading merit shop construction firms who plan all year long for the two-day competition—managing site logistics, sponsorships and donations of materials, and sorting out everything from power tools to nuts and bolts.

In the pages ahead, the 2015 NCC winners talk about what it’s like in the heat of the competition, why they chose to pursue their respective craft, what they enjoy about the work they do, their favorite projects and their advice for others considering a construction career.

Compiled by Lauren Pinch, managing editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email pinch@abc.org or visit www.nationalcraftchampionships.org. Photos courtesy of Kevin Dietsch.
CARPENTRY
Gold: Mark Rineer, ABC Keystone Chapter, Wohlsen Construction Company
Silver: Daniel Clark, ABC Northern Ohio Chapter, Wojcik Builders, Inc.
Bronze and Safety: Brian Hall, ABC Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter, Klover Contracting, Inc.

“I chose to pursue a job in the construction field because I enjoy working with my hands and being able to look back at the end of the day and see the things I have built. I specifically chose carpentry because I always enjoyed building things out of wood when I was younger and wanted to pursue my hobby to become a professional carpenter.”
—Brian Hall, Klover Contracting, Inc.

“I really enjoy the diversity of the job and always taking on new tasks, acquiring new skills and learning different ways to complete the job. The best part of the job is completing a task, taking a step back and feeling a sense of accomplishment on a finished product. It is also a great feeling when a supervisor or coworker shows an appreciation for the work that you’ve done.”
—Mark Rineer, Wohlsen Construction Company

ELECTRICAL-INDUSTRIAL/COMMERCIAL
Gold: Varand Ghazarian, ABC Los Angeles/Ventura Chapter, LAC USC
Silver: William Wayne Figgins, ABC Virginia Chapter, Beckstrom Electric
Bronze: Shawn P. Flanagan, Gaylor Electric
Safety: Andrew Golder, ABC Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter, The Tri-M Group, LLC

“My advice to others who are considering construction as a career would be: Go all in. Do whatever your boss wants you to do, take any classes that you can, show up to work with a good attitude every day and put your best foot forward. Always be ready for work.”
—Shawn Flanagan, Gaylor Electric

ELECTRICAL-RESIDENTIAL/COMMERCIAL
Gold: Jesse D. Babington, CECA-South Carolina, Watson Electrical Construction Co. LLC
Silver: Pete Rauls, ABC of Wisconsin Apprenticeship & Training Trust, Faith Technologies Inc.
Bronze: Russell H. Johnson, ABC of the Carolinas, Watson Electrical Construction Co. LLC
Safety: Joseph Emil Zazo, ABC Greater Michigan Chapter, Trahan Electric Incorporated

“I enjoy the complexity in my work. Every day brings a new challenge. It’s a growing field, and as long as there are buildings being erected, there will always need to be electricians.”
—Russell Johnson, Watson Electrical Construction Co. LLC
**FIRE SPRINKLER**

**Gold:** Jordan Bretey, American Fire Sprinkler Association, Rapid Fire Protection  
**Silver:** Robert Taylor, ABC Baltimore Metro Chapter, Advanced Fire Protection Systems, LLC  
**Bronze:** Johnathon Dover, ABC Florida Gulf Coast Chapter, Cox Fire Protection  
**Safety:** Jason Rogge, Florida Automatic Sprinkler Training, Inc. (FAST), Wiginton Fire Systems

“I chose to enter a career in construction because I have been building all my life. I am good with my hands, and the fire protection industry is a strong industry that saves money, property and most importantly, lives. I enjoy watching the blueprint become reality and working with everybody as a team to make it a great place for the occupants.”  
—Jordan Bretey, Rapid Fire Protection

“There are not many things that feel better than completing a project and being able to step back and admire your work!”  
—Robert Taylor, Advanced Fire Protection Systems, LLC

**HVAC**

**Gold:** Ty A. Balmer, ABC Keystone Chapter, W.C. Eshenaur and Son, Inc.  
**Silver:** Daniel Mercier, ABC of Wisconsin Apprenticeship & Training Trust, AMA Heating & A/C, Inc.  
**Bronze and Safety:** Parker Reed Lumley, ABC Cumberland Valley Chapter, RW Warner, Inc.

“My advice to the next generation is: Be willing to learn about everything, never be afraid to try something you’ve never attempted before, and don’t get intimidated by the job at hand.”  
—Ty A. Balmer, W.C. Eshenaur and Son, Inc.

“My favorite days in the field are when I take service calls and make my customers happy.”  
—Daniel Mercier, AMA Heating & A/C, Inc.

**INSTRUMENTATION FITTING**

**Gold:** Cody Petersen, Interstates Construction  
**Silver:** Gerald Wayne Vick, III, ABC Pelican Chapter, ISC Contractors, LLC  
**Bronze:** Marlen Harris, ABC New Orleans/Bayou Chapter, Triad Electric & Controls  
**Safety:** Gerald Wayne Vick, III, ABC Pelican Chapter, ISC Contractors, LLC

“In this industry, don’t be afraid to ask questions because without questions, you won’t gain knowledge and experience.”  
—Gerald Wayne Vick III, ISC Contractors, LLC
**INSULATION**

**Gold:** Mark Koch, ABC Greater Michigan Chapter, G.E. Insulation

**Silver:** Noel Ocasio, Starcon International Inc.

**Bronze:** David J. Wright, Starcon International, Inc.

**Safety:** Randall Kubin, ABC Greater Houston Chapter, Brand Energy Solutions

“Do your best work all the time, and people will notice.”
—David J. Wright, Starcon International, Inc.

“I prepared for the National Craft Championships by studying things that I do on a daily basis, as well as the challenges that we occasionally encounter in my trade. Personally, it meant a lot to be able to compete in the craft competition, knowing that what I have learned has given me skills that equal the best in the industry.”
—Mark Koch, G.E. Insulation

**MASONRY**

**Gold:** Maxwell Bond Kelley, Florida Masonry Apprentice and Educational Foundation, Kevin J. Brandel Masonry Construction

**Silver:** Abner Torres, Florida Masonry Apprentice and Educational Foundation

**Bronze:** Gatien Cesaire, Florida Masonry Apprentice and Educational Foundation, Modern Plumbing Industries

**MILLWRIGHT/INDUSTRIAL MAINTENANCE**

**Gold and Safety:** Chad Bemis, Cianbro

**Silver:** Paul Temple, Cianbro

**Bronze:** Brian Loeb, ABC Texas Gulf Coast Chapter, McGill Maintenance Partnership, Ltd.
TEAM COMPETITION

GOLD:
ABC Iowa Apprenticeship and Training Trust
Pipefitting: Ben Mollhoff, ACI Mechanical, Inc.
Millwright: Ryan Krieseley, Keen Project Solutions
Insulation: Mike Bradley, Iowa Insulation, Inc.
Electrical: Bryan Miller, Price Electric
Carpentry: Mitch Plambeck, Frye Builders & Associates Inc.

“I enjoy coordinating with my coworkers as well as meeting workers from other trades. The daily interaction with new people keeps the work fresh, and it allows me to network.”
—Mike Bradley

“My most memorable moment in the industry was during a 10,000-square-foot school addition project, when a masonry company told me that I’d built the best foundation wall they have ever set block on.”
—Mitch Plambeck

SILVER:
ABC Ohio Valley Chapter
Pipefitting: Robert M. Kelley, TP Mechanical
Millwright: Steve DeAtley, United Group Services
Insulation: Brandon Russell Cross, All American Insulation

Electrical: Robert A. Davis, Carey Electric
Carpentry: Joshua Terlau, Building Crafts Inc.

“Always have a positive attitude and be willing to work with others. Take pride in all the work that you are doing.”
—Brandon Cross

“As long as you work hard, pay attention to details and apply yourself, you will go far with any employer.”
—Joshua Terlau

BRONZE:
Zachry Industrial, Inc.
Pipefitting: Chadwick Bass
Millwright: William Jeff Garner
Insulation: Fidel Rueda
Electrical: Francisco Barragan
Carpentry: Jose Montejano

“Pipefitting takes brains and muscle to do the job well. Pick a craft that is a good fit for you, and treat it with respect. It’s a career, not just a paycheck that you’re earning.”
—Chad Bass

2015 NCC SPONSORS
**PIPEFITTING**

**Gold:** Jeremy Fisher, TIC - The Industrial Company  
**Silver:** Sean Aho, Gould Construction Institute, DECCO, Inc.  
**Bronze:** Eric Neal Capps, Zachry Industrial, Inc.  
**Safety:** Laramie W. Griffin, Jr., ABC Pelican Chapter, Performance Contractors, Inc.

“In construction, I enjoy that yesterday is never the same as today.”  
—Jeremy Fisher, TIC - The Industrial Company

**PLUMBING**

**Gold:** Matthew Elliott, ABC Southern California Chapter  
**Silver:** Bryan Weaver, ABC Southern California Chapter, Warren Weaver Inc.  
**Bronze:** Manuel L. Garcia, ABC New Mexico Chapter, National Heating and Ventilating  
**Safety:** Morgan Parks, ABC of Iowa Apprenticeship and Training Trust, ACI Mechanical

**SHEET METAL**

**Gold:** Brandon Oettchen, ABC of Iowa Apprenticeship and Training Trust, B&G HVAC  
**Silver:** Kevin Strahler, ABC San Diego Chapter, West Coast Air Conditioning Co.  
**Bronze:** Nicholas L. Miller, ABC Keystone Chapter, James Craft and Son, Inc.  
**Safety:** Frank Hernandez, Construction Education Foundation, TDIndustries

**PIPE WELDING**

**Gold:** Waylin Lynn Brandon, ABC New Orleans/Bayou Chapter, River Construction  
**Silver:** Joshua White, TIC - The Industrial Company  
**Bronze:** Timothy Nelson, Cianbro  
**Safety:** Francisco Ochoa, Construction Education Foundation, TDIndustries

“The thing that I enjoy about this industry is working with people who help me and give me pointers on the work we do.”  
—Francisco Ochoa, TDIndustries

“I like that the work is hands on and that what I do contributes to the strength of pipe, buildings and docks.”  
—Waylin Brandon, Cianbro
HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The 2016 National Craft Championships will be held March 1-4, 2016, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in conjunction with ABC’s 2016 Workforce Conference. The goal is to bring even more top-notch competitors together for a chance to garner national recognition, as well as generate more event coverage to help educate the public about fulfilling career opportunities in the construction industry.

• **Register a competitor.** Participation in the National Craft Championships is not limited to ABC chapter-sponsored training programs. All eligibility requirements can be found on [www.nationalcraftchampionships.org](http://www.nationalcraftchampionships.org). ABC chapters and members must complete an intent-to-compete form specifying the number of competitors per craft who are planning to compete by Dec. 4. The cost per competitor is $250. Competitors must arrive in Fort Lauderdale on Tuesday, March 1, 2016, and may depart the afternoon of Friday, March 4, 2016.

• **Volunteer as a judge.** Judges must have recognized experience and expertise in their craft. They must be onsite the day of the hands-on performance test from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. and must attend an orientation session Wednesday, March 2, 2016, at 4 p.m.

• **Become an event sponsor.** National Craft Championships sponsorship opportunities can be tailored to meet a company’s goals. Sponsors interested in donating a combination of cash and materials or tools for the hands-on performance tests must commit to providing the ABC requested quantities to ensure each competitor in a craft works with the same materials/tools. Sponsor benefits may include logo placement, advertisements and exhibit space.

• **Spread the word.** One of the easiest ways to support the National Craft Championships is by sharing news and information about the event with colleagues, employees, project partners, local schools, social media networks and other media outlets.

For more information, visit [www.nationalcraftchampionships.org](http://www.nationalcraftchampionships.org), email nationalcraftchampionships@abc.org, like [www.facebook.com/ABCNational](http://www.facebook.com/ABCNational) or follow @ABCNational.
STRUCTURAL WELDING

Gold: Brandon Moore, ABC Greater Houston Chapter, Jacobs
Silver: Joseph H. Matherne, III, ABC New Orleans/Bayou Chapter
Bronze: Joshua Prater, Construction Education Foundation, FSG Electric
Safety: Shawn Davis, Starcon International, Inc.

“There is a certain beauty to welding. Once that hood drops, nothing else in the world matters. It’s just you and the metal before you, concentrating on the goal of making a perfect weld with a certain amount of skill, hard work and practice achieving it. Every project has its own memories, but the parts that stick with you long after the job is finished and you’re onto the next thing are the skills you gain and the friends you make.”
—Brandon Moore, Jacobs

“I really love when a good group of workers gets on the same page and the job goes smoothly, safely and with as few problems as possible. My advice to others considering a career in this industry would be: Choose a craft that you enjoy and give it 100 percent. If you do, you can provide a good living for yourself while doing something you enjoy.”
—Joseph H. Matherne, III, ABC New Orleans/Bayou Chapter
FIND AND DO BUSINESS WITH OTHER ABC MEMBERS.

FindContractors.com lets you search for members by name, chapter, location, sales volume or type of construction, plus it's easy to find members that participate in STEP, have federal designations and have signed the Drug- and Alcohol-Free Workplace Pledge. You can also update your membership information—and win more work!

Check out FindContractors.com today.
Associated Builders and Contractors’ 2015 Craft Professional of the Year Holley Thomas of KBR inspects a competitor’s weld at the National Craft Championships event in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
“A LOT OF PEOPLE ask me, ‘what opportunities are available in the construction industry for females?’

“My response is short and to the point. It is: ‘What opportunities are available in the construction industry for males?’ It’s the same. Any opportunity that’s there for males is the same opportunity that’s there for females. It’s not about gender. It’s about how successful you want to be in your life and in your career. It’s about setting a goal for yourself, no matter what that is.”
Holley Thomas, a certified welding inspector and instructor for Houston-based KBR, was named Associated Builders and Contractors' (ABC) third-ever female Craft Professional of the Year at the association’s annual Workforce Conference, March 3-6 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. ABC presents the award each year to a construction craft professional who excels in his or her field while also demonstrating a commitment to safety, training and the merit shop philosophy.

Thomas is a shining example of succeeding on one’s merits—and never letting factors like gender or youth get in the way of success. She inspires her fellow craft professionals in the field and in the industry at large through her can-do attitude and dedication to mentorship, not to mention her careful eye for detail in a highly competitive environment.

“I’ve pushed myself to learn every day,” she says. “In everything I do, I’ve not only pushed myself, but I’ve also pushed other people to show them that they can progress in this industry.”

Thomas began her career with KBR more than five years ago as a welder-helper and rose quickly to the role of piping general foreman. Most recently, she became an American Welding Society Certified Welding Inspector and was promoted to become an inspector and QA/QC leader on a major gas processing plant expansion in Enid, Okla.

She has competed in ABC’s National Craft Championships (NCC) twice, becoming the first woman to win the gold medal in the structural welding competition in 2010. On the jobsite, Thomas’s crews consistently achieve superior productivity rates and maintain a zero accident and zero injury record.

Holley’s passion for her work and for the industry, along with the pride she takes every day in a job well and safely done, makes her the perfect choice for ABC’s Craft Professional of the Year. Holley is a strong female role model in our industry and has dedicated herself through many volunteer roles to ensuring that young women understand the opportunities available to them in the construction industry. In addition, her desire to not only master her own craft but also to assist in the development of pipefitters and structural welders around her is a tremendous representation of what ABC stands for, and we could not be happier to recognize her.

—Pamela Volm, 2015 ABC national chair and president of Annapolis Contracting Inc., Annapolis, Md.

Holley Thomas received a brand new 2015 Chrysler truck from the award’s exclusive sponsor, Tradesmen International. Pictured at right is Ed Rojeck, Tradesmen International’s director of marketing.

WELDING: FINDING A CAREER FIT

Like many people who flourish in the industry, Thomas never planned to be a part of it—at least not when she was a teenager. But choosing a career in construction wound up being the best decision she ever made.

“When I was 18, I had no direction. My parents said I should go to a four-year school, so I enrolled at Mississippi State,” she says. Like many teenagers first leaving home, she had too much fun away at school, didn’t focus on her studies and received poor grades. “I went home to very unhappy parents,” she jokes.

Then, after a few years back in her home town of Alexander City, Ala., Thomas suffered a heart attack at age 21, requiring her to undergo double bypass heart surgery. “After I healed, I had to do some soul searching, and so I enrolled in community college in a robotics program,” she says.

One of her required courses was a welding class—one that she’d put off until her last year in school. “On my first day, I wore shorts and flip flops. I wasn’t prepared at all,” she says. “But once I started it, I loved it.”

Thomas decided to switch directions and stay in school for another two years to earn her welding certificate. “In doing that, it really opened up a huge door for me in my career. I found something that I enjoy doing, so it didn’t seem so much like work.”

(continued on page 20)
STEERING STUDENTS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

By Joanna Masterson

Teacher, training coordinator, employee, volunteer, mentor, friend. Craft instructors wear a lot of hats, and the best ones possess creativity, a positive attitude and a collection of innovative methods to transfer knowledge to students with a variety of learning styles.

Jonathan Sacks, a transmission and distribution training manager at Cianbro in Pittsfield, Maine, embodies all of these characteristics as Associated Builders and Contractors' (ABC) 2015 Craft Instructor of the Year. He received the honor in March during ABC’s Workforce Conference in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Sacks is the third Cianbro craft trainer to win the award.

“Our industry has a well-documented shortage of skilled labor, and the commitment of instructors such as Jon will go a long way in providing America with its next generation of skilled craft professionals,” says 2015 ABC National Chair Pamela Volm, president of Annapolis Contracting Inc., Annapolis, Md.

Sacks is a graduate of the University of Maine and began his career with Cianbro in 1993 as an electrician/foreman. He helped establish what is now called the Cianbro Institute and was a founding father of the ABC Maine Craft Championships. In his current role, he develops and coordinates training efforts for all transmission, distribution and substation needs. He holds a Master Trainer certification from NCCER and previously worked as a public school teacher in Maine.

“Jon’s ability to facilitate peer instruction and group activities to allow the students to become better acquainted with each other fosters the core value of teamwork that is so important to our company,” says Cianbro Vice President Michael W. Bennett. “Because Jon creates such a comfortable atmosphere, students are more at ease and open to learning. His unique teaching style brings even the most difficult theory down to earth at a level students easily relate to and build upon.”

Sacks’ students agree. “I was always amazed when Jon could tell one of us wasn’t getting it. He had a special way of backing up and approaching the subject matter in a different way, without singling anyone out,” says Andrew Bowden, now a supervisor for Cianbro. “He had a passion for making sure that we understood, not just memorized, what he said. I still look to Jon today not only as an instructor, but also as a mentor and a friend.”

Building that level of trust and personal connection with students is typical for Sacks.

“Jon spent countless hours of his own time tutoring me on the electrical code, which in turn helped me pass my electrical license exam. He has always helped steer me in the right direction, whether I needed technical assistance or advice regarding my personal growth and career path,” says Garret Plourde, who now works as a safety specialist for Cianbro.

In addition to his role training craft workers at Cianbro, Sacks teaches night classes at a local community college, serves as a volunteer board member for the Down East Construction Education Foundation and the NCCER Workforce Development Board, and participates in several advisory committees for local high school career and technical education programs.

As ABC’s 2015 Craft Instructor of the Year, Sacks received a $10,000 cash prize from NCCER and the Trimmer Construction Education Foundation. The other nominees for the Craft Instructor of the Year award were:

- Bill Cherry, weld testing and training manager, Zachry Industrial, Inc., Baytown, Texas;
- John Dillon, principle HSE inspector, KBR, Wimauma, Fla.; and
- Bryan McClure, training manager, LPR Construction Co., Thornton, Colo.

For more information about nominating someone for ABC’s 2016 Craft Instructor of the Year award, visit www.abc.org and click on Workforce Development Awards under the Education & Training tab.

Joanna Masterson is senior editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email masterson@abc.org, visit www.constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
TOp of the Class

The three other nominees for the 2015 Craft Professional of the Year Award were:

Bernard Balz, company foreman, Messer Construction Company, Cincinnati
“Safety performance is the most important skill of a leader, and Bernie is always looking out for his crew and everyone else involved in the project. He has always delivered his projects on time, with superior quality and within the resources he has available. Bernie does an outstanding job in letting others grow into their potential by allowing them to experience success and work through challenges.”
—Kimberly Garn, Cincinnati craft manager, Messer Construction Company

Brad Dutton, foreman, Price Electric, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
“With his self-disciplined personality, hard work ethic, compassion for customers and employees, knowledge of his craft and attention to quality and detail, Brad has always been an employee that I knew I could count on and trust with any project. He is one of the most dedicated and motivated employees that an employer could hope to have.”
—Jason Miller, residential division manager, Price Electric

Matthew Kohles, jobsite supervisor, Signature Electric, LLC, Omaha, Neb.
“A proactive and tactful manner has enhanced Matt’s reputation as a great partner of others working on any project. When instructing apprentices, he provides the necessary direction, instructions and demonstration. He has good judgement on when to stay close and when to let them work independently. Matt is humble, but very effective.”
—Lori Buchanan, principal and partner, Signature Electric, LLC

Mentorship on the Job

Today, Thomas holds a high-pressure position in which she is often the final manager to inspect and sign off on welds that affect the long-term strength and safety of multi-million-dollar projects for top industrial construction owners.

In her role, she often oversees work performed by craft professionals who've been in the industry 20 or more years longer than she has. However, Thomas refuses to let fear or intimidation play a factor in her job.

“Everything I do is about respect. I don’t go into anything boastful,” she says. “One time, I had to test a welder who was 40 years older than I am. But I thought, I can learn something from him, and I told him that.”

In addition to her full-time responsibilities, Thomas teaches structural welding and pipe welding classes after work for two hours, four days a week, for KBR employees.

“I’m a mentor to those guys and gals that come into these classes unpaid, on their own time, as a way to move up in their careers. As they progress on the jobsite, I’ve had a few of them come up to me after they’ve become certified welders, and they will ask me for help or to look at welds. I’m lucky enough to be in the position I’m in, where I can break free for a couple minutes on the jobsite to work with my colleagues,” she says.

Industry role model

Thomas is committed to mentorship off the jobsite as well. She helps fill the industry’s massive skills gap by getting involved with programs intended to change the mindset.
of the parents, teachers and counselors who guide young people—particularly women—in their early career choices. “We’ve got to hit the kids at a young age. When you think about it, kids are always doing something with their hands. So, by doing a simulation for them and letting a kid try building something in a safe environment, we can get them engaged,” she says.

Every summer, Thomas participates in the KBR-co-sponsored Summer Welding and Technology (SWEETY) Camp in Priceville, Ala., and volunteers at the Bechtel-co-sponsored MAGIC (Mentoring a Girl in Construction) Camp in Houston, where girls are exposed to a variety of crafts.

“I hang out with them throughout the day, and then I tell the story of how I got to where I am today. Every time I go to SWEETY Camp or MAGIC Camp, I give my cell phone number out. I tell the girls, if you decide to go down this path down the road, just call me or text me for advice,” Thomas says. “We can’t be successful in our industry without being a positive light through these personal mentorships.”

**TOP ACCOLADES**

Thomas also served as a volunteer judge for the recent structural welding competition at the NCC (see Passion & Pride on page 24).

“It felt great coming back as a judge for welding because I’ve been in [the competitors’] shoes. I know the 10 different emotions they’re having as they’re walking onto the show floor for the first time, and I know the pressure they’re feeling throughout the day. All of the competitors worked hard, and they should be proud of themselves,” she says.

The NCC competitors were honored in a final ceremony in Fort Lauderdale—the same ceremony where Thomas’ name was announced as Craft Professional of the Year.

“I didn’t even hear them say my last name. When the loudspeaker said, ‘and the Craft Professional of the Year award goes to…’ all I heard was ‘Holley.’ It was so overwhelming and exciting at the same time,” she says.

Thomas received a brand new 2015 Chrysler truck from the award’s exclusive sponsor Tradesmen International. The truck included custom upgrades donated by ABC business partner Ram Commercial. Bosch Tools and Ram Commercial provided additional prizes for the winner and finalists.

“In life, we all strive for recognition for our efforts throughout different stages in our careers. I looked for validation from my peers when I was a welder. Then, I wanted recognition from my bosses and superintendents when I was a foreman. Once I was upgraded to a QA/QC leader and teacher, I was seeking validation for my hard work from ABC and the best merit shop craft competitors, which is what I got when I won gold in the NCC welding competition. The only thing left was getting recognition from the industry as a whole—and that’s what the 2015 Craft Professional of the Year award means to me,” she says.

Lauren Pinch is managing editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email pinch@abc.org, visit www.constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
At the Northern California Chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), training the workforce doesn’t just mean classroom learning and on-the-job instruction—it means diving into the community to teach apprentices the importance of giving back.

The chapter is involved with a few nonprofit organizations in their local area, but primarily supports a local women’s shelter, Shepherd’s Gate, in need of construction assistance. Throughout the year, the chapter works with Shepherd’s Gate to assess the work it needs done and then correlate those projects with the hands-on portion of the apprenticeship training so the students can perform the work.

“It is important for the apprentices to see firsthand why it is always important to give back,” says ABC Northern California Chapter Training Director Roy Horton. “If you have not left the world a better place than you found it, you are not doing enough.”

In the past five years, apprentices from four of the five trades being taught at the chapter have assisted with new construction of Shepherd’s Gate’s facility.

Carpentry apprentices have reframed interior walls and built soffit and chase walls for a housing unit that was left unfinished by a previous contractor—plus built a patio and BBQ area; installed cabinets, doors, hardware and new interior trim; and repaired water-damaged drywall.

Laborers poured concrete for new curbs, sidewalks and pathways, jackhammered the floor in the building and rerouted sewer lines. Electrical students installed outlets and lights in a new building and retrofitted lights on existing buildings. In addition, painting apprentices repainted the interior and exterior of a majority of Shepherd’s Gate’s buildings to keep them looking fresh.

“There is a level of professionalism and sense of giving back that is difficult to teach in the classroom,” Horton says. “It’s important for the apprentices to realize that they have been given an opportunity that should be reciprocated in the world.”

In addition, the work the students complete counts toward their school-related supplemental instruction hours. The projects also allow the students to work on certain aspects of the trade that they might not encounter very often in the field, providing expanded learning opportunities outside of their designated training course.

“Incorporating this community service has absolutely improved our training program,” Horton says. “Any opportunity we can utilize to help break up the training with something different aids our efforts tremendously.”

Donna Puglisi is public relations manager for Associated Builders and Contractors. For more information, email puglisi@abc.org or follow @ABCNational.
COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Giving a New Meaning To Hands-On Training
BY DONNA PUGLISI

Apprentices from Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) Hawaii Chapter get to put their skills to work outside the classroom, but it’s not on an average jobsite.

Through a partnership with Honolulu Habitat for Humanity, craft trainees get real-life experience, and local families in need get new homes.

“There are so many causes that demand attention, so selecting an organization to get involved in came down to two basic criteria,” says Ken Wilson, education director for the ABC Hawaii Chapter. “First, we wanted to choose an organization that would effectively complement our primary function of teaching and perpetuating the merit shop construction industry. Second, we wanted to support a cause that provides a hand up versus a hand out.”

Since the fall of 2013, 81 apprentices from the Hawaii Chapter’s carpentry, painting and roofing classes have volunteered more than 1,000 hours of labor and community service to build six homes in the Honolulu area.

The trainees at ABC Hawaii, who are required to demonstrate their skills through hands-on assessments, are given the opportunity to use this community service program as a way to show their task knowledge on an actual jobsite. The instructors for each class accompany the students to ensure they are performing the tasks necessary for their training to be complete.

Each piece of the most recent project corresponded with the specific labs the apprentices needed to complete. The carpentry classes (levels one, two and three) assisted with layout, trenching, concrete forms for footings, trusses and rough framing. They also installed flooring, baseboards and some cabinetry. The painting level one class worked with brush and roller primer and finish paints, and the level two and three roofing classes worked together on another project with Honolulu Habitat.

Plus, the apprentices got to work alongside the families for whom the homes were being built.

“There is nothing better in life than giving out a helping hand to your brothers and sisters in Hawaii,” says apprentice Manny Crawford.

While the community service program is coordinated through the chapter, the students that participated were there for much more than class credit.

“Our apprentices learn firsthand that growth within themselves and their career is only part of being successful,” Wilson says. “Walking away from a project without any expectations of receiving anything other than the heartfelt ‘thank you’ from the families they impacted is a feeling they will never forget.”

Donna Puglisi is public relations manager for Associated Builders and Contractors. For more information, email puglisi@abc.org.
Matthew Romanoff started out as an electrical project manager at a family-run union company before starting his own open shop business, Romanoff Group, which now does about $65 million in annual sales.
Matthew Romanoff is a go-getter. In his words, he likes to work hard and play hard. It’s the main reason he’s had success as a college graduate turned electrician turned business owner. That’s not to say there haven’t been a few missteps along his 30-year career in the construction industry, but with his never-fail attitude, he prefers to focus his attention on the positives.

For example, his company—Romanoff Group, headquartered just outside Columbus, Ohio—did about $65 million in sales this year with a workforce of about 400 employees. It’s a considerable jump from the dozen craft professionals he started out with in 1993, not to mention the family-owned electrical business he grew up around.

Romanoff’s grandfather came to the United States from Russia in 1917, settled in Cleveland and completed electrical training with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). In 1927, he moved to Toledo, Ohio, and started Romanoff Electric. Romanoff’s father took over the business in 1976, and four years later opened an office in Columbus to work on the first Honda plant to be built in Marysville, Ohio.

After earning a business degree from Arizona State University in the mid-1980s, Romanoff returned to Toledo to go through the IBEW’s electrical apprenticeship program and learn estimating, project management and purchasing through the family business. In 1990, he moved to Columbus with the expectation he would run the operation a few years down the line.

But about three years in, Romanoff realized a union company just wasn’t the right fit for Columbus. “I went to my dad and said, ‘this is a merit shop city and my future is in the merit shop.’ I let him know I wanted to leave and buy a company named GE Miller Electric. He was very understanding and even allowed me to piggyback off the name, so we became Miller/Romanoff.”

The new venture—which eventually became Romanoff Group—focused on smaller commercial projects at first, but it didn’t take long for Romanoff to get the urge to expand. “My dad started some other companies (doing development, commercial and industrial work) and never wanted to sit still, so I’m like him but on steroids.”

Romanoff opened a residential unit in 1998, but it was far different from what he knew on the commercial side and made virtually no money for the first few years. Looking back, sticking with that business was one of the best decisions he’s ever made. “We eventually figured out how to be profitable on the residential side, and it has been very beneficial,” Romanoff says. “When residential is down, commercial is up, and vice versa.”

Not every diversification strategy was quite so successful. Romanoff tried a commercial HVAC business in 2001 and a residential plumbing business
in 2004, both of which “failed miserably.” Not to be deterred, in 2003 he set his sights on opening a residential HVAC business that remains profitable today. In fact, residential electrical and HVAC work accounts for about 60 percent of the Romanoff Group’s projects today.

Expansion took a geographic turn in 2007, when Romanoff opened new offices in Charlotte, N.C., and Louisville, Ky., in order to perform additional work for existing clients. The same strategy has brought the firm to Nashville and Raleigh, N.C., as well.

All the ups and downs beg the question: Wouldn’t it have been easier for Romanoff to just build the family business instead?

“I learned so much going out on my own, like sweating payroll and having to meet with banks. If I had stayed with my dad’s company, all of those relationships would have been built for me,” he says. “Even if I would have failed, which I never thought of, I never would have been sorry for what I attempted.”

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH MENTORSHIP AND TRAINING**

In his role as chief executive officer, Romanoff is content to leave his tools behind and focus on mentoring his team of general managers. He speaks with them on a daily basis and visits each office monthly.

“I’m fairly hands off. I give my general managers the tools they need to be successful and I focus more..."
on the strategy of how we’re going to grow and what we need to make that happen,” he says.

A lot of the employees who are running operations came up through the ranks, due in part to the company’s commitment to hiring from within and ensuring staff gets the proper schooling and training needed to advance their careers. Romanoff describes his team as an energetic bunch with a lot of longevity—essentially, they are the nuts and bolts of the firm’s success.

Despite recently being named one of Columbus’ best places to work by CEO Magazine, Romanoff Group faces the same workforce pressures as every other U.S. contractor; namely a severe shortage of craft professionals. True to form, Romanoff refuses to sit around and do nothing about that problem.

“We’re having trouble recruiting like I’ve never experienced before,” he says. Anticipating this shortfall, two years ago the management team literally sat in a room together for hours until they came up with a way to bring more electricians and HVAC apprentices into the industry. The plan is simple, albeit quite a financial investment: pay for apprentices’ training and 100 percent of their housing costs for the first year.

To start, the firm’s HR recruiter reached out to every career and technical school in Ohio and met with a dozen that expressed interest, many of which were in rural areas. “Young people often want to move to Columbus from southern Ohio, but they don’t have enough money without a job in place. Now they have no excuse,” Romanoff says. “We put them up in apartments, they work for us, and we pay for them to go to school.”

For the second year of training, students get a housing stipend, and all school costs remain covered by Romanoff Group. Last year, 34 students started off in the program and 25 finished—a huge success compared to the numbers Romanoff would have had using traditional
recruiting methods. This year, about 50 people started in June and only a couple have dropped off.

“It has been revolutionary,” Romanoff says. “Obviously there’s a cost to us, but we’ve been able to figure it out, and we know we’ll be paid back tenfold once these students are fully trained. They know we stuck our necks out for them and will be loyal; plus our recruiter is a bit of a mother hen to them.”

Romanoff Group uses the apprenticeship program offered by Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) Central Ohio Chapter. Additionally, students come to the office for a couple hours each week during the first six months for in-house training to make sure they learn certain skills the “Romanoff way.”

The company joined ABC back in 1993, when Romanoff was first trading in his union background for the open shop philosophy, and he later served as a board member for a few years. “I needed to learn the essence of what it meant to be a merit shop contractor,” he says. “My goal was to be the most sophisticated merit shop electrical contractor in Columbus, and being involved in ABC greatly helped my learning curve and my ability to meet that goal.”

Joanna Masterson is editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email masterson@abc.org, visit www.constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
What value does your company gain from sponsoring competitors in ABC’s National Craft Championships (NCC)?

**MATT KLEBS**  
**VICE PRESIDENT**  
Klebs Mechanical  
Anchorage, Alaska

The construction trades are facing an interesting time in which the industry will be looking at this new generation to become the technical experts and leaders of tomorrow. I believe the NCC fosters a drive for these young competitors to be their best and accomplish more than they thought they could. In doing that, momentum continues to build after the competition for them to reach even greater goals.

It is extremely satisfying to see these young people evolve in many cases from a high school graduate to a competitor on the national level. For this to happen, a company must commit to training, motivating and creating an environment that will allow young apprentices to flourish. We have had representation at the national level for the past four years, and have placed twice. Our apprentices consistently demonstrate exceptional skill and dedication to their craft. That energy spreads throughout the organization as a whole and creates a sense of pride. It also gives the first-year apprentices a goal to reach for.

**TOM WANAMAKER**  
**TRAINING MANAGER**  
Starcon International, Inc.  
New Lenox, Ill.

By sending our welding, piping fitting and insulation apprentices to the NCC, we can reward our top performers, benchmark our training program, network with other instructors and learn about the latest innovations in workforce development.

The event is well organized and professional, and the friendships and bonds created are priceless. We also encourage the competitors to bring a guest. For many, this is the first time they can share what they actually do at work. The competitors and attendees are left with a feeling of pride and professionalism they will always remember. Our past competitors usually become our next instructors.

Filling our pipeline of quality craftspeople is what interested me most and sparked me to become engaged in ABC at a national level. Sharing best practices allows us to become better.

**JAMIE VAN VOORHIS**  
**SENIOR MANAGER, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**  
Jacobs  
Birmingham, Ala.

Our continued success depends on having a workforce that is skilled, safe, productive, motivated and flexible. The NCC gives our craft employees an opportunity to compete against the “best of the best” from across the industry. There is a tremendous amount of excitement leading up to the competition that permeates throughout the organization—from the competitor to the workforce development team and up to executive leadership. The pride that comes with participating in the event is exhilarating and enduring. Even years later, competitors always say they remember it like it was yesterday. Skill development and the NCC are effective ways to engage employees in our company’s “learning organization” culture—where continuous skill and knowledge acquisition is seen as a competitive advantage.

**COMPETITOR REGISTRATIONS**

Competitor registrations for the 2015 National Craft Championships are due Dec. 1. For more information, visit www.nationalcraftchampionships.org.
2014 ABC Craft Professional of the Year Robert Stuart is an electrician with Stronghold Engineering, Inc.
Robert Stuart is proof that a little interest and mentorship from a construction business owner can go a long way toward bringing talented people to the industry.

As a teenager, Stuart learned the benefits of earning money and setting his own hours by doing yard work for his neighbor Scott Bailey, founder of Stronghold Engineering, Inc., Riverside, Calif. Impressed with the results, Bailey offered Stuart a part-time job in Stronghold’s shop the following summer. The timing was perfect for an introduction to the construction industry. Though Stuart performed well in school, he much preferred physical activity to sitting and doing homework. He had an interest in cars, but wasn’t sure if there was a future as a mechanic.

“I was weighing the options, but when I worked at Stronghold my junior year and got to drive stuff out to the jobsites, I knew that’s what I wanted to do. I saw that the work would be more rewarding,” Stuart says. “The day I realized I could be the guy I am now, I rolled up to a job at Camp Pendleton, looking to drop something off for the foreman. I saw an older gentleman by the trailer and assumed he was the foreman, but the actual guy in charge was no older than I am now. It blew my mind. At that moment, I knew it was something I could do.”
Not wanting to give up on the idea of a college education, Stuart took night classes at a local junior college while working at Stronghold. But as time passed, he found he liked his job more and eventually focused full time on his apprenticeship (graduating in 2003). “I got lucky with Scott Bailey,” he says. “Had I not met him, I think I would have gone to college full time.”

Now, with about 15 years in the trades under his belt, Stuart is an electrical superintendent with Stronghold Engineering and an instructor in the electrical apprenticeship program sponsored by Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) Southern California Chapter. In 2011, ABC National recognized him as the Craft Instructor of the Year. In May, he added to the accolades by winning ABC’s 2014 Craft Professional of the Year award, which honors someone who demonstrates a passion for his or her trade and whose commitment to excellence makes him or her the ultimate example of merit shop success in the field.

HANDS-ON ATTENTION TO DETAIL
Stuart has been instrumental in executing some of Stronghold’s most challenging and complex projects involving electrical crews of journeymen and apprentices, as well as subcontractors and numerous other trades. Currently, Stuart is wrapping up final details on a $14 million, 264-unit student housing project at the University of California, Riverside. Stuart has been onsite since January 2013, adhering to a fast-paced schedule and maximizing the project flow to minimize delays, cost overruns, and conflicts with the different trades and firms working collaboratively to complete eight structures.

“Robert is extremely cooperative, as well as proactive in coordinating his crew,” says John Warren, senior project manager for Clark Construction. “His experience and communication skills have made him an ideal leader.”

The job boasts more than 45,000 manhours without an injury or accident. Stuart starts a typical day with a...
MEET THE FINALISTS

The three other Craft Professional of the Year finalists share award-winner Robert Stuart’s passion for the construction industry in their own unique way.

Binesh Prasad - Electrician
Keithly Electric Company, Seattle
His journey to the industry: I was born and raised in Fiji, went to University of South Pacific for one year of accounting and came to the United States in 1998 at age 23. I found a job with 7-Eleven and two years later moved from California to Seattle and became a naturalized citizen. I found a job with an electric supply company, where Keithly Electric’s purchasing manager was one of the customers. When I got laid off in 2001, Keithly offered me a job as a helper and later I was brought into the office to do purchasing and billing. I decided to change my career to become an electrician and Keithly put me through school for four years.

Being a positive role model: When apprentices work with me, I tell them what I went through—there wasn’t even a light bulb in my house growing up. I tell them to set a goal and they’ll reach it someday.

Employer brag: When it was time to augment our purchasing and warehouse staff, we knew Benny would be a good fit. He was always hustling and smiling and always had a kind word for our staff. When we realized we needed to develop more craft professionals, Benny was ready for a new challenge. There was no hesitation that becoming a skilled electrician was what he wanted to do. He has greatly contributed to our success.

John Reese Kuhn II – Welder, Pipefitter, Boilermaker and Rigger
Manhattan Mechanical Services LLC, Manhattan, Ill.
Welding philosophy: All that matters is that you make two pieces into one piece without any imperfections. It doesn’t matter who’s the best so long as it’s done right.

Why he went the craft route: I went to one year of college for construction management, but there wasn’t enough hands-on learning. I decided to leave Kansas and go to the Missouri Welding Institute. For one of my first jobs, I went up to Nebraska all nervous and scared by myself, but once I met people and physically saw the things I was doing, I got hooked.

Industry benefits: You can go anywhere you want and travel the country or stay in one spot. There’s great pay, great honor and it’s a great way to take care of your family. Being a tradesman is an American tradition.

Employer brag: You can give John a project and he owns it. His maturity and expertise far exceed his age. He treats safety with the highest priority and sets a great example to everyone around him. We always say we wish we had 10 Johnnys.

Tony Brown – Plumber, Pipefitter and Welder
Dilling Group, Inc., Logansport, Ind.
Major influence: My step-dad came into the picture when I was 7 years old and showed me the right and wrong ways to do things. He lost his job as a salesman, so I got him into the electrical field. He went back to school at 56 years old and got his electrical license last year.

Ambitions: In five to 10 years I want to be a project manager, and eventually I want to run Dilling. For everything I’ve done and learned, I try to give back twice as much. I work 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. and teach Monday and Tuesday nights and Saturdays on top of that.

Motivating the next generation: We set goals at the beginning for what they want to get out of the class, and I spend a lot of time with people who start to fall behind. I also tell young people to find a trade they love and would like to do the rest of their life. There are so many opportunities to grow in this industry with so many great companies.

Employer brag: Tony teaches, supports and mentors craft professionals of all levels while he continues to learn and grow himself. He is honest, genuine, hardworking, loyal and passionate. There is no end to what he would do for his coworkers, family, friends and those in his community.

—Joanna Masterson

Nominations for next year’s Craft Professional of the Year Award are due Dec. 1. For more information, email krauer@abc.org or visit www.abc.org.
morning huddle, consisting of about 40 workers who stretch and warm up during the discussion. Stuart goes through the paces of what’s expected of the crew that day and that week, as well as talks about safety issues to look out for. Further oversight is dedicated to a safety officer so Stuart is free to answer questions and bounce around to coordination meetings with the general contractor (Clark Construction) and the MEP and fire alarm subcontractors.

“To make safety work, it has to be simple,” he says. “We have a 100 percent glove policy, but guys take them off to eat lunch, so we gave them clips so it’s easy to put them back on. Harnesses have to be right there too.

“You’ve got to walk the walk. They mimic what you do. If you take safety seriously, then they will too. It’s a vibe you have with your crew.”

Other aspects of Stuart’s priority-juggling act include motivating his crew, putting out fires and picking up his tools to help meet a deadline—whether it’s preparing to start up boilers or energizing a roof. Though it’s in his nature to work with his hands, Stuart credits a former supervisor for teaching him not to stand back; there’s always time to jump in and help.

“Each job is a new opportunity to do something better than the last time. There’s always a different atmosphere, and you get to meet different people,” he says. “I get the best of both worlds wearing multiple hats. I can spend three to four hours in the office or spend the whole day in the field.”

THE BIGGER PICTURE
When he’s not on the jobsite or spending time with his wife and three kids, Stuart usually can be found in the classroom. He has been an instructor in the ABC apprenticeship program since 2005 and is getting ready
CHAMPION EDUCATOR IS ALWAYS THERE FOR HIS STUDENTS

It’s not possible to tout the talent of craft professionals without acknowledging the support of dedicated instructors who can channel a positive attitude and transfer knowledge to young apprentices. In May, Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) honored Lloyd T. Evans, hiring and training administrator with Watson Electrical Construction Co. LLC, Wilson, N.C., as its Craft Instructor of the Year.

Evans joined Watson Electrical Construction as an electrical helper in 1968 following three years of military service—working his way up as a foreman, supervisor, office manager, division manager and safety inspector. In his current role as hiring and training administrator, a position he has held for the past 10 years, Evans performs new hire orientations and helps develop, implement and evaluate company training processes.

He earned his NCCER Craft Instructor certification in 1999 and became an NCCER Master Trainer in 2005. He also is the NCCER Sponsor Representative for Watson Electrical Construction and Wilson Community College’s Accredited Training Education Facility. He participates in career fairs throughout North Carolina and works closely with military veterans to help educate people about the benefits of working in the electrical industry.

“Lloyd’s knowledge and experience and his positive attitude about electrical work serve as a great example to our apprentices and other employees on how to advance within our company,” says David Garren, vice president of human resources for Watson Electrical Construction. “He is willing to make himself available to help anyone who desires to learn more about the electrical industry or needs help in any area, whether it’s school or field work.”

Indeed, Evans is widely known for being exceptional at explaining complicated subjects, utilizing hands-on techniques, and going out of his way to work with students after hours or help them train for competitions such as SkillsUSA and the ABC National Craft Championships.

“He teaches with passion, hard work and dedication. If you are struggling and having a hard time understanding anything, he’s there for you or just a phone call away,” says Shaun Birch, who won a gold medal for Watson Electrical Construction at the 2014 ABC National Craft Championships held last May in Birmingham, Ala. “He would never give up on a student, even when they try to give up on themselves. He is always there, giving them the confidence needed to be successful.”

As the 2014 Craft Instructor of the Year, Evans received a cash prize from the Trimmer Construction Education Foundation, a trophy, and a tablet and leather jacket from NCCER.

— Joanna Masterson

Nominations for next year’s Craft Instructor of the Year Award are due Dec. 1. For more information, email krauer@abc.org or visit www.abc.org.
to kick off another night class next month. In addition to the camaraderie of a classroom and getting to talk about the industry he enjoys so much, Stuart says a major benefit of teaching is staying up to date on code issues and new types of materials.

His overall approach to teaching includes sharing best practices and getting students to see the bigger picture outside the electrical trade. “A lot of training is showing guys tricks of the trade. I try to tell them why we do what we do so they can incorporate it on a daily basis onsite to make their jobs easier,” Stuart says. “Sometimes instruction focuses on the technical aspects more than human interaction. I sidebar my conversations with tips for interacting with other trades because in the field you have to coordinate with everyone to make something work.”

As such, Stuart emphasizes the importance of young workers being able to express themselves verbally and via email, as well as understand what people are saying and relay that message to others. For example, while certain lingo may seem acceptable onsite, it’s important to be able to transition to more professional communication during client meetings.

Stuart is impressed with his apprentices’ tech-savvy communication skills (e.g., sending a picture so they can discuss and solve a problem virtually) and ability to catch onto things very quickly. What he hopes to instill in the next generation is a stronger ambition to take on leadership roles and follow in the footsteps of their journeyman teachers.

Outside the classroom, Stuart has been chairman of the ABC Southern California Craft Championship Committee for the past six years. (He competed in the event in 2002 and 2003, finishing in second place both times.) He also is active in the Apprenticeship 411 program, in which he conducts hands-on training, equipment demonstrations and seminars for high school students and their parents.

“How hopefully I can be a bug in their ear that you can make a good living in the construction industry—just as good as going to college—and use your hands and be outdoors,” he says. “There are lots of opportunities for advancement under the merit shop philosophy. It’s not about who you are or who you know. You’re rewarded by the quality of work you produce and how safely you do it.”

Joanna Masterson is editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email masterson@abc.org, visit www.constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
WAKE UP TO THE AMERICAN DREAM

Members of Associated Builders and Contractors build our communities. From schools, hospitals and airports to bridges, military installations, industrial facilities, skyscrapers, professional sports venues and the playground down the street, we build the structures where Americans work, play, heal and learn—and the infrastructure to get us there.

We believe in free enterprise and what we call the merit shop philosophy: that projects should be awarded based on quality, skill and achievement.

We’ve been setting the standard for safety, performance and integrity in the construction industry since 1950, and every day we continue to raise the bar.

Together, we are building something great in America. We’re building communities.

LET’S BUILD SOMETHING GREAT TOGETHER.

#ABCMeritShopProud

Members of Associated Builders and Contractors build our communities. From schools, hospitals and airports to bridges, military installations, industrial facilities, skyscrapers, professional sports venues and the playground down the street, we build the structures where Americans work, play, heal and learn—and the infrastructure to get us there.

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WAKE UP TO THE AMERICAN DREAM

Visit ABCMeritShopProud.org and learn how ABC members develop people, win work and deliver that work safety, ethically and profitably for the betterment of our communities.
Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) National Craft Championships celebrates the training efforts of chapters and member companies by testing trainees’ expertise via a written exam and hands-on competitions for 11 different crafts. This year’s event, held April 30-May 2 in Birmingham, Ala., as part of the 2014 ABC Workforce Development Conference, featured 156 competitors.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...

CARPENTRY
Gold & Safety: Brett Wesson, ABC Keystone Chapter, Wohlsen Construction Company
Silver: Tyler Stauts, ABC Northern California Chapter
Bronze: Chris Neubert, ABC Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter, Klover Contracting, Inc.

“The hard work and dedication our employees put forth over their four years of education is monumental, so why not honor them, their craft and their competitive side by sending them to the National Craft Championships? The benefit of seeing our employees’ excitement over Chris’ bronze medal and the desire to be the next winner is priceless.”
— Kristy Pollock, Director of Human Resources, Klover Contracting, Inc.

ELECTRICAL: RESIDENTIAL/COMMERCIAL
Gold: Shaun Birch, ABC of the Carolinas, Watson Electrical Construction Co. LLC
Silver & Safety: Dillon Clemsen, ABC of Iowa Apprenticeship and Training Trust, Remsburg Service, Inc.
Bronze: Jose Vaca, ABC Los Angeles/Ventura Chapter, Bergelectric Corp.

“Over the years, many of our apprentices have medaled in their respective trades, which helps strengthen our apprenticeship program. The competition is an outstanding opportunity for apprentices to showcase their knowledge, skills and talents while promoting the importance of merit shop contractors.”
— Ginny Shindelar, Education Director, ABC of Iowa Apprenticeship and Training Trust
ELECTRICAL: INDUSTRIAL/COMMERCIAL
Gold: Spencer Hoffman, Gaylor Electric
Silver & Safety: Franklin Noble, ABC San Diego Chapter, Bergelectric Corp.
Bronze: Robson Marcondes, ABC Virginia Chapter, M.C. Dean Inc.

“ABC was a good stepping stone to getting into the workforce. When I finish school and get my license, it will open up my schedule so I can study for my electrical engineering degree.”
– Franklin Noble, Bergelectric Corp.

FIRE SPRINKLER
Gold: Paul Gibson, ABC Florida Gulf Coast Chapter, Piper Fire Protection
Silver & Safety: Rocky Thompson, American Fire Sprinkler Association, Rapid Fire Protection Inc.

“Training for the National Craft Championships has helped me slow down and better evaluate the job and the fire system. Being in the competition itself was a confidence boost; it was a good way to show my bosses that I am good at what I do and have the motivation toward bigger and better things.”
– Paul Gibson, Piper Fire Protection

HVAC
Gold: Justin Witkowski, ABC Baltimore Metro Chapter, Green Contracting Company, Inc.
Silver & Safety: Nicholas Thacker, ABC Indiana/Kentucky Chapter, Freije-RSC Engineered Solutions
Bronze: David Allhands, ABC of Wisconsin Apprenticeship and Training Trust, North American Mechanical, Inc.

“The competition benefits our members by pulling—not pushing—the students to be their best and by laying out clear standards for what is best. It helps the chapter by providing a method for monitoring the students’ grasp on the skills and processes, and it helps the industry by preparing our students to perform their work in a safe and professional manner.”
– Michael Wall, Education & Training Committee Chairman, ABC Baltimore Metro Chapter
INSTRUMENTATION FITTING
Gold & Safety: Bryon Hebert Jr., ABC Pelican Chapter, ISC, Inc.
Silver: Logan Willmert, Interstates Companies
Bronze: Jonathan Siggio, ABC New Orleans/Bayou Chapter, Triad Electric & Controls

"Instrument techs fit into a fuzzy category between electricians and mechanical trades; it offers the opportunity to be the person that can take on problems and offer solutions that neither group immediately wants to."
— Logan Willmert, Interstates Companies

INSULATION
Gold: Trevor Reis, ABC Greater Michigan Chapter, G.E. Insulation
Silver: Mitch Schwoeppe, hth companies inc.
Bronze: Eric Valentine, Starcon International, Inc.
Safety: Ron Strednicky, Jr., Starcon International, Inc.

"We plan on sending an apprentice to this competition each year and all the apprentices seem very excited to have a chance to show their skills. Anything that creates additional excitement to go to work or to class to better yourself and the company is a win-win for all parties involved. A company is only as good as its employees."
— Eric McCleave, Superintendent, hth companies inc.

MILLWRIGHT/INDUSTRIAL MAINTENANCE
Gold: Michael Astle, Cianbro
Silver: Ashley Agbe, ABC Texas Gulf Coast Chapter, RPM Services, Inc.
Bronze & Safety: Jeremy Michelli, ABC Pelican Chapter, Jacobs Field Service

"Sending competitors to the National Craft Championships allows us to validate the strengths and weaknesses of our craft development programs and gives us the opportunity to recognize team members and trainers who excel."
— Brian Watson, Manager, Cianbro Institute
Check out a video of the National Craft Championships at youtube.com/TheABCNational. Videos of competitor interviews are available on www.constructionexec.com.

**PIPEFITTING**

*Gold:* Ross Capps, Zachry Industrial, Inc.  
*Silver:* Joshua Allgier, ABC Heart of America Chapter, Lee Mechanical Contractors, Inc.  
*Bronze:* Matthew Allgier, ABC Heart of America Chapter, Lee Mechanical Contractors, Inc.  
*Safety:* Bryan Collett, TIC

“The greatest construction superintendents start their careers as pipefitters. I believe the challenges and processes that go into pipe make you very knowledgeable and grow you into a leader.”  
— Bryan Collett, TIC

**PLUMBING**

*Gold & Safety:* Gavin Gardner-Marlow, ABC of Iowa Apprenticeship and Training Trust, Kruck Plumbing and Heating Co., Inc.  
*Silver:* Richard Ederer, ABC San Diego Chapter, Sherwood Mechanical  
*Bronze:* Lee McKnight, ABC of Alaska, Klebs Mechanical

“As new technology develops, so do the skills you need as a plumber. Learning on-the-job skills has always been very rewarding.”  
— Richard Ederer, Sherwood Mechanical

**SHEET METAL**

*Gold:* Sidney Jones, ABC of Iowa Apprenticeship and Training Trust, C&K Heating and Plumbing  
*Silver:* Kevin Sullivan, ABC San Diego Chapter, Brian Cox Mechanical, Inc.  
*Bronze & Safety:* Corey Brown, ABC Florida Gulf Coast Chapter, Express Metals

“This event affords our students the opportunity to understand the value of ABC to our members, as well as to take pride in themselves and their chosen profession and to build camaraderie with their fellow tradesmen.”  
— Lisa Boyette, Education Director, ABC Florida Gulf Coast Chapter
WELDING: PIPE
Gold: Aaron Poole, Cianbro
Silver: Demetris Lawson, Robins & Morton
Bronze & Safety: Brandon Kinder, Starcon International, Inc.

"Training was hard, but I enjoyed it because of the new skills I learned. I learned that hard work and patience always pay off. It also helped me be a safer and more productive employee."
– Demetris Lawson, Robins & Morton

WELDING: STRUCTURAL
Gold & Safety: Cecil Folse, ABC New Orleans/Bayou Chapter
Silver: Houston Hall, Zachry Industrial, Inc.
Bronze: Nathan Sutton, ABC New Orleans/Bayou Chapter, Hahnville High School

"I enjoy welding because no two people weld exactly alike. It’s like you’re putting down your own art form. I plan on taking pipelining, too, because the more trades you know, the better off you’ll be."
– Cecil Folse, ABC New Orleans/Bayou Chapter

TEAM DEMONSTRATION
Carpentry, electrical, insulation, millwright and pipelining craft professionals hailing from Alabama-based Dunn Building, Ivey Mechanical, Patco Electrical and Bevill State Community College worked collaboratively in an industrial construction simulation requiring complete skills mastery, coordinated teamwork and solid communication.
HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The 2015 National Craft Championships will be held March 3-6 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in conjunction with ABC’s 2015 Workforce Development Conference. The goal is to bring even more top-notch competitors together for a chance to garner national recognition, as well as generate more event coverage to help educate the public about fulfilling career opportunities in the construction industry.

- **Register a competitor.** Participation in the National Craft Championships is not limited to ABC chapter-sponsored training programs. All eligibility requirements can be found on www.nationalcraftchampionships.org. ABC chapters and members must complete an intent-to-compete form specifying the number of competitors per craft who are planning to compete by Dec. 1. The cost per competitor is $250. Competitors must arrive in Fort Lauderdale on Tuesday, March 3, and may depart the afternoon of Friday, March 6.
- **Volunteer as a judge.** Judges must have recognized experience and expertise in their craft. They must be onsite the day of the hands-on performance test from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- **Become an event sponsor.** Sponsorship opportunities can be tailored to meet a company’s goals. Sponsors interested in donating a combination of cash and materials or tools for the hands-on performance tests must provide enough to ensure each competitor in a craft works with the same materials/tools. Sponsor benefits may include logo placement, advertisements and exhibit space.
- **Spread the word.** Share news about the event with colleagues, employees, project partners, local schools, social media networks and other media outlets. For more information, visit www.nationalcraftchampionships.org, like www.facebook.com/ABCNational or follow @ABCNational.

Compiled by Joanna Masterson, editor of Construction Executive, and Donna Puglisi, ABC public relations manager. For more information, email masterson@abc.org or puglisi@abc.org. Photos courtesy of 205 Photography by Jana Sobel.

2014 NCC Sponsors
In the midst of learning technical skills that will help them succeed in the trades, the students in Cardozo High School’s Academy of Construction & Design (ACAD) are gleaning lifelong lessons that apply no matter what career path they choose to take.

The academy, made possible by the D.C. Student Construction Trade Foundation (DCSCTF), provides elective courses that teach NCCER-certified technical curriculum to students in grades nine through 12, and puts those lessons to the test with hands-on training in carpentry, electrical and HVAC. The program also exposes students to architecture and design, renewable energy and sustainable building practices, construction safety and blueprint reading.

“The program really helps the students who want to go into the trades and gives them hands-on experience before entering the workforce,” says Treymane Chatman, a senior at Cardozo High School who hopes to join the construction industry in the carpentry trade after graduation. “Most students never really thought about construction as an option before this class, but now we know what to expect.”

Adds fellow senior Aunye’e Waller: “This program gives you opportunities to expand your career interests. Construction doesn’t just involve the jobs in the field.”

The DCSCTF was established in 2003 by a dedicated group of business, community, school and faith-based leaders who were seeking to help youth in Washington, D.C., focus on getting an education while addressing the difficulty many construction companies were having recruiting, hiring and retaining skilled employees.

About a dozen members of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) serve on the foundation’s board of directors and executive council, which collectively make annual financial commitments and provide the major source of operating income for ACAD and its programs.

Over the years, participating companies have provided internships, field training and job placement opportunities that directly benefit both work- and college-bound students.
“The industry support has been phenomenal,” says Sheldon Shapiro, CEO of Shapiro & Duncan Mechanical Contractors, Rockville, Md. “At first, we saw this as a way to get kids excited about the trades, but now many of them are going to college when they never dreamed that it was an option, which is another great outcome. Sometimes, all these students need is a push and a purpose.”

ABC National got involved with the group in January 2014, with staff taking recurring trips to the school to mentor the students, help develop their networking and interviewing skills, and teach ways to leverage the skills learned in the academy on their résumés.

ABC CEO Mike Bellaman spoke about facing adversity and making positive choices. Other sessions included résumé and cover letter writing tips and using social media professionally. In one of the weekly sessions, the foundation organized a speed networking event where the students had three-minute mock interviews with representatives from ABC member companies and ABC National. The exercise helped the students prepare for interviews and professional settings as they head off to college or enter the workforce.

“No matter the path they choose to take, they leave here equipped with the skills they need to succeed,” says DCSCTF’s Beth Moore.

In addition, each year the foundation holds an annual “Meet the Future” luncheon that gives ACAD students a chance to network with and learn from industry leaders in the Washington, D.C., area. During the luncheon, the Norman Dreyfuss Scholarship is given to select graduating seniors who are entering building industry jobs or enrolling in colleges or universities. Students who submit an application and an essay about their educational experiences in the academy are eligible to compete for cash awards that recognize outstanding academic performance, technical skill development and good citizenship in the Cardozo community.

Through its nearly 10 years of programming at the academy, the foundation has seen the powerful and lasting effect mentoring can have on students’ motivation and success. With the help of industry professionals, DCSCTF aims to create and inspire a broader definition of student achievement.

Donna Puglisi is public relations manager of Associated Builders and Contractors. For more information, email puglisi@abc.org.
A leader must clearly define the team's mission and work with the team to determine how goals will be met and when projects will be completed. A potential leader is organized, self-disciplined, an excellent motivator and able to keep multiple balls in the air at any given time.

To help spot these traits in a candidate, start with the adage, “messy desk, messy mind.” Does the candidate present his or her background and qualifications in an orderly and comprehensive fashion, both in writing and verbally?

Once hired, how does the new employee’s office look? How well does he or she file and document project activities? Do job meetings have an agenda that clearly identifies objectives? Are meeting attendees engaged?

Leadership training can be difficult. I have had some luck with formal programs like Dale Carnegie, but success depends on the employee’s willingness to buy into the techniques presented during the class. I also have had some success with the mentoring model of on-the-job training.

In today’s business world, technical skills are as important as ever. However, unless coupled with soft skills, leaders are not as effective as they need to be.

Because people are the most important element in any business, building good relationships is key for leaders when relating to others and getting things done. Having strong communication skills means much more than writing well or feeling comfortable with public speaking. Instead, it requires being a good listener and being articulate and authentic in your words and deeds. An environment of trust and respect is founded on being approachable and friendly because team members trust and respect leaders they like—leaders who demonstrate support for others and whose words match their actions.

To foster these skills in our leaders, the firm established a two-year character-based leadership program that takes each person on a journey to gain a deeper understanding of how to live out and build in others emotional intelligence, vulnerability, trustworthiness and integrity.

What soft skills do you look for when considering employees for leadership positions, and how does your company help develop those traits?
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Members of the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) Student Chapter at the University of Houston are getting ahead on campus, in their communities and in their careers.

STUDENT-TO-INDUSTRY CAREER CONNECTIONS

ABC STUDENT CHAPTERS PROVIDE NETWORKING AND MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

BY LAUREN PINCH
Construction students enrolled at technical colleges and university programs are some of the most highly motivated job candidates out there. They’re catching the attention of local contractors looking for fresh talent, and they’re already making a name for themselves in their field—getting paid to work on big projects while balancing full course loads of estimating, programming and management classes.

Not only are construction management (CM) students making connections with leading contractors, but they’re also passing the torch to local high school students by demonstrating the value of pursuing an early career path in the industry.

Jared Nash, a senior CM student at the University of Houston, is a prime example. He grew up with the industry—his father was a technician and his grandfather was an engineer—but it was mentorship from his professors, peers and construction employers that got him locked into his career path. Today, he is a full-time contract administrator for Fluor, working on large-scale oil and gas projects such as the $2.5 billion ethane cracker unit for Chevron Phillips Chemical Company under construction in Baytown, Texas.

In the evenings, Nash attends classes, and he serves as president of the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) Student Chapter at the university. Nash had worked part time in residential construction performing quality assurance, and then in civil construction as a field engineer on road projects such as Houston’s METRORail project, before coming into contact with leaders at Fluor at an ABC-sponsored event last summer. Impressed by his experience and confidence, he was quickly offered a job.

Nash says he devotes hours of his time to running the student chapter’s career mentorship programs and charity events because without them, he wouldn’t be in the great position he’s in today.

“This is a tremendous growth opportunity for me. Our students look at Fluor as one of the biggest and the best, and to be able to work with them is almost a dream,” he says. “I attribute my position to the mentorship I’ve received through ABC, and I want to provide that construction knowledge to my peers.”

Nash is not the only student to be working for a major construction company before receiving his degree. In many CM programs nationwide, especially those with strong student-to-industry collaboration, undergrads often have a chance to connect with professionals who are eager to hire, whether through jobsite visits or campus recruitment events.

For experienced construction employers, this is an ideal situation: They gain young talent and fill a potential skills and knowledge void, all while extending opportunities they might not have had at a younger age.

David Stayshich, construction engineering department manager at Fluor, hires local students to fill construction engineering positions throughout the company.

“When I began my career with Fluor, we did not have a mentoring program,” he says. “We were basically given an assignment and learned by doing, observing and listening. Over the years, we have found that helping develop future managers early in their careers pays dividends later on. It gives the new grads opportunities to learn from their mentors and be guided by them to help them focus on the important aspects of their jobs.”

Stephen Roca, currently a CM student at Florida International University’s (FIU) OHL School of Construction in Miami, first enrolled in 2004 as a business management student with a focus on marketing. He took a six-year break from his studies to gain real-world experience, working in the health care industry, as well as serving in marketing and public relations roles. “It was hard for me to manage a full course program, plus working 50 to 60 hours,” he says.

As the effects of the recession started reducing his job opportunities, Roca decided to re-enroll as a CM student in 2011. He took on the role of president of FIU’s ABC Student Chapter in 2012, and he will graduate this fall with a bachelor’s degree. In the meantime, he works for Skanska as an assistant project
engineer, currently learning about erosion control and safety management on the job.

“At Skanska, I do a little of everything; they’re giving me that opportunity. I feel so thankful because it’s such a big company,” Roca says.

PASSING THE TORCH

Gricel Muñoz, a student at Montgomery College in Rockville, Md., and president of its ABC Metro Washington Student Construction Association, has a summer internship lined up with James G. Davis Construction, Rockville, Md., and will graduate in December. She began on her career trajectory early. While attending Thomas Edison High School of Technology in Silver Spring, Md., she applied for a scholarship through a Montgomery County program that allows students to begin taking two semesters of college construction courses during their senior year, giving them a head start on their associate or bachelor’s degree.

“These students not only go to an academic high school, they also go to a technical college during their senior year,” Muñoz explains. “We try to get them involved in our student chapter so they can start seeing if they want to continue their education in CM.”

After taking Methods and Materials and Plan Reading courses while they’re seniors, several scholarship students go on to enroll in the college as CM majors, taking courses such as Computers in Construction, Software for Estimating, and Documentation for Projects, and then culminate their education with a field operations project requiring in-depth analysis, a binder presentation and an oral presentation for fellow students.

Having been through the program herself, Muñoz is the perfect mentor for high schoolers who want to know what a construction career has to offer. “I’m setting the example of the route we want them to take. When I share my experience, I show them all the doors that are open to them. I feel like they connect with me a little more than a faculty member or a professor telling them about a career,” she says.

Fellow student chapter member James Huang will intern with Whiting-Turner this summer. Recently, he helped arrange a high school tour of a Whiting-Turner jobsite, Holy Cross Germantown Hospital, where he knows the project superintendent. Students had a chance to see operating and patient rooms, plus the CEU building and garage foundation under construction.

“The students had a lot of positive things to say and they were very motivated afterward,” Huang says.

At the University of Houston, Nash became involved in mentoring high school students through a relationship with the ACE Mentor Program. He believes it’s essential to clear up false perceptions of the industry while younger people are still impressionable.

“Instead of having students waste their time going into something they might not like later, I try to give them perspective. There are a lot of misconceptions of what construction is and what it means to be a professional in the construction industry,” Nash says. “I tell students there’s office as well as field jobs. You’re not necessarily going to be out there in the field with a hammer.”

Plus, he wants to help students understand the difference between an engineering path and a construction path.

“A lot of students that don’t have a strong math and science background are thinking they’ll go into engineering. But it’s really hard for a person with only a pre-calculus understanding to graduate on time with an engineering degree. We want to show them, if you’re interested in engineering, and if you’re also interested in business, then construction management or construction science programs will integrate these two aspects.

“The fact of the matter is, there is a drastic percentage of students who don’t even get employed in the field they studied in. And that’s not the case with CM. If you go into CM, you will land a CM job. I’m a firm believer of that, and it shows in how our students place after finishing the program,” Nash says.

(Continued on page 32)
WHY MENTORING MATTERS

Dr. Jonathan U. Dougherty, director of the Corporate Knowledge Center (CKC) at James G. Davis Construction Corporation, Rockville, Md., has been a college mentor since his days teaching sophomores and seniors in The Pennsylvania State University’s Department of Architectural Engineering (AE). That experience provided the foundation for mentoring young professionals, as students would come to him for advice on anything from class scheduling to career planning.

Currently, Dougherty serves as a guest speaker and advisor for Montgomery College’s Student Construction Association, which was named Associated Builders and Contractors’ 2014 Student Chapter of the Year. He also has worked on committees to create mentoring programs in Penn State’s AE Department and at the Penn State Wilkes-Barre Campus.

Q: How is mentoring college students incorporated into your job at DAVIS?

My experiences in academia were a natural transition to my role in creating and directing the CKC, which is essentially DAVIS’ corporate university. I have made mentoring a priority in my job throughout my eight-year tenure. During my academic career, I was heavily involved in planning and executing an annual career fair for engineering students, and I found that all too often, companies try to swoop in to find as many qualified candidates as they can, and then leave quickly, not to be seen again until the next career event. When I joined DAVIS, I wanted our firm to be different and started the company’s University Partnership Program to collaborate with universities where we actively recruit. This program has been instrumental in attracting high-quality summer interns and full-time candidates to our firm.

As part of our University Partnership Program and our robust summer internship program, we are mentoring the future of our profession, and it brings a great level of personal satisfaction that we are directly impacting construction students’ lives and careers.

Q: What makes for a good mentoring relationship?

During the Penn State Wilkes-Barre mentoring program, I was paired with a student majoring in administration of justice (AOJ), not an engineering or construction student. While I think there was some apprehension about the compatibility of pairing a construction alum and an AOJ student, our mentoring relationship was very productive, and thanks to my network, I was able to help the student secure an internship with a local K-9 police unit in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The moral of the story here is that what appears to be a mismatch can actually turn into a great mentoring relationship if both parties go into the experience with an open mind and an understanding that we have more in common than just our college majors.

Mentorship at DAVIS extends beyond college students, and is an integral part of on-the-job learning and the growth of our employees. We have even seen success in reverse mentoring, where our longtime employees mentor young professionals on construction means and methods, while our young professionals mentor on topics related to technology. Mentoring excels when a mutually beneficial relationship is established and appreciated.

Q: What programs do you have planned to fill the industry’s existing knowledge and experience gap?

I joined DAVIS in 2005 to create and lead our CKC with an emphasis on professional development and lifelong learning. This is accomplished in a variety of ways, including instructor-led courses in our onsite classroom, DAVIS eCourses, external seminars and webinars, conference attendance, our intranet-based resource center and our CKC library.

In 2013, the CKC managed 224 educational events for our employees—ranging from an in-house OSHA 30-hour program and two robust programs for teaching virtual construction to sustainability education and professional aptitude development. The vision for the CKC is to maximize the creation, discovery and dissemination of knowledge and experience, under the mantra, “Learning: The DAVIS Way.” The knowledge and experience represented in DAVIS’ history and the loyalty of DAVIS employees are sustainable sources of our company’s competitive advantage.

Q: Why should other companies get involved with groups such as the ABC student chapters?

Theodore Roosevelt said it best: “Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.” DAVIS has found great success and hired phenomenal young professionals from our active involvement with student groups and mentoring programs. Working with these groups and construction students, in general, is indeed “work worth doing” and the results of your efforts and mentoring the future of the construction profession will leave a lasting impact on your organization.

—Lauren Pinch
PEER-TO-PEER MOTIVATION

In addition to mentoring high schoolers, these student chapter leaders dedicate time to inspiring their peers.

For Roca, that means growing the ABC Student Chapter’s profile at FIU, as the group is somewhat new on campus. He took on the leadership role with the encouragement of a professor. Now, the chapter has seven executive board members.

“The whole idea is to transition young students and have the older members mentor them,” Roca says.

“It’s still a process. We had to start from scratch, find new members, do branding and marketing around the school, and send out email blasts. At the same time, I didn’t want to bring in people who weren’t committed. It took us a while to get the right people.

“I found a vice president who is an extraordinary leader. He thanked me for giving him the opportunity, and I said, ‘I’m just passing on the torch from the opportunity given to me,’” Roca says.

Nash finds the same is true at the University of Houston: Peer-to-peer mentorship is just as important as cross-generational mentorship.

“A lot of people are born into this job, and get into the business because they joined their father’s company,” Nash says. “But for as many students who have had that opportunity, there are just as many students who haven’t.”

Nash goes out of his way to approach undergraduate students who may be more comfortable talking with him than a busy department chair. “It’s a little easier as an upperclassman to engage with a new student who looks uncomfortable. A casual conversation can be a chance to mention a mentorship opportunity or to help them get a job,” he says.

At Montgomery College, the Student Construction Association has nearly doubled in size in the past year, with six officers and nearly 40 members. Recently, it was awarded the designation of ABC’s Student Chapter of the Year.

“We’ve become a very well-organized student chapter, and that is because of our team efforts and the fact that we all work together,” Muñoz says. “We’ve gotten really good feedback from our peers about our leadership and our ability to perform as an organization, and I think now we’ve set an example for all of our classmates.

ADVICE FROM INDUSTRY VETERANS

Huang says he got involved in the Montgomery College student chapter program as a way to take advantage of his professors’ years of construction industry experience.

“To see how passionate and motivated they are, and
seeing the students be motivated too, really brings attention to the rewards I’m pursuing in my career,” he says.

Vincent Villavicencio, project manager for PCC Construction Components, Inc., Gaithersburg, Md., graduated from Montgomery College in 2010. For the past two years, he has served as chairman of the ABC Metro Washington Chapter’s Student Chapter Committee, mentoring students like Muñoz and Huang.

“I have been able to guide our local college students through their educational careers and help them bridge from the classrooms to the construction industry,” Villavicencio says.

Through the committee, he has participated in guest speaking events, arranged site visits, provided scholarships and opportunities to attend ABC networking events, and made himself available to answer any questions from students. In addition to Montgomery College, the ABC Metro Washington Chapter works with students at Prince George’s Community College, University of Maryland College Park, University of Maryland Eastern Shore (Shady Grove Satellite Campus), Howard University and Catholic University.

“I highly recommend all other companies to get involved with student groups,” Villavicencio says. “Our students are eager to learn and make the connection with the construction industry. We have so many great talents within our local student chapters, many of whom will be our future leaders and who are searching for opportunities.

“We want to make sure that our students receive as much exposure to the construction industry before they graduate, and we can achieve that by providing knowledge and experience,” he says.

Stayshich of Fluor also has served as a guest speaker for the student chapter program, and it has allowed him to make genuine connections with potential employees, whether he hires them himself or they go to work for another firm.

“Students are eager to hear about real-life experiences from construction professionals. They don’t necessarily want to hear ‘war stories,’ but want to know what people in the industry go through in developing their careers,” he says.

“Students today are inundated with tons of information. They need to know how to separate the wheat from the chaff and value the information that is worth keeping.”

Lauren Pinch is a writer for Construction Executive. For more information, email pinch@abc.org.

**Opportunities to Get Involved**

This fall, construction management students have two chances to show contractors what they’re made of.

**ABC Construction Management Competition:** This annual event, sponsored by the Trimmer Construction Education Foundation, features teams of four college students testing their project management, estimating, safety, quality control and presentation skills. All teams must be from an ABC Student Chapter in good standing. Intent to compete forms are due Aug. 29 and the competition will be held Nov. 7-11 during the ABC Institute for Leadership and Professional Development in Miami.

**ABC Construction Management Career Fair:** On Nov. 11, during the ABC Institute for Leadership and Professional Development in Miami, qualified construction management students interested in internships and full-time employment will be on hand to interview exclusively with ABC member companies. Participating companies can maximize their recruiting dollars by receiving access to résumés from students from leading schools across the country, as well as recognition on [www.abc.org](http://www.abc.org) and in the conference program.

For more information, email Kirsten Krauer at krauer@abc.org or visit [www.abc.org/educationtraining/abcstudentchapters](http://www.abc.org/educationtraining/abcstudentchapters).
Students at the Ohio Construction Academy can earn a high school diploma while receiving apprenticeship training from instructor David Hannah, Jr. (center).
When Bart Hacker was president of the Los Angeles/Ventura Chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), the first thing he did was meet with member companies and ask about their most pressing challenges. By far, the biggest issue construction firms had to contend with was the economic downturn and corresponding high unemployment.

When Hacker assumed the leadership role at the ABC Central Ohio Chapter in October 2011, he did the same outreach exercise, but with a much different result. In this case, nine out of 10 members complained about not having enough people to fill available jobs.

“We focus heavily on craft apprenticeship training, but we rely on member companies to hire those people and then bring them to us to train,” Hacker says. “We wanted to figure out how to be the mechanism to provide potential employees to our members.”

ABC Central Ohio zeroed in on deficiencies in high school technical training in the Franklin County area surrounding Columbus. Vocational programs either were nonexistent or focused on automotive and computer technology. And any students that found their way to apprenticeship training after finishing vocational school would have to start at square one because none of their credits transferred to the chapter's Department of Labor-approved program.

The clear answer was to initiate training at the high school level, but how? Hacker’s staff began investigating the idea of opening a state charter school for students to earn a high school diploma while receiving up to two levels of apprenticeship instruction.

“The intent was to start a school years from now, but a consultant told us charter schools were on an upswing in Ohio. We could get a license and utilize our existing training space for high schoolers during the day and apprentices in the evening,” Hacker says. “We took it to our board of directors in December 2012 and they charged us with making it happen.”

By the following spring, the chapter secured a sponsor and executed a contract to start the Ohio Construction Academy (OCA). Governance was put in place in July and the first class of 30 students started in September.

FAST-TRACK PLANNING

As with most new initiatives, funding was a major component of the planning process. ABC Central Ohio committed $50,000 in the form of a loan to help the school get started, and it continues to cover the rent.
and staffing fees. Gale Frank is the school’s director, and David Hannah, Jr. is the onsite instructor.

The state provides a base amount of $5,700 per pupil, which diminishes if a student enrolls partway through the year. On top of that, the academy qualifies for career technical dollars from the state because of its construction focus. That amount is calculated based on the amount of time a student spends on technical education (in this case, 30 percent). Additionally, about 85 percent of academy students qualify for state aid for children in economically disadvantaged communities.

“Overall, we get $6,000 to $10,000 per pupil from the state depending on a student’s background,” Hacker says. “If that doesn’t cover all the costs, we seek federal, state and private grants, as well as private contributions.”

“IT’S A CONSTANT EFFORT TO GO OUT TO THE COMMUNITY AND IDENTIFY STUDENTS WHO ARE TRULY INTERESTED IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY.”

INNOVATIVE COURSEWORK

Every charter school is required to have a sponsor to oversee regulatory compliance with the Ohio Department of Education. For the Ohio Construction Academy, that advisor is the Warren County Educational Service Center, which helped ABC Central Ohio identify curriculum vendors, set up food service, implement an accounting system, and determine the best approaches for meeting the state and federal governments’ requirements.

With those legal details in place, ABC Central Ohio could move on to the business of expanding its 11,000-square-foot apprenticeship training facility to accommodate high school students. Ten member companies contributed about $150,000 in cash, labor and materials to renovate 7,000 square feet of the building for five new classrooms and separate school administrative space. All the work was completed in just three months during the contractors’ busy summer season. Companies assisting with the build-out included BiCon Services, Inc.; Claggett & Sons, Inc.; Claypool Electric, Inc.; Cleveland Construction; Echo 24, Inc.; Henry Painting Company, Inc.; Miles-McClellan Construction Company; Spectra Contract Flooring; and TP Mechanical Contractors. Dave Bush, 1999 ABC National Chairman and former owner of ADENA Corporation, also contributed to the project.

Meanwhile, Hacker’s staff began recruiting students to fill those classrooms. They reached out to several community organizers for help finding kids who weren’t likely to attend college and needed to learn a skill. Because the Ohio Construction Academy is a public school, it cannot be selective about admission. If a student applies, he or she must be accepted, and enrollment is an open year-round process. The academy started with 30 students, lost about 12 due to truancy or significant behavior issues, and has since gained another 12. All are male and 60 percent are minorities.

“It’s a constant effort to go out to the community and identify students who are truly interested in the construction industry,” Hacker says. “As a new charter school, we have some kids who got in trouble with the law and can’t go back to their home school. OCA might be considered a last stop for them.”
DEVELOPING PRIZED RECRUITS IN WESTERN MICHIGAN

One of the victims of the economic downturn in western Michigan was construction training. With no jobs in sight, community college programs all but fell apart. But now that contractors are getting busy again, there’s a renewed focus on attracting youth to the construction industry and providing training programs to get them job-ready.

In response, the ABC Western Michigan Chapter formed a task force last fall that put together a curriculum to be administered by the Michigan Technical Education Center (M-TEC). The program—called the Construction Core Certification (CCC)—combines the NCCER core curriculum with training requested by ABC members. For example, contractors expressed a desire for employees with OSHA 10, first-aid and CPR certifications, as well as a rough terrain forklift license and competence in scaffold erection.

With a solid implementation proposal from M-TEC, ABC Western Michigan kicked off a CCC pilot program in January with 17 students meeting two nights a week for a total of 96 hours of training. When class wraps up in May, the participants will offer feedback so the program can be improved and then offered on an open enrollment basis in the fall. The goal is to reach both existing ABC member employees and others outside the construction industry who want to learn these skills.

“It seems to be the right program at the right time,” Brady says. “Two years ago it would have been a great idea, but it wouldn’t have been sustainable with the lack of jobs. Change in the economy is setting us up for success.”

State-level support is helping, too. ABC Western Michigan presented the curriculum to the Michigan Workforce Development Agency, which agreed to fund half the cost of the pilot program (per student).

“In the past, the state would identify a need to get people back to work and would set up programs with mixed results,” Brady says. “Today, the state wants to fund the programs that employers want.”

ABC member companies involved in the pilot program include Erhardt Construction, Pioneer Construction, Triangle Associates, Bouma Corporation, Kent Companies, Vos Glass, Elzinga & Volkers and Sobie Company.

In addition to the CCC, M-TEC will offer modules in the fall for carpentry, concrete and steel erection. NCCER-certified instructors will lead the courses with support from ABC member company field professionals. Though this dual-teacher approach increases the cost to deliver the program, Brady believes it will improve the quality of education and the ability to recruit instructors.

“It’s a big responsibility to manage a class, with testing and administration, so it can be hard to get a qualified foreman or carpenter to want to do that,” he says.

“Under this model, the NCCER instructor is already there to put the lesson plan together and lead the book work. Meanwhile, the field professional can offer insight on practical applications in the day-to-day world.”

Seeking to extend opportunities in the AEC industry to a younger generation of students, ABC Western Michigan teamed up with the Home Builders Association of Greater Grand Rapids and the American Subcontractor Association of Michigan to form the Construction Workforce Development Alliance of West Michigan. Each alliance member is providing five scholarships (for a total of 15) to graduating high school seniors to do an accelerated three-week version of the CCC program at M-TEC starting in June. Upon completion, scholarship students are guaranteed at least two interviews with alliance member companies.

Currently, the accelerated program costs $1,240 per student, half of which is covered by the Michigan Workforce Development Agency and the other half by ABC Western Michigan. As employers start to see the quality of workers emerging from the program, Brady hopes alliance member companies will step in to fund the remaining $620 per student.

“We’re trying to make a direct link between employers and people looking for work,” Brady says. “I have no doubt that if a young person came to a member company with all the CCC certifications, he or she would be a prized recruit and quickly hired.”

- Joanna Masterson
winning team. Students entering their second year will learn basic electrical and carpentry concepts. After four years and upon graduation, they will be able to test out of the first two years of classroom apprenticeship work, plus have their high school diploma. They also have the opportunity to earn credit toward an associate degree in construction technology from Zane State College.

“Between a student’s junior and senior year, the intent is to get them hooked up with a member company for a summer internship so they can be mentored within the construction industry,” Hacker says. “That way our members can evaluate the skills of students who have shown an interest in a construction career. If it’s a good match, they can hire upon graduation.”

Currently, students range in age from 15 to 18. Most are at least a year behind on traditional coursework (e.g., technically should be in 10th grade but actually perform at a ninth-grade level). Motivated students can catch up by doing additional lessons online at a faster pace. Students must graduate by age 21; if that doesn’t happen, they must withdraw and seek their GED elsewhere.

According to Hacker, about one-third of the student body has shown vast improvement, going from Ds and high truancy rates to Bs and working ahead on lessons. Another third is highly interested in the construction coursework, but still struggles to excel at the core curriculum. And the final third has no interest in school at all, and likely will withdraw at some point.

“If we lose 10 students, our hope is the 10 replacements will be higher achievers so we lose fewer and fewer students over time,” Hacker says. “If we could do five days of construction, we probably would have success beyond our wildest dreams. But they have to graduate from high school as well.”

Going forward, the recruitment process should start to get easier now that the school is established and operational. ABC Central Ohio plans to do more targeted marketing to other charter schools that end at eighth grade and let those parents and students know OCA is a viable next step. The chapter also is reaching out to principles, guidance counselors and the faith-based community.

**DIRECT CONNECTION**

The ABC Central Ohio Board of Directors is “wildly supportive” of the academy, Hacker says, and the school has caught the eye of many politicians as well. For example, the Ohio Department of Education and Gov. John Kasich (R), who has expressed the need to expand career technical education, are interested in seeing the program succeed.

“They see the direct connection we have to the industry, instead of just training students and then throwing them out on their own,” Hacker says. “There is a huge political upswing to this school. Our local political influence is expanding because of it.”

Despite intense opposition from the local unions, political entities that don’t typically partner with ABC have reached out to help the chapter promote the school.

“Every politician wants education to improve and they don’t care who’s doing it,” Hacker says. “We have an opportunity to make alliances on those grounds.”

Ultimately, Hacker’s goal is to get enrollment up to 100 so the program is more self-sustaining and depends less on outside financial contributions. Once staffing and finances are at a point where the school can operate independently, staff can incorporate field trips to ABC events and member jobsites/offices, bring in motivational speakers and eventually add more trade specialties.

“We are actively seeking ABC members’ support for what we’re trying to accomplish,” Hacker says. “The Ohio Construction Academy is an innovative solution that will have a positive impact on workforce development.”

Joanna Masterson is editor of Construction Executive. For more information, email masterson@abc.org, visit www.constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
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The Ultimate PROBLEM SOLVER

BY JOANNA MASTERS}

ABC's 2012 Craft Professional of the Year Joseph Poynter.
Thirty-four years ago, Joseph Poynter was a budding cement mason looking to lay down roots in his hometown. He quickly made a name for himself upon joining Cincinnati-based Prus Construction, but it wasn't exactly what he had in mind. The predicament was simple enough: Poynter's crew foreman, who's now president of the company, also was named Joe. With all the noise and communication common to a construction jobsite, having two Joes around just wasn't working.

"Somebody had to have a nickname, so they decided it would be me. I said, ‘just don’t call me Bird Dog.’"

You can almost see Poynter biting his tongue as soon as the words leave his mouth. Alas, he's been known as Bird Dog ever since (in reference to the Pointer dog breed that's known for hunting birds).

Driven by an innate positive attitude, Poynter says the nickname has served him well in a career in which he constantly works with different project managers, engineers and municipal employees. Going by Bird Dog is an easy way for him to stand out.

But Poynter's name is far from the only reason people remember him. His colleagues—both at Prus and throughout the southwest Ohio construction industry—describe him as polite, well-respected, kind and creative. He's a true leader and a hands-on craftsman who always keeps safety and quality in mind, and who makes everyone around him better. Prus turns to Poynter when a complex problem needs to be solved, knowing he'll pitch in to do what needs to be done.

For these reasons and more, Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) named Poynter its 2012 Craft Professional of the Year. He received the award, along with a new pickup truck sponsored by Tradesmen International, in April at ABC's EdCon & Expo in San Antonio.

The last time Poynter was in San Antonio was for basic training in the 1960s. He was stationed in St. Louis and served in the Air Force for four years. When his commitment to the Air Force ended, Poynter went through a cement mason apprenticeship program offered by the Local 527 in St. Louis, eventually graduating as a journeyman in 1976.

As a native of Cincinnati, the banks of the Ohio River beckoned and Poynter returned home to seek work in 1978. He wound up at Prus Construction—which specializes in structural concrete work, road reconstruction and environmental projects—and hasn't looked back since. Well as what everyone else is doing and how it fits into what I'm doing," Poynter says. “It's a great place to learn, and they're always challenging me.”

Indeed, Prus relies on Poynter's innovative spirit when a job requires a new or more efficient process. “Bird Dog takes a lot of unknown variables out of the experimental process when we first try putting a new idea into practice," says Jason Harvey, Prus' director of human resources. “His well-rounded knowledge in all of the crafts gives him a unique ability to look at a situation and come up with a process that no one else could imagine. Then he teaches our crews how to effectively utilize the method.”
In essence, Poynter goes where he is needed, imparts his knowledge and then moves on to the next task. No two days are the same, with his responsibilities changing depending on whether he’s working as a laborer, mason, carpenter or operator.

“Sometimes my job is like putting out fires,” Poynter says. “They call my name, and I come running.”

As the first phase of work finished up at the park, Poynter moved on to a high-priority project at the $400 million Horseshoe Casino, which is scheduled to open next spring. In addition to a 100,000-square-foot gaming floor, 33,000 square feet of multipurpose space and three restaurants, construction plans call for an outdoor plaza. That’s where Prus comes in.

“It’s almost like a park itself,” Poynter says of the plaza. “The project has a really tight schedule, so I was sent there to get the retaining walls up.”

Once Poynter marked that task off the checklist, he briefly moved on to a street reconstruction job before heading back to Smale Riverfront Park to gear up for phase two. He gets a thrill out of not knowing what challenge will present itself next, and enjoys the lasting impression his work leaves on the community.

“There are very few jobs where you can do something and go back 20 years
later and see it,” Poynter says. “Hundreds of thousands of people enjoy the parks we work on, which makes you feel so good, but you shouldn’t waste too much time looking backward. The project I’m most excited about is what I’m working on right now. You can build your legacy and look at what you’ve done, but what’s most important is the job you’re currently doing.”

**INFLUENCING THE NEXT GENERATION**

Such wisdom gleaned throughout a three-decade career is a boon to young craft professionals. Most of Poynter’s training responsibilities occur onsite via informal mentoring, but he also leads classes at Prus’ education center, named “The Bird’s Nest” in honor of Poynter’s contributions to the construction industry and local workforce.

“I often try to place our apprentices with Bird Dog because he’s approachable, knowledgeable and loves to share trade practices,” Harvey says. “Not only do apprentices look up to him as a mentor during their journeymen status, but they also develop a strong lifetime bond with him. He really has impacted the lives of people who are now leaders in the construction industry.”

Perhaps Poynter’s most important influence has been on jobsite safety. He leads by example and makes no exceptions about who must follow safety guidelines and procedures. As a result, he has yet to experience an Occupational Safety and Health Administration recordable injury on any of his jobsites.

“We have daily safety talks that keep everyone on the safety track. They might seem redundant, but you have to keep your mind sharp because you can hurt yourself and others if you start doing something without thinking about it,” Poynter says. “Safety isn’t something we focus on to make work harder; it’s because we care.”

Another core value Poynter passes on to young professionals is the importance of having a positive, progressive attitude; in other words, he tries to instill a “self-expectation of success” and a desire to continue learning.

“I don’t like working with a bunch of zombies,” he says. “I want the crew to ask questions or offer a better way of doing something. If it won’t work, I’ll tell them why. If it does work, it means they’re using their heads and learning.”

Encouraging collaboration and problem solving onsite—rather than just allowing crews to log eight-hour workdays—is Poynter’s way of preparing young workers for the retirement of seasoned craft professionals. With the right direction, he has found apprentices are eager to step up.

“Construction isn’t just digging a ditch anymore. Technology use is way up, so they have more to learn and more responsibilities. The young people we hire are ready for that,” Poynter says. “It’s up to us to explain to them that construction is a great job and offers a great life.”

Two people who have received that message are Poynter’s sons, Matt and Doug, both of whom work for Prus. Between the fun of working with his kids and the thrill of always having another challenge around the corner, Poynter isn’t ready to untie his work boots just yet.

“The construction industry does not hold still; there’s always something new,” he says. “I can’t remember a time when the change was for the worse. It’s always for the betterment of the industry, the people who work in it and the customers you’re building for.”

Who wouldn’t want to be part of that?

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**Masters of Their Craft**

Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) Craft Professional of the Year award honors an employee who sets the standard for professionalism in his or her field by exhibiting outstanding skills and leadership. In addition to award winner Joseph “Bird Dog” Poynter, a foreman with Cincinnati-based Prus Construction, finalists for the 2012 competition included:

- Keith Gardner of Bay Mechanical & Electrical Corporation, Lorain, Ohio;
- Daniel Grote, Jr. of Messer Construction Co., Cincinnati;
- Jeffrey Mertensmeyer of Thermaltech, Inc., Union, Mo.; and
- Edgar Tarin of Pinkard Construction Company, Lakewood, Colo.

Nominees are judged on their mastery of job-related skills, jobsite and safety performance record, leadership, professionalism, community and industry service, personal motivation, credentials and commitment to the merit shop philosophy. Candidates must currently be employed by an ABC member firm, possess journey-level designation as defined by their employer, and spend approximately 90 percent of their daily job duties and responsibilities either using tools, processes and equipment or directing field supervision of craft professionals using tools. For more information, visit www.abc.org/education_training/awards.aspx or email craftprofessional@abc.org.

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This spring, construction management students at Colorado State University (CSU) graduated with more than a degree under their tool belts. They are entering the workforce with construction experience in a community service setting through the CM Cares program. CM Cares, which began in 2010, teaches the importance of community service, leadership, team building and ethics by allowing students to apply classroom skills to real-world projects that benefit a local family or organization.

A standing committee evaluates requests from families in need of assistance based on construction feasibility and cost, and selects up to five projects each spring for juniors and seniors enrolled in the Undergraduate Leadership Course to complete. To apply to the leadership course, students must provide a recommendation from a professor and meet certain academic criteria. They also must be able to fundraise and complete each project within a semester. The spring 2012 class had 22 students.

“In only our second year, the program has been extremely successful,” says CM Cares Coordinator Khristy Preston. “It’s really amazing to see the level of community involvement in these projects.”

So far this year, CM Cares students have installed a ramp and widened the driveway for a Loveland, Colo., family with a 17-year-old boy with Cornelia de Lange Syndrome. Students also built a stairwell enclosure for a domestic violence shelter and assisted an elderly woman with the repair of a covered porch that didn’t meet code requirements.

Last year, students completed five projects, including the construction of a two-bedroom addition for a grandmother raising four kids, two of whom have special needs; the design and construction of a greenhouse for a local elementary school; and the construction of a bedroom and handicapped-accessible restroom for a 9-year-old boy named Noah with spinal muscular atrophy.

Allie Parker, a construction management major and president of Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) student chapter at CSU, served as project coordinator for Noah’s bedroom and bathroom addition. During the year-long effort, Parker and her fellow students raised funds for the project, obtained permits and performed the labor for Noah’s new space. Realizing that the guidance of construction industry veterans would be invaluable, Parker asked ABC member Mortenson Construction, Minneapolis, Minn., to get involved in the community service project while interning with the company during the summer of 2011.

“The faculty and staff of CM Cares and the professionals at Mortenson Construction were so supportive and generous,” Parker says. “They taught us so much. As students, the fact that we can contribute to the local community is really empowering. I feel so confident graduating knowing I participated in something I’m so proud of.”

Parker says she looks forward to the day when she can come back as a construction professional and mentor future CM Cares students.

“ABC is always listening and willing to teach,” she says. “They are patient and eager to help. Whether with construction competitions or with the Noah project, they were ready to answer any questions we had.”

Heidi Hahn is a contributing writer to Construction Executive. For more information, visit www.abc.org/abccares.
When you choose to work with an ACCREDITED QUALITY CONTRACTOR (AQC), you choose to work with the best of Associated Builders and Contractors’ more than 21,000 member firms.

The AQC designation provides national recognition to construction firms that document their commitment to quality achievement in five areas of corporate responsibility: quality, safety training, community relations and diversity, employee benefits and employee training.

abc.org/aqc
The buzz around the construction industry is it will be lacking more than one million skilled workers within the next decade. Seasoned craft professionals are retiring in droves, and existing and prospective employees left the construction industry or pursued other career paths amid the downturn in nonresidential activity.

The nationwide problem may be overwhelming, but the outcomes of local workforce development programs are downright inspiring: a 15-year-old earning his first welding certification; a 19-year-old millwright making $28 an hour at his first job; a high school graduate choosing to weld her way through college; and a reformed criminal making $24.50 an hour in his third year as an electrical apprentice.

Knowing quality craft professionals must be cultivated before the industry enters a full-fledged rebound, local chapters and members of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) are collaborating with high schools, community groups and AEC firms to prepare for the uptick in work and expose new demographics to careers in construction. By all accounts, this type of outreach and training is an investment construction executives must prioritize to ensure future prosperity.
FILLING THE VO-TECH VOID

Like many areas of the country, secondary schools along the southeast coast of Texas have lost their vocational programs to state budgetary cuts during the past two decades. As the need for skilled workers increased, ABC’s Craft Training Center of the Coastal Bend (CTCCB) stepped in to fill the void. The Corpus Christi-based CTCCB, founded in 1987, already had a 30-acre campus with welding, electrical, instrumentation, pipefitting and computer labs for adult classes held in the evening. But the 34,000-square-foot training center sat largely vacant during the day.

“I heard public school superintendents express frustration about affording vocational programs, and they knew a large segment of their students needed them,” says Anne Matula, a former community college dean and local school board member who became president of the CTCCB in 2008. “We were the perfect vocational school setting because the high school construction program was wanted and needed; it was just a matter of logistics.”

The first logistical hurdle involved contacting the state education agency to determine how to get the program off the ground. Matula learned the CTCCB would be treated as a post-secondary institution, like a community college. As such, it needed to enter into memorandums of understanding with each independent school district to confirm students would earn dual credit—via the high school and...
Getting a ‘JumpStart’ on Apprenticeship Training

With massive urban renewal plans in store for East Baltimore—including revitalizing 80 acres of housing and building the 31-acre Science + Technology Park at Johns Hopkins University—Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) Baltimore Metro Chapter is offering a way to funnel local residents into construction careers. The pre-apprenticeship program, called JumpStart, not only meets local companies’ hiring needs, but also gives residents a chance to turn their lives around.

JumpStart is a partnership between ABC, Maryland’s Job Opportunities Task Force and Catholic Charities of Baltimore. The Job Opportunities Task Force takes care of funding and administration, while Catholic Charities handles recruitment and works to resolve issues that could derail participants from success, such as finding a place to live and getting a driver’s license. The ABC Baltimore Chapter provides 87 hours (13 weeks) of classroom instruction, as well as job placement services. In addition to hands-on carpentry, electrical and plumbing projects, the training covers math proficiency, OSHA 10-hour certification and first-aid/CPR certification. The goal is to place graduates in construction jobs paying at least $9.50 an hour, followed by enrollment in state-approved apprenticeship programs.

JumpStart has trained 344 people since kicking off in 2006. Participants are recruited through community groups, churches and nonprofits such as Our Daily Bread, and by posting fliers at local construction sites. According to Kate McShane, ABC’s JumpStart placement director, about 75 percent of participants are ex-offenders who aren’t making any wages at the start of the program. As such, candidates are screened for math proficiency and they must undergo drug testing. They also need a high school diploma or GED, and must perform well on an interview.

Once accepted into the program, rigorous performance and attendance standards are enforced. “Every step of the program is about telling students what it means to work in the construction industry—the environment, the expectations and the culture,” McShane says. “I give credit to lead instructor Jack Diehl, who teaches both tangible and intangible skills, such as efficiency, productivity and the importance of being on time. This program does a great job of not just saying what’s expected, but expecting it right away.”

Eighty-five percent of participants complete the program, and 80 percent of graduates have been placed in jobs—three-quarters of which are construction jobs. More than one-third of job placements pay at least $12.50 per hour, and 20 percent of placements have enrolled in apprenticeship programs.

“We are a great resource for employers that hire our graduates because we can meet hiring needs at no cost to them,” McShane says. “But we also give hope to those who have given up and provide a platform for success to those in our society who many choose to ignore or overlook. We have seen over and over again that when provided with a chance and the hope of advancement, amazing transformations are possible.”

Tyrone Ferrens is living proof of such a transformation. After too many years in and out of prison, he made up his mind to turn his life around. Ferrens figured that probably meant working in fast food for the rest of his life, but when an employment agency referred him to JumpStart, he realized he had an opportunity to become successful in the professional world.

“It gave me hope, so I committed to the program,” Ferrens says. “The training focused on what you need to do on the job, and it gave me the soft skills of how to coexist on the jobsite with different personalities and do a good interview.”

Ferrens’ first post-JumpStart job was digging ditches at Ft. Mead for $12 an hour. Four years later, he’s making $24.50 an hour with Star Electric Co., Odenton, Md., and preparing to start his third year of apprenticeship in September.

“JumpStart has completely changed my life. I get to be a father and a husband,” Ferrens says. “I really love my job and being able to take responsibility for what I’ve accomplished. I want to represent the program well and open the door for other people.”

Graduates are encouraged to stay in touch with ABC once they are placed in a job. McShane recently advised someone on how to ask for a raise, and Diehl is available by phone to answer questions graduates encounter while working onsite. If layoffs occur due to circumstances beyond the employees’ control, JumpStart is available to help place them in another job.

Given the current economy, job placement is undoubtedly one of the most challenging aspects of the program. Openings at companies that perform private work are highly sought after, and government jobs tend to have mandates in place that prevent employers from hiring people with a criminal record—making JumpStart’s 80 percent placement rate all the more impressive.

McShane works closely with ABC member contractors, such as Star Electric, TISSA Enterprises Inc. (TEI), Scaffold Resource, American Infrastructure, Benfield Electric and The Bell Company, to identify job leads. Scaffold Resource, Lanham, Md., has hired seven JumpStart graduates, the first of which already has moved into a salaried position as second in command of yard operations.

“His leadership abilities and diligent work ethic have separated him from others in our company with far more scaffolding experience,” says Joel Ross, Scaffold Resource’s director of business development. “Additionally, two of the six field laborers we hired have been promoted to crew leads and we anticipate they will become foremen in the future.

“We have found that JumpStart graduates are hungry to succeed and willing to learn. We could not be more pleased with the results,” Ross says.

TEI, Frederick, Md., has experienced similar success with three JumpStart graduates who currently work full time as electrical apprentices. “The program has great teachers and stresses the important parts of being a good employee,” says TEI President/COO Frank Murphy. “JumpStart has demonstrated to me that the program is built to succeed.”

—Joanna Masterson

ABC BALTIMORE METRO CHAPTER

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(Continued from page 19)

the CTCCB— as well as guarantee every instructor would be accredited through the CTCCB. Instructors are not required to be certified public school teachers; most are retired craft professionals or individuals with injuries that prevent them from working on a jobsite.

Another major hurdle involved proving to each district that the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) courses being taught at the CTCCB matched the state curriculum requirements for welding, pipefitting, electrical and instrumentation so students could earn Career and Technology Education (CTE) credit. “We created a sheet with the NCCER competencies in one column and the state public school competencies in another column to confirm the courses are meeting both NCCER and CTE requirements,” Matula says. “In the end, students get much more from the NCCER courses at a higher standard.”

About 200 students from 13 high schools come to the CTCCB every day, some traveling up to 40 miles to participate in the welding, electrical, pipefitting, instrumentation and construction technology programs. Districts pay a modest tuition and provide the transportation, while the training center offers three sessions per day to meet each school’s scheduling needs. Students must pass a drug test to participate and are randomly tested throughout the program.

For schools located 50 miles or more outside Corpus Christi, the CTCCB dispatches an instructor to teach on campus. One school district has a 10-hour day to accommodate the area’s high incidence of teen pregnancy and dropouts, allowing traditional classes to start around noon and construction courses to begin around 5:30 p.m. With so much oil-related work occurring nearby, the program has been successful in sending graduates straight to work in local fabrication shops.

An additional eight high schools have instructors certified to teach both the state and NCCER curricula in a particular field (usually welding). “We tailor the offerings around whatever capacity the school district or teacher has,” Matula says. “Overall, the best way to work with high schools is to be value-added and flexible. You make the best of the circumstances you’re given.”

This approach allows the CTCCB to provide NCCER training to about 350 students per year across six counties. About three-quarters of seniors who have participated in the program for two years go directly into the workforce, with the remainder going to college. One hundred percent of CTCCB program graduates who look for work are employed, and nearly all of those are working in their field.

Part of that success can be attributed to what Matula calls South Texas’ “exceptional employment situation.” The region has an industrial base of chemical plants, refineries and oil-related companies engaged in a building boom, and two companies already have contacted the training center about talking to this year’s graduating seniors.

“During the recession, budgets were tight so the plants put off big maintenance projects and are just now catching up,” Matula says, adding that the Eagle Ford Shale, a major oil and gas producer north of Corpus Christi, is impacting the workforce too. “Because they’re paying top wages, many welders that normally would be working around here are working at Eagle Ford instead, which means they aren’t here to do other plant turnarounds.”

Local fabrication shops also are swamped from shale-related work, and an instrumentation fitter is needed every time a new well is drilled. Additionally, a Chinese-owned pipe company is ramping up to build a billion-dollar plant in Corpus Christi; the $3 billion Las Brisas Energy Center is awaiting approval from the Environmental Protection Agency; and a proposed liquefied natural gas facility is expected to require at least 3,000 construction workers.

With the immediate demand for craft professionals so high, the CTCCB focuses on preparing students for realistic job settings. The training center is run as close to an industrial site as feasible, and students can be removed from the program for repeated safety violations.

“We also stress that students have to learn how to interact with adults. We teach them how to shake hands and look them in the eye. We want them to be confident in what they’re doing,” Matula says.

Although enticing students to learn a craft isn’t as difficult in Texas as other parts of the country, where hard labor on ranches and oil fields isn’t as common or respected, the CTCCB dual credit program offers students one distinct advantage: choice. Graduating from high school means they can go to college, while graduating from the training center means they can join the workforce right away. Or, they can use their craft skills to work their way through college.

“These students don’t want to spend their life sitting behind a computer; they need to move and work with their hands,” Matula says. “That isn’t something public schools have valued recently, so it’s our job to develop those assets.”

Aiding the CTCCB’s mission is $1.7 million in city tax money—matched by another $1.7 million from industry members—that will be put toward expanding the training center to house pipeline and boilermaker programs and free up more room for mobile crane assessments. Groundbreaking for the new building is anticipated to occur this month, with substantial completion by early 2013.
A NECESSARY INVESTMENT

CULTIVATING PARTNERSHIPS
WITH CONTRACTORS

With a thriving industrial base in and around Baton Rouge, La., the ABC Pelican Chapter devised a way for area contractors to take a more active role in recruiting young people to the construction industry by supporting high schools with technical education programs. Through the launch of its Program Partners initiative in 2003, local high schools receive supplemental funding and job placement assistance from the ABC Pelican Chapter and sponsoring contractors.

Schools are completely responsible for teaching the coursework, but sponsoring companies can be called on to donate tools and materials, arrange a field trip, serve as a guest speaker or participate in a job fair. Currently, 15 companies sponsor 43 different schools with 75 construction programs. Last year, those 15 contractors invested 1,300 hours of time and a total of $57,600 to support Program Partners.

“Turner Industries employees speak to a night class at the Louisiana School for Agriculture and Science and (below) join winners of the Louisiana Area IV Welding Contest.

If a welding class runs short of welding rods, we can call the contractor and ask for help. Almost every time, the response is: ‘We’ll get you what you need,'” says Matthew Campbell, director of workforce development for the ABC Pelican Chapter. “Some contractors take classes on field trips to fabrication shops, which stimulates a lot of interest from students.” Additionally, because a lot of teachers are educators, but not necessarily craftsmen, they might call a contractor to discuss a certain topic or skill.

Baton Rouge-based Turner Industries Group, LLC has done all this and more as a sponsor of eight high schools, including advising teachers and administrators about industrial career paths. “High school guidance counselors often equate success with a four-year college education, but some very bright students are just not cut out for four more years of classroom work,” says Ray Neck, Turner Industries’ training manager. “A position in industrial construction and maintenance can offer a financially fulfilling alternative.”

One of Program Partners’ earliest supporters, Baton Rouge-based Performance Contractors, Inc., has agreements with 14 high schools. The industrial contractor has continually hired graduates for the past nine years as entry-level helpers or structural welders. New hires are paired with quality superintendents who can help them get acclimated and monitor their safety practices.

One student who started training at age 15 was certified as a full combination welder before graduating. After his 18th birthday, Performance Contractors hired him to work in its fabrication shop for $14 an hour; several months later he was making $25 an hour. Now, as he transitions to a plant for some field experience, he’ll be making $28 an hour.

Program Partners: Participating Contractors

Cajun Industries, LLC
EXCEL
IES
Infinity Construction Services
ISC
Jacobs
James Construction Group, LLC
MEI
Pala Interstate, LLC
Performance Contractors, Inc.
The Shaw Group
Triad Electric & Controls
Turner Industries Group, LLC
Vector Electric & Controls, Inc.
Westgate, LLC

Another student who graduated with basic welding certifications took an entry-level position with Performance Contractors while continuing coursework at the ABC Pelican Chapter. He received his full combination welding certification in order to earn a permanent welding job, and has been with Performance Contractors for nearly two years.

Because these types of success stories are common for the Program Partners initiative, the ABC Pelican Chapter expanded its offerings to include an accelerated summertime training program targeted toward high school students interested in electrical, pipefitting and welding careers. “They can be job ready as a mid-level helper in just two months,” Campbell says. “With a career fair following the training, we place 75 percent to 80 percent of students in construction jobs.”

Joanna Masterson is assistant editor of Construction Executive.
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Though Harold Harris, a millwright, and Kyle Kliebert, a welder, work in different crafts, they share much in common. Both made a career change to the construction industry after feeling dissatisfied with their original jobs, attended Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) Pelican Chapter’s Training Center, work for Turner Industries Group, Baton Rouge, La., and are a part of ABC’s National Craft Championships. The craft competition, which has been testing the skills of construction apprentices for more than two decades, will take place next month in San Antonio.

THE BEGINNER
A positive attitude, dedication and a desire to learn led Harris to the millwright industry, where his eight short months of experience have already resulted in great achievements. Harris is heading to San Antonio in April to compete in the ABC National Craft Championships after winning first place in the millwright competition at the Pelican Chapter’s craft championship.

Finding the Right Fit

Craft Professionals Excel Once They Discover Their Niche in the Construction Industry

BY JESSICA PORTER
Originally a brick mason, Harris possessed a knack for working with his hands and a familiarity with the construction industry. When work became slow, he decided to enroll in the ABC Pelican Chapter Training Center, where he found becoming a millwright was a perfect fit. Though brick masonry and millwright are very different crafts, both require precise measurements and meticulous attention to detail.

Brand new to the industry, Harris is still learning the ropes and determining his long-term goal. Meanwhile, working for Turner Industries provides him a taste of everything millwright offers, from tearing down equipment pumps, repairing machinery, and installing pumps and compressors in the field, to rebuilding equipment in the shop. At this point, he is more interested in working in the shop than in the field.

“You learn more in the shop about the equipment—how to tear down and rebuild it correctly with the right clearances,” he says. “On a day-to-day basis, the field would get boring to me. I want to learn more and not do the same thing every day.”

Harris put his knowledge to the test during the Pelican Chapter’s craft championship. He studied independently for the written exam and attended six chapter training sessions geared toward helping students improve their weaknesses. Everyday work also helped him prepare for and understand the tasks he will face during the national competition.

Although Harris was confident about his performance on the written exam, he was less confident about the practical due to trouble with pipe alignment. However, he scored a 100 percent on the exam and beat his competitors on the practicum to win the millwright competition.

“After winning, it was such a big weight off my shoulders that it was over,” he says. “I am ready to move on to nationals.”

He currently is perfecting skills that will be tested at the National Craft Championships, but were not part of the chapter competition, as well as getting the butterflies out of his stomach.

“I love what I am doing and I look forward to competing in the national competition,” he says. “I will do my best and try to maintain a positive mindset.”

**2012 ABC National Craft Championships**

**WHO:** Craft apprentices from ABC chapter, member firm and chapter-approved training programs across the country.

**WHAT:** Written exam and practical performance test in a variety of crafts, including carpentry (residential/commercial), electrical (residential/commercial and commercial/industrial), fire sprinkler, HVAC, insulation, millwright, pipefitting, plumbing, sheet metal and welding (pipe and structural). Top finishers receive medals and cash prizes.

**WHERE:** ABC EdCon & Expo, Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, San Antonio.

**WHY:** To foster growth and excellence in training the future construction workforce, as well as showcase the talents of open shop apprentices to the industry, public and media.

**WHEN:** April 24–27.

For more information, including video highlights from previous competitions, visit www.nationalcraftchampionships.org.

**THE VETERAN**

Growing up, Kliebert was fascinated with fire and melting things; as an adult, that translated into becoming a skilled and talented welder. Initially performing storage tank maintenance work on oil refineries, Kliebert decided to turn his side welding job into a full-time career.

“While on the oil refineries, I worked side by side with welders,” he says. “I just enjoy it. I like that I can make something from basically nothing.”

To jumpstart his career in 2010, Kliebert enrolled in the ABC Pelican Chapter Training Center. He excelled, but the road to a welding career wasn’t smooth. After earning his certification, he couldn’t find work as a welder and instead took a job as a pipefitter. Eventually, he received a phone call from Turner Industries giving him the chance to use his welding skills with a position at the firm’s Syngenta plant. He accepted the offer, and also decided to re-enroll in the training center.

At Turner Industries, Kliebert predominantly welds in the shop, but sometimes is called into the field for tasks such as millwright and pump replacements.

One day, Turner Industries’ safety professional approached Kliebert about participating in a local craft competition. He decided to give it a shot, and won first place in the ABC Pelican Chapter’s craft championship. In 2011, he flew to San Antonio to compete in the ABC National Craft Championships.

“At first I didn’t want to go, but I thought about it and figured ‘what is there...
to lose,” Kliebert says. “I ended up going and I had a blast.”

To train for the exam portion of the competition, Kliebert attended ABC courses while researching and studying all aspects of welding. This part was the most difficult because much of what would be tested was brand new to him. On the other hand, the practicum portion came easily because he could practice new skills every day at work while perfecting the tasks he already knew how to do.

Kliebert won the gold medal in pipe welding at the national competition, attributing his success to the training he received from ABC and Turner Industries, as well as from the natural skills he has possessed since childhood.

“I have a very steady hand, and not everyone does,” he says. “Growing up I was always in painting and drawing classes. That steady hand helps me a lot.”

When a friend recently approached him about whether to become involved in the craft championships, Kliebert gave this advice: “Study, train and ask other people who have been doing it for many years lots of questions. If you don’t compete to win the competition, do it for the experience.”

Winning the competition has helped Kliebert in unexpected ways. For example, he travels around the country to various construction companies where his achievements are recognized.

“It’s pretty cool that people I’ve never met who are higher up in the industry—the top dogs—recognize everything I did. I think it’s fantastic,” Kliebert says.

Kliebert does not plan on stopping now. His goal is to complete the ABC Pelican Chapter Training Center welding program and earn his Certified Welding Inspector certificate.

Jessica Porter is staff writer of Construction Executive.
Top: Richard Raynor competes at the 2011 National Craft Championships. Middle: Raynor (left) with other competitors from the ABC San Diego Chapter. Bottom: Electrician Jorge Sevilla at the ABC San Diego Chapter Apprenticeship Craft Champions Competition.
Last December, the San Diego Chapter of Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) held its 10th annual Apprenticeship Craft Champions Competition, which determines the best electrical, plumbing and sheet metal students from the ABC San Diego apprenticeship program. In addition, apprentices and trainees compete for a chance to go to the 2012 ABC National Craft Championships, which will be held April 24–27 during ABC’s EdCon & Expo in San Antonio, Texas. Participants in the National Craft Championships must perform a written exam and a practicum designed specifically for their trade, with judges and other industry members and competitors just a few feet away.

During the past nine years, students from the ABC San Diego Chapter have won nine medals at the national competition. This year, the chapter will send three people to the competition; among them is Jorge Sevilla, who won the local electrical competition.

Sevilla was nervous before the ABC San Diego Chapter competition and unsure whether his skills were up to par for a fourth-year apprentice. However, his confidence grew as the event progressed. “Once I went in and started doing the work, it was all second nature to me,” Sevilla says. Although he missed one small piece of wire, he thought his ability to read and follow all directions thoroughly would allow him to place in the competition. It turned out that small piece of wire was not as damaging as he thought, because he beat 11 other apprentices to win the electrical competition.

“I was very happy when I won,” Sevilla says. “I put all my knowledge into that championship and it proved everything we’re doing at school and on the job really is working.”

Sevilla has worked for the San Diego office of Bergelectric, Corp. for about three years, but did not always want to be an electrician. After enrolling in ABC classes straight out of high school, he decided construction was not for him. Instead, he worked for a home loan company, but soon became tired of being in an office all day. That led Sevilla to work for a communications contractor, where he began learning how to run wire.

At a friend’s recommendation, Sevilla decided to give the industry another try and enrolled in electrical contracting courses. “I tried it and I liked it. It’s harder and more complex than what I was doing...”

BY JESSICA PORTER

Craft Competitions Give Construction Apprentices Confidence, Career Advancement
It helps if you can visualize things before, just running data wire,” Sevilla says. “Now he is mastering that complexity and having fun at work. He enjoys the electrical craft because it is an integral part of the construction process and allows him to be creative, especially when it comes to bending pipe to fit a challenging space. He feels proud when all the pieces come together and the building lights up.

“I like coming to work and doing what I do. I like making the lights work, putting big gears together and seeing a building power up,” Sevilla says. “I enjoy knowing all the other crafts need us to power their stuff.”

Sevilla is involved in a variety of electrical work with Bergelectric and is always eager to learn new aspects of the trade. Day to day, he predominately does underground digging, puts PVC pipe together, ensures all measurements are correct, and installs lights and receptacles.

In just two months, he will head to the National Craft Championships to compete against the best of the best in his field. He expects the national competition to be two to three times harder than the chapter competition, and is working with a mentor to prepare for the challenge ahead. In the end, he knows all his hard work will pay off even if he doesn’t win, because getting this far in the competition proves he is talented.

“My company will see I’m good at following directions, I’m good under pressure and I’m good at what I do,” Sevilla says. “That will help me get to where I want to be in my career faster than I anticipated.”

After graduating from the ABC apprenticeship program, Sevilla’s goal is to become a foreman on his own jobsite.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFIDENCE

Richard Raynor knows firsthand how competing in the ABC National Craft Championships can propel an apprentice’s career. He represented the ABC San Diego Chapter last year and beat six competitors to win the gold medal in the sheet metal competition.

“It’s a confidence booster,” Raynor says. “My employer knows I’m able to learn quickly and am serious about my job.”

Before working with sheet metal, Raynor worked as a plumber and with a general contractor. He applied to work as a plumber at San Diego-based Pacific Rim general contractor. He applied to work as a plumber and with a general contractor. He applied to work as a plumber and with a general contractor. He applied to work as a plumber and with a general contractor.

Raynor is a field worker, which primarily consists of installing duct work, while shop employees fabricate sheet metal. Raynor had to learn an entirely new skill in order to compete, which also proved to be valuable to his career.

“It helps if a field worker knows how parts are made,” Raynor says. “If you need to modify a part in the field, it helps to actually know how to do it.”

After a few practice runs to make sure he was able to complete the work on time, as well as spending time after class perfecting his skills, Raynor headed to the competition with a few of his bosses for support.

“I felt pretty good and confident with the written test. I also knew I was going to be competitive with the practicum part,” he says. However, nerves and second guessing himself proved to be the most difficult. “They only give you a certain amount of metal and if you cut something wrong, you’re pretty much done.”

After competing, Raynor thought he did well enough to place, but actually winning came as a complete shock. He was proud all his hard work paid off, and credited certain skills that come naturally to him with helping him during the competition, as well as allowing him to be successful in the construction industry.

“It helps if you can visualize things in your head, if you can see the way you need to bend flat metal to make a certain shape before you start cutting up material,” Raynor says. “Also, you have to be able to do things right the first time so you don’t have to do it a second time.”

For competitors headed to the 2012 competition, such as Sevilla, Raynor advises: “Stay calm, zone everything else out and focus on your project, not on how far along the other competitors are. It’s really easy when you’re there to peek up and see how far along everyone else is, but don’t do it. Just do your job.”

He also recommends young people try working with sheet metal and become involved with their local ABC chapter.

“Find a good company that has stable work,” Raynor says. “Also, get enrolled at ABC, or even go to ABC first and they will help you find an employer.”

Jessica Porter is staff writer of Construction Executive.
WAKE UP TO THE AMERICAN DREAM

Members of Associated Builders and Contractors build our communities. From schools, hospitals and airports to bridges, military installations, industrial facilities, skyscrapers, professional sports venues and the playground down the street, we build the structures where Americans work, play, heal and learn—and the infrastructure to get us there.

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Apprentices Gain Experience, Confidence at ABC’s National Craft Championships

More Than A Medal

BY JOANNA MASTERS

Carpenter Derek Herr competes in ABC’s 2011 National Craft Championships in San Antonio, Texas.
Spend a few minutes with young construction apprentices and it’s obvious many are wise beyond their years—not to mention hardworking, motivated and, at times, competitive.

Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) harnesses all these characteristics at its National Craft Championships, an annual competition that challenges apprentices’ skills and puts their talents on display. Participants must perform a hands-on test designed specifically for their craft, with judges and other industry members and competitors just a few feet away. The event is big, loud and pressure-filled, but the best competitors set that aside and focus on the task at hand. They come to win, and along the way discover the experience is about more than a gold, silver or bronze medal.

THE MORE YOU KNOW

This year’s National Craft Championships will take place April 24–27 at the ABC EdCon & Expo in San Antonio, Texas, but preparation is already under way for most competitors. In order to compete at the national level, they must be enrolled in and sponsored by an ABC chapter, member firm or chapter-approved training program.

The ABC Keystone Chapter holds its competition in conjunction with its annual Construction Rodeo, a family fun day that benefits the Make-A-Wish Foundation and Merit Shop Scholarship Fund. Since 1997, carpentry, sheet metal, electrical and plumbing apprentices have faced off in annual written and practical skills tests that simulate the national competition. The chapter has sent 42 apprentices to the National Craft Championships during the past 14 years, with 19 winning gold, silver or bronze medals.

Matt Woodcraft, a plumber with central Pennsylvania-based Haller Enterprises, registered the highest score on the written exam to earn a spot as one of four people the chapter will send to the 2012 National Craft Championships.

“I really enjoyed the bookwork in preparing for the competition,” Woodcraft says. “During the competition, I had to put all my time, skill and knowledge into one three-hour period. If I second-guessed myself, I had to quickly decide to go back or move forward.”

Woodcraft was introduced to the plumbing field through a vocational program his junior year of high school. He took a four-month class that reviewed each construction craft, and was most impressed by the job opportunities in plumbing.

“My teacher found jobs for most of his students, which perked my ears up,” he says. “This line of work is so broad. You can do maintenance and service work or be in the Navy or work with nuclear power plants. The skills are needed anywhere in the world.”

His senior year of high school, Woodcraft attended the Lancaster County Career & Technology Center (Brownstown campus) full time and completed his first year of apprenticeship. Haller Enterprises first hired him between his junior and senior years of high school to see if he was a good fit for the craft and the company. Pleased with the results, Haller brought Woodcraft on full time and he began his second year of apprenticeship with the ABC Keystone Chapter.

On the job with Haller, Woodcraft performs residential rough-ins and finish
work—from installing pipes and drilling holes to designing supply lines and installing sinks. "I like to be physically active and to work with my hands; this job allows me to do that and be outdoors," he says. "This line of work gives me a great source of knowledge on basic plumbing, as well as HVAC and electrical. It’s also a great avenue for learning professionalism and how to be a courteous service person."

Woodcraft is thankful for the support he receives from Haller—whether it’s using a company van to drive an hour from the jobsite to class, qualifying for tuition reimbursement or knowing he can call his boss, a master plumber, with any question that arises onsite. With the National Craft Championships around the corner, he also called on a colleague who won the plumbing competition a few years ago for advice on learning new job-related skills.

"I’m excited to learn things I’ve never done before and then put them to use in the competition," Woodcraft says, noting the experience will help his career too. "The more you know, the more the company appreciates you and can use you in other areas. If they know you know how to do something, they can send you anywhere to do the work."

THE MORE YOU GIVE BACK

Derek Herr, who won the gold medal in carpentry at the 2011 National Craft Championships, already is reaping the benefits of participating in the competition. When his superintendent hands him a set of drawings and asks him to do something like lay out anchor bolt locations, Herr feels confident rather than overwhelmed because he logged so many hours reading prints for the competition.

"A couple weeks ago I noticed one of the guys I was working with didn’t do the trim perfectly, so I went up to him and joked that it would have been a couple points deducted at the National Craft Championships," says Herr, who works for Wohlsen Construction, Lancaster, Pa.

That confidence and competitive spirit traces back to Herr’s time as an athlete growing up and as a student at Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology, where he earned an associate’s degree and connected with Wohlsen at a career fair. The fi rm’s recruiter, now Herr’s boss, told him about the ABC apprenticeship program and National Craft Championships.

“He said every year they get close, but hadn’t somebody win it. I said, ‘I’ll take you there.’ Lo and behold, I ended up winning the local competition and he came to watch the whole thing.”

Herr was nervous about everything that would have to be accomplished in just six hours at the national competition in San Antonio, so he committed himself to studying and gathering as much information as possible from the ABC Keystone Chapter. He also got in touch with a previous competitor to pick his brain about what to expect and whether he should spend time worrying about small mistakes. The guidance he received came in handy when the person next to him during the competition hung his drywall differently, causing Herr to re-check the print and question his decision. In the end, he forged ahead with his original plan and came out on top.

The importance of the advice and support he received was not lost on Herr, who decided to mentor the chapter’s next round of competitors in the National Craft Championships. “During the plane ride home from San Antonio, it hit me that everything I learned in that short period has helped me on the job,” he says. “Knowing the great experience I’ve had, it would be selfish not to help others."

Dave Sload, director of education for the ABC Keystone Chapter, is impressed with his apprentices’ willingness to stay involved in the training process. Three of his current instructors are previous medal winners, and he suspects Herr may teach some day too. “These young kids are just getting started in their careers. The competition improves their chances of succeeding, and now we’re seeing the giveback with them either teaching classes or mentoring future competitors. Talk about building an industry,” he says.

In terms of what he’ll share with competitors like Woodcraft, Herr emphasizes the role education and coursework play in positioning apprentices to say, “I know how to do that” instead of “I can’t.”

“If you’re going to do something, be the best,” he says. “ABC gave me the opportunity to be the best at something and I proved it. I can literally say carpentry has taken me places.”

Joanna Masterson is assistant editor of Construction Executive.

Note: This is the first in a series of articles on ABC’s National Craft Championships. Look for coverage of San Diego competitors next month.
Q: What is your company doing to help close the skilled trades gap?

SHON SMITH
PREFABRICATION MANAGER
ACI Mechanical
Ames, Iowa
Prefabrication is the next wave of construction; we’ve seen it in housing, commercial buildings and even high-rise towers. Developing an effective prefabrication model in our company has helped alleviate the problems we’ve faced with a shrinking workforce. Building assemblies of duct, pumps or coil stations in our shop has empowered our smaller installation crews to construct buildings on time and with less field support.

Technology is another way to do more with less. What used to take several people and quite a bit of time to coordinate now can be done with a fraction of the people. Tablets, smartphones and CAD-programmed layout tools can shorten the time from design to installation. Utilizing cloud-based project management software has helped us get more accurate information to our installation departments before they need it.

Finally, keeping our employees in a continuing education program has gone a long way to retaining our workforce and ensuring our projects are finished accurately and under budget.

RONNIE NEUMANN
PRESIDENT
Alloy Construction Service, Inc.
Midland, Mich.
High school students are increasingly being told they are not going to measure up if they don’t pursue post-secondary education. To most educators and legislators, that means college. But many students struggle with “book learning” and are going to fall by the wayside if not given other options.

I have participated in countless job fairs through the years and found them to be ineffective in giving students realistic exposure to construction career paths and earning potential.

The Greater Michigan Construction Academy JumpStart Program is unique in that the students visit actual shops and job sites and observe or participate in hands-on activities. They have an opportunity to get more up close and personal with workers from a variety of trades who help them make the connection between what they’re learning in school and their future success in construction. It’s a real eye-opening experience that offers hope for students who might not see a bright future for themselves.

CLAY KUBICEK
EDUCATION DIRECTOR
Crossland Construction
Columbus, Kan.
We have been working to get high schools and post-secondary programs to offer nationally recognized credentials to their students. We sponsor a number of school construction programs in three states and use credentialing as an NCCER Accredited Training Sponsor and Assessment Center.

Kansas helped move the importance of career and technical credentialing for high school students to a new level with S.B. 155, which Gov. Sam Brownback signed into law last year. The new law gives each school district a $1,000 incentive for every high school student who graduates with an industry-recognized credential in a “high-need” occupation.

With an industry-recognized credential, graduates have a documented, marketable skill to enter the workforce. Colleges benefit from more students, the school districts benefit from the incentive and the economy benefits from a stronger skilled workforce. Everybody wins.
Contractors are accustomed to following very detailed construction plans, but sometimes lack the same detail in business plans. One area that often is overlooked is leadership development. But as the following companies attest, a structured plan is essential for creating future leaders.
"What I find in the construction industry is a lot of businesses promote people into a leadership position because they are really good at doing their jobs. What happens is they are good at their job but not at leading, which involves helping and teaching others to do their jobs."

—Randy Goruk, Founder, LeadersEdge360.com

Often faced with a gap in workers’ field skills versus leadership skills, Houston-based KBR created an in-house Leadership Academy to bring out the best in promising employees.

“What we’ve done as an industry is identify someone who is good with tools and move them into a supervisor position, and in the first year they wander around struggling with the leadership skills,” says Matt Clark, senior manager of workforce development for KBR. “We identify those people and give them the tools in advance to help them be more confident.”

Nearly five years ago, KBR realized the looming workforce shortage and the increasing size and amount of industrial projects along the Gulf Coast would require more supervisory employees. With projects that call for 15,000 total employees and a necessary ratio of eight craft employees to one supervisor, KBR needed to step up its training initiatives.

“A lot of people cut back on training during the downturn,” Clark says. “But we knew the pendulum was going to swing back and we accelerated our training.”

KBR looked at training employees as an investment, not a cost, and as a necessity to being successful in a very competitive environment.

“If we make that investment, our employees will execute projects at the highest level,” Clark says. “Our employees do the work safer and faster; it’s our competitive edge and our differentiator.”

Working on industrial projects along the Gulf Coast is not only competitive from a project perspective, but also in regard to employee retention. Employees typically look at how much money they will make and the per diem—as well as project type, location and length—when deciding what company to work for. KBR must manage all of those aspects to remain competitive.

“We share resources in our industry. A supervisor for KBR might move on to a competitor next year, and we hire from our competitors,” Clark says. Because employees sometimes have a history with many companies, training is even more important.

“If we don’t indoctrinate them with KBR expectations right off the bat, they will do what they did at the last company, which may be at a different standard,” Clark says. “So we orient them to the company as soon as they walk on a project.”

Holly Thomas, a pipe welder with Houston-based KBR.
A PLAN THAT PAYS OFF

KBR first identifies employees at all levels of the company who could be future leaders and designates them as “high potentials.”

“They usually are good communicators. They don’t necessarily yield positional power but demonstrate personal power. They are the ones people go to for advice,” Clark says.

Ten percent of the workforce is identified as high potential and is in development at all times. KBR gives these employees stickers and patches to put on their gear as recognition, and hopefully to inspire other employees to show leadership potential as well.

KBR determines high potentials through observation and communications with leadership. It looks for employees who are punctual, have a strong work ethic, communicate well, know multiple crafts and exhibit a commitment to workforce development.

High-potential journeymen go through a 16-hour course on crew leadership and must be NCCER certified. Then they begin front-line leadership training that combines NCCER’s project supervision course and KBR’s curriculum.

KBR always has a queue of employees in this stage of training who are used as temporary supervisors. It holds work shutdowns and turn-arounds (when a project is shut down and hundreds of outside workers are brought in to meet an expressed schedule for an accelerated project), during which the temporary supervisors are put in charge and monitored by KBR leadership.

Once employees become front-line supervisors, they begin training for higher levels of responsibility, including project management, planning and scheduling, cost control and negotiations. The employees then begin KBR University, an in-house program that teaches project managers client-focused communication and negotiation techniques.

The entire process takes about 10 years, but varies by employee. Though time consuming, KBR found that adults learn best by applying what they learn, so it breaks down the training into modules followed by practicing the material in the field. To determine whether an employee is ready to move onto the next step, supervisors evaluate the worker’s productivity rate using tools developed by KBR.

The KBR Leadership Academy trains high-potential employees to take on additional responsibilities—from becoming a front-line supervisor to scheduling projects and negotiating with clients.
Investing in employees is part of the culture at Ruppert Landscape, Laytonsville, Md. From providing internship programs and encouraging employees to attend seminars to participating in community outreach and showing staff appreciation with structured initiatives, Ruppert Landscape gives employees the tools for success.

“When we hire, we strive to hire for life,” says Amy Snyder, director of public relations for Ruppert Landscape. “We do a lot to appreciate and celebrate employees and their accomplishments because we want our employees to be here for the long term and to be content.”

Each year, Ruppert Landscape holds a Management Development Day for all 300 managers from its 15 branches. Attendees network with each other, discuss current projects and compare tactics used throughout the company. They receive an overview of Ruppert Landscape’s five-year strategic plan as well as an in-depth financial report, and they attend seminars on management and leadership topics. The event also features a keynote speaker with leadership expertise. This year’s speaker was Sergeant Matt Eversmann (retired), whose heroism was immortalized in the film Black Hawk Down.

“You have to invest in your people; they are your most valuable resource. Companies often don’t do a good job investing in people until it is too late, and people become disengaged because they don’t see that there’s a future for them. Helping people have a good vision for their future and professional development results in much more engaged employees.”

—Randy Goruk, LeadersEdge360.com

“The interaction among employees is fantastic,” Snyder says. “It’s the one day of the year that people who have worked together in different branches in different states get to interact, and our team really looks forward to that.”

Ruppert Landscape also helps employees develop new skills by covering seminar expenses. Employees have attended executive leadership training at Harvard Business School, Dale Carnegie courses on leadership and management, and seminars on public speaking and desktop publishing.

“A manager may realize an employee would benefit from a seminar, or an...
employee might go to their manager and say ‘hey, there’s a seminar I would love to take,'” Snyder says. “It’s based on aptitude and whether the employee’s manager thinks they can take on more responsibility.”

Ruppert Landscape also assigns mentors to employees on an as-needed basis. This tactic is being used to enhance the skills of the next generation of Ruppert family members and help them develop a broader perspective of the company.

“The company has enough business savvy not to just assume those people will be the next top leaders,” Snyder says. “The mentoring approach makes sure they are a good fit for the company, just like any other employee, and makes sure they are prepared with the necessary skills.”

Additionally, Ruppert Landscape occasionally takes its top management team to tour different companies so they can see how processes such as research, development and hiring are done elsewhere. Over the years, they have visited dozens of companies such as District Photo, Under Armour and even a dairy farm.

“We want people to keep their antennas up to see what other companies do to set themselves apart,” Snyder says. “It opens people’s minds to other possibilities. When you see businesses that are totally unrelated to what you do, you get more value on a strategic level versus a practical level.”

Ruppert Landscape encourages employees to be directly involved with charitable giving. Five percent of the company’s profits are allocated to charities, with 3 percent directed by corporate and 2 percent going to organizations selected by branch employees.

“It feels good to know the profit your company makes goes to a cause you support,” Snyder says. “In many ways, it makes employees proud of where they work and more committed to the company.”

Ruppert Landscape also works hard to find new talent through its internship program. It recruits up to 15 interns per year from colleges throughout the country who major in subjects such as landscape management, landscape construction, construction management and business.

“We look for someone who is willing to get out of their comfort zone, works well with others and has the ability to overcome challenges and keep growing,” Snyder says.

The company matches interns with employees related to their majors, as well as employees who can provide an overall perspective of the company so they get a well-rounded experience. For interns who prove to be a good fit, employment is offered after graduation. Approximately 50 percent of interns accept full-time positions.

Jessica Porter is staff writer of Construction Executive. For more information, email porter@abc.org, visit www.constructionexec.org or follow @ConstructionMag.
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Developing Future Leaders

BY JESSICA PORTER

PROGRAMS GEARED TOWARD YOUNG PROFESSIONALS BRING VALUE TO EMPLOYEES, CONSTRUCTION COMPANIES AND ABC CHAPTERS

Graduates of the ABC Georgia Chapter's Future Leaders Program.
As the economy rebounds, construction firms expect to see many employees set retirement plans in motion. Couple that with fewer people turning to construction careers due to the industry’s above-average unemployment rate over the past few years, and what’s left amounts to a skilled craft professional shortage of two million workers expected by 2014. Recognizing this looming need, AEC companies and industry groups such as Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) are taking steps to develop the next generation of construction leaders.

CHARTING A NEW COURSE
The ABC Georgia Chapter created the Future Leaders Program in 2003 to help members develop up-and-coming talent. The annual course is open to anyone in the construction industry—from project managers and estimators to sales representatives and attorneys—with two-and-a-half-hour classes that meet once a month from January to September. All students must be referred by their employers or a past graduate, which presents an opportunity for companies to reward their most promising employees.

Julie Ham has been in construction for 13 years, beginning as a receptionist at age 18 and eventually being promoted to sales five years ago in the Atlanta office of White Cap Construction Supply. “My job is so much fun. I get to meet new people every day,” Ham says. “There’s always a new challenge and I never know what the challenge will be. It’s never boring.” Ham went through the Future Leaders Program last year after being nominated by her boss. “I was happy that he saw enough value in me to put me through the program knowing it was for leadership,” she says.

Students spend one afternoon per month developing their own leadership skills, networking with others in the industry and learning from their peers. In addition to benefiting young professionals and their employers, these efforts help ABC identify potential association leaders. “There are always a few students each year that catch your eye as emerging leaders,” says Pat Dunwoody, vice president of education for the ABC Georgia Chapter. “Some become committee members, chairmen and Board of Directors members.”

Dunwoody is an integral part of making the class a success and ensuring it continually improves. To provide the most value to students, she begins each year with a questionnaire on participants’ strengths, weaknesses and what they hope to gain from the class. At the end of the course, students fill out an evaluation to describe the topics they enjoyed the most and what they actually apply at work.

Dunwoody kicks off every class by sharing recent ABC news with students. She then hands the class over to a professional speaker to discuss different aspects of leadership. After the presentation, students work in small groups to find solutions to scenarios they could encounter at work.

One of the most popular sessions is on whole-brain thinking, which teaches students how to understand other people’s communication styles; other favorites cover team building and reading financial statements. This year, Dunwoody introduced a class on aspects of construction students may not learn in school, as well as classes on time management and goal setting. But perhaps the most valuable session is on public speaking. “Being in sales, I don’t have a problem talking to people at all,” Ham says. “But when I went to the class, I learned so many things I didn’t know I was doing wrong, like body language and eye contact.”

The sessions teach students skills that not only enhance their résumés, but also help them see the big picture in construction. “The interaction with their peers helps them see beyond their particular niche or job function,” Dunwoody says. “They are seeing the whole industry from different perspectives.”

After students complete the Future Leaders Program, they receive certificates and are recognized at the chapter’s annual membership meeting. Top students also form a group to plan for the following year, and all graduates become ambassadors for the program.
DEVELOPING FUTURE LEADERS

“As an ambassador, I tell the students: ‘You were nominated for this class for a reason. Someone thinks you deserve a step up into a leadership role,’” Ham says. She also promotes the class at ABC events.

This is an important initiative for a city like Atlanta, which draws so many young residents. “We’re going to have a lot of people retiring soon,” Dunwoody says, “so it’s important to bring a young person’s perspective to ABC and member companies.”

ABC helped Ham break into the industry when she moved to the Atlanta area more than two years ago, and chapter events continue to be a great way to meet new people.

“ABC members like to do business with ABC members. I put the logo on my business card and most people will try to do business with me,” Ham says. “I want to show people that if they get involved with ABC, they will meet new people and go further.”

Ham hopes to move into a leadership role at White Cap Construction Supply, and thinks the class will help her get there. “I heard several people’s theories on leadership, and everyone’s was different,” she says. “If I learn one way, it may not take me where I need to go.”

The program has earned so much recognition in the past decade that it’s not hard for Dunwoody to convince companies to participate. Each year, a few new companies send an employee, and many companies regularly send one to three employees.

TARGETED NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

While discussing ways it could offer more member value, the ABC New Hampshire/Vermont Chapter realized one of the top challenges facing many construction companies was succession planning.

“It became apparent that it was the rule, not the exception, that firms were in some kind of succession stage,” says ABC New Hampshire/Vermont Chapter President Mark Holden. “We’re looking at an industry that’s being turned over to a whole new generation of people all at once. If we’re going to be relevant to this new generation of leaders, we better meet their needs.”

With a new goal in mind, the chapter and its younger members began making a plan to bring the future and current industry leaders together. After identifying about five individuals with the necessary leadership skills, the chapter created the Young Professionals Group (YPG).

“The best part of ABC is networking,” says Carlton Cooper, YPG chairman and director of marketing and business development for EnviroVantage, Epping, N.H. “It gives me a much broader look at what’s going on in the industry and my region than I would have had before joining.”

“Before YPG, I felt like the kid in the shadows at chapter events,” Cooper says. “All the powerful leaders of companies attend and that can be difficult to break into.”

Now about a year old, the roughly 40-member YPG holds monthly social
events, including attending University of New Hampshire hockey games, going wine tasting, taking brewery tours, tailgating at football games and hosting billiards nights. The group also is forming educational sessions and speaking engagements on topics such as professional development and social media.

YPG members typically include people in mid- to upper-management, such as estimators, superintendents and project managers. The group is working on developing a database of potential companies to contact to grow its membership. Members also created a website and a Facebook page with events and photos, which have become their main communication platforms.

There’s no membership fee, just the cost of attending events, which usually runs around $10 each. Because membership is free, Cooper is exploring other ways to raise enough money to pay for events through corporate sponsors and donations.

Today, YPG is virtually a separate entity from the ABC New Hampshire/Vermont Chapter. Though the chapter helped the group get on its feet by attending YPG board meetings, setting up bank accounts and helping organize events, it is completely financially independent. However, the chapter does help the group recruit members during meetings and even via Facebook campaigns to “like” each organization.

Despite only being around for a year, YPG already has taught the chapter a lesson: the group excels at welcoming new members by captiating them, learning who they are and what they do, and helping them get more involved, which is something Holden’s staff finds more challenging.

He hopes ABC members recognize the value of YPG and pinpoint young professionals in their companies to participate. “The group enhances the development of their professional careers and allows them to establish relationships with people in the same industry and place in their career,” Holden says. “We want members to develop pride not just in what they do every day, but in the big picture.”

Being affiliated with YPG also benefits the chapter, which uses the group as a recruitment tool and brings prospective ABC members to YPG events and meetings. “You have to look at who ABC is going to consist of in 10 to 15 years, and you better be relevant to them,” Holden says. “What we’re doing is helping develop the next generation of ABC. As we do that, they will define what ABC is and how ABC functions.”

Cooper expects YPG to grow steadily and potentially become a national organization. He wants the group to be used as a tool to get more young people interested in construction and to encourage different generations of employees to work together.

“There are so many changes with taxes and regulations that you see young people dwindling in the industry,” he says. “Whatever we can do to reverse that trend is most important.”

So far, the group is on track for growth. Five young professionals were at the chapter’s annual dinner in January 2012; less than a year later, 30 young professionals attended.

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hen John Pelnar’s college plans didn’t go as expected, he joined the construction industry as a sheet metal laborer. Always wanting to learn more and challenge himself, Pelnar decided an apprenticeship program would be the best way to further his construction career. He accepted a job with Schaus Roofing & Mechanical Contractors, Manitowoc, Wis., and started working toward his first goal of becoming a journeyman.
Pelnar earned straight As throughout the five-year apprenticeship program, and his success led him to the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) Wisconsin Chapter’s Apprentice Skill Competition in January 2012.

“I was extremely nervous going into it,” Pelnar says. “I felt confident enough that I deserved to be there, but not knowing what I was up against was nerve-racking.”

Accustomed to working alone, Pelnar quickly had to adjust to being in front of an audience and being judged on his HVAC knowledge, such as completing a diagram with exact specifications and making perfect joints.

“When they rang the buzzer at the end, I was thinking ‘I don’t ever want to do this again,’” Pelnar recalls. “When they called my name during the awards ceremony, I was happy I won, but I realized ‘oh no, now I have to do this again.’”

With one gold medal around his neck and the 2012 ABC National Craft Championships just three months away, Pelnar began studying HVAC techniques and tools that he wasn’t accustomed to using. He studied for the written exam at home and practiced for the hands-on portion of the competition on the job.

Pelnar’s hard work paid off when he earned the silver medal in the HVAC competition during the National Craft Championships last spring. He credits his success to knowledge shared by coworkers.
and his teacher, as well as his own passion and natural ability.

“I study well and absorb things I read well,” Pelnar says. “And I love doing the electrical part of it. I just have a knack for it.”

He also exhibits efficiency and independence on the job. With Schaus Roofing & Mechanical Contractors, Pelnar primarily performs control and refrigeration work on retrofit projects. But he learned early on that if he became well-rounded in his skills, he wouldn’t need to bring an extra person along for service calls.

“I’m one of three people out of about 20 in my department who can do more than just sheet metal,” Pelnar says. “That knowledge really helps me.”

Schaus Roofing & Mechanical Contractors recognized Pelnar’s talent, and promoted him to foreman after he completed his apprenticeship program.

“Going from apprentice to foreman was a big move,” Pelnar says. “Down the road it can only get better.”

Pelnar plans to continue his education and begin working toward earning an associate degree in his trade. One day, he hopes to start his own business. He is thankful he pursued a career in construction because he says there always will be a need for skilled craft workers.

“I’m very happy with what I did. The things I know even help me as a homeowner because I don’t have to rely on someone to fix my stuff,” Pelnar says. “The work is physical, but it’s rewarding. I like what I do and there are not a lot of people who can say that.”

**ELECTRICAL SWITCH**

After determining early on that a career in carpentry would lead to a lot of wear and tear on his body, Ryan Sawyer switched to the electrical field. On a friend’s recommendation, Sawyer went to work for KSK Electric, Inc., Tempe, Ariz., where he began excelling at the trade.

KSK Electric offered to pay for Sawyer to begin an apprenticeship program, which led him to compete in the Arizona Builders Alliance’s (ABA) Craft Championships in March 2012. He took first place—a success he credits to his job experiences.

“I’ve been put in mini-leadership roles throughout my career, so I’ve been exposed to a lot of things that helped me compete,” Sawyer says. “I also had been exposed to some of the paperwork side of the business and to the math element.”

The ABA competition included written and hands-on tests on wiring in residential and commercial construction projects. After taking the gold medal, Sawyer went on to compete in the Arizona Skills USA Championships, which solely tested his motor control ability. The competition reinforced his passion for motor control work, and he now does PLC controls and instrumentation wiring for KSK Electric, hoping to eventually become a programmer.

Sawyer also is training for ABC’s 2013 National Craft Championships, which will be held April 30–May 3 in Birmingham, Ala., by focusing on perfecting his general wiring skills for commercial and industrial projects.

Competing helps Sawyer broaden his views of the electrical industry. “The exposure to other contractors is huge. I’ve met a lot of contractors and learned what their expectations are for their employees,” Sawyer says. “The best thing is meeting people in the industry and learning how they work in other states.”

Now that he has graduated from his apprenticeship program, successfully navigated two state competitions and begun preparing for the National Craft Championships in April, Sawyer believes the electrical trade is the best fit for him.

“It’s good work and work that is always in demand,” Sawyer says. “If you’re skilled, the money is endless, but you have to go to school to learn the trade and continue learning. I learn something new every day.”

Jessica Porter is staff writer of Construction Executive. For more information, email porter@abc.org, visit www.constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.

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**2013 ABC NATIONAL CRAFT CHAMPIONSHIPS**

**Who:** Craft apprentices from ABC chapter, member firm and chapter-approved training programs across the country.

**What:** Written exam and practical performance test in a variety of trades, including carpentry (residential/commercial), electrical (residential/commercial and commercial/industrial), fire sprinkler, HVAC, instrumentation fitting, insulation, millwright/industrial maintenance mechanic, pipefitting, plumbing, sheet metal and welding (pipe and structural). Top finishers receive medals and cash prizes.

**Where:** 21st Century Workforce Development Conference, Birmingham Jefferson Convention Center, Birmingham, Ala.

**Why:** To foster growth and excellence in training the future construction workforce, as well as showcase the talents of open shop apprentices to the industry, public and media.

**When:** April 30–May 3
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Electricians Seize Opportunities in the Classroom and at Craft Competitions

BY JOANNA MASTERSON

Like many craft professionals, a combination of perseverance and an ability to roll with the punches helped Mark Pusateri find his way into the construction industry. As the son of a building inspector for Elk Grove Village, Ill., who did electrical work on the side, Pusateri started learning “on the job” at an early age. Right out of high school, he was hired by a union contractor in Chicago and thought he was on the path to apprenticeship. But two days before class was supposed to start, Pusateri got a call that the school was closing down and he was out of a job.

In need of a paycheck, he joined a printing company where he proceeded to do electrical work for a few years. Last March, through a connection at Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) Illinois Chapter, Pusateri landed a position as service manager with Scott Nelson Electric, Mundelein, Ill.

“My main responsibility is handling service calls,” Pusateri says. “We’re swamped with work right now—mostly residential jobs, such as basement remodels and home additions.”

Amid a busy work and apprenticeship school schedule, Pusateri carved out time to pursue the ABC Illinois Craft Olympics. The annual event, held last November in DeKalb, Ill., featured more than 50 electrical apprenticeship students in a hands-on competition to win an IDEAL tool set and move on to the ABC National Craft Championships.

Initially, Pusateri only tested well enough on the entrance exam to serve as an alternate in the hands-on competition. But when one of the top four competitors failed to show up on time, he seized the chance to participate.

“Mark really wanted to compete. He kept saying he was ready,” says Steve Foltin, vice president of education and safety at the ABC Illinois Chapter. “I love his competitiveness; he shows the same ambition in class.”

Although Pusateri started about 40 minutes after everybody else, he was only four or five terminations away from finishing when time ran out. “I figured I couldn’t win, so I may as well take my time,” he says. “Then it turned out I actually won.”

Pusateri hopes to adopt the same relaxed attitude at the ABC National Craft Championships, which will take place April 30–May 3 during the 21st Century Workforce Development Conference in Birmingham, Ala. Undoubtedly, the national competition is a much bigger affair—featuring more than 150 elite apprentices from all over the country representing 11 different crafts, including residential/commercial electrical.

In addition to completing the necessary bookwork, Pusateri says his everyday job is the best training he can do leading up to the National Craft Championships.

“I usually work alone, or with a first-year apprentice, so I often have to figure...
National Craft Championships from the ABC Chesapeake Shores Chapter. “Tim was a great competitor because he’s always focused on the task at hand and is extremely level-headed and steady,” says Angelica Faulkner, the chapter’s education director. “I noticed the majority of competitors seemed rushed or even panicked, but not Tim; he was as cool as a cucumber. He was well-prepared and familiar with all his tools, and paid attention to the instructions given.”

Looking back, Reedy is glad he put the time into preparing and competing because it got him out of his comfort zone. “I met a lot of different people and got to do something I don’t normally do every day at work,” he says.

Simultaneously, the experience gave him more confidence in his skills, as well as opened up a new teaching opportunity at the ABC Chesapeake Shores Chapter. When the second year electrical instructor resigned, chapter staff immediately recommended Reedy.

“I hadn’t really pictured myself teaching, but I’m always willing to try something outside my day-to-day work,” Reedy says.

Not knowing what to expect when he stepped into the classroom for the first time a couple months ago, he was relieved to find a great group of about 12 students. Likewise, the students already have reported how beneficial it is to learn from a young professional who can answer questions about everyday work situations.

“I try to bring stuff into class so it’s not all out of the book. Hands-on activities are the best way to learn,” Reedy says. “I would like to continue teaching as long as I’m able.”

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The recession brought about a lot of change in the construction industry. In addition to a shift toward a more conservative way of doing business, many skilled craft professionals found themselves with a need to change their skill sets. Take Chad Bass and Brandon Hartford for example. Both were skilled craft professionals working for companies that couldn't stay afloat in the recession. Facing unemployment, they took matters into their own hands, broadening their skills to find success in other construction trades.

Bass and Hartford eventually found themselves with an opportunity to compete in Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) National Craft Championships, an intense two-day event where craft trainees from ABC chapter and member firm training programs across the country compete in one of 13 competitions representing 11 crafts.

THE VALUE IN HARD WORK

At age 21, Bass faced a decision familiar to many young people: Go to school or go to work. He opted to join the construction industry and began learning various trades. He quickly realized going on to higher education wasn’t his only option, and construction presented an opportunity for a successful career.

“When you choose a career, go to school or learn a trade, you need to do it with all you’ve got. You need to focus on it, make goals for yourself and reach those goals,” Bass says. “You don’t have to go to school to make it.”

He started his own window insulation business, which eventually closed under the weight of the recession. Unemployment didn’t suit Bass, an exceptionally hard worker who is mechanically inclined, so he began working as an apprentice pipefitter for San Antonio-based Zachry Industrial, Inc.

“Pipefitting is the best line of work I’ve ever done. It pays very well and there’s a lot of work available,” Bass says. “The field is so broad and I can work in a lot of different areas.”

Bass’ peers at Zachry quickly discovered his talent and knew he would be an excellent fit for the National Craft Championships. To prepare, a jobsite foreman with expertise in pipefitting began holding classes two nights a week for eight weeks. Bass learned as much as he could from the foreman, reading books and practicing his test-taking skills. He also began building jigs similar to what he would encounter at the competition.

Once he arrived at the National Craft Championships in San Antonio last April, Bass realized exactly what he was in for.

“It’s a much bigger event than I thought it was going to be,” Bass says. “I was nervous because there are cameras and people making videos and they set you up in the middle of the civic center for everybody to watch.”

However, once he became more comfortable, he was able to show off the skills he had worked so hard to perfect. He suggests this year’s competitors do the same when they step into the convention center in Birmingham, Ala.

“Take your time, be confident and focus on what you’re doing,” Bass says. “You’re there because someone thought you could do...
it. You already proved you have the skills and deserve to be there.”

Though he did not place in the National Craft Championships, Bass expects to reap the benefits of competing throughout his career. He also continues to work hard to prove that Zachry’s high expectations for him were spot on.

“The competition will be in my mind all the time,” Bass says. “It makes me push myself harder to do something that most guys can’t do.”

UNEXPECTED SUCCESS

Hartford was a carpenter in the residential construction industry for many years before being laid off due to the economy. Unsure of where to go next, Hartford contacted a friend at Cianbro Corporation, Pittsfield, Maine, who helped him land an interview with the company. During the interview, Hartford discussed how his carpentry skills and work ethic could be transferred to another trade, so Cianbro offered him a pipefitting job last April.

“I prefer working in a nonresidential environment,” Hartford says. “Some of the boilers I worked on are 10 to 14 stories high. I like the scale of it.”

Though Hartford was aware of the ABC Maine Chapter’s Annual Craft Championships, he initially did not want to compete. However, his training instructor saw promise in him and continued to push him in that direction. It wasn’t until the day before the competition that Hartford decided to drive from his hometown of Bangor, Maine, to the competition in Augusta, Maine. His training instructor’s persistence paid off, because Hartford won first place in the pipefitting competition.

“You could have knocked me over with a feather when I heard I won,” Hartford says. “I’m really looking forward to competing in Birmingham; it looks like it’s going to be a lot of fun. I get a chance
to show what I can do as a pipefitter and to show that Cianbro’s great training program can make someone this knowledgeable in less than a year.”

To prepare for the National Craft Championships, Hartford will continue attending pipefitting classes with Cianbro. Then he will complete a week of one-on-one training with an instructor to prepare for the hands-on portion of the competition.

While slightly nervous about heading to Birmingham, Hartford is confident in the training he will receive and is looking forward to showing off his skills on the national stage.

“With winning the Maine competition, I’ve got a little button on my chest that states, ‘I’m at the top of my class,’” Hartford says. “I’m excited about just being in the national competition. I’ve heard nothing but good things and I look forward to it all.”

Hartford expects the honor he already has received from the Maine Chapter—and the fact that he made it to the national competition—to help him on his journey as a pipefitter, as well as to prove that he can handle more work with Cianbro.

“It feels really good to have won,” Hartford says. “I’m hoping for good things to come about.”

Jessica Porter is staff writer of Construction Executive. For more information, email porter@abc.org, visit www.constructionexec.com or follow @ConstructionMag.
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abc.org/aqc
With the anticipated 1 million to 1.5 million skilled worker shortage expected by 2014, offering workforce development programs to current and future craft professionals is more important than ever. Despite the construction industry’s rank near the top of the unemployment list—at 11.4 percent—it lost many skilled workers during the downturn and will see more retire during the rebound.

Many companies and organizations recognize the need for more skilled workers and are stepping up to the plate. Some of the largest and most well-known initiatives include GoBuild and the NCCER’s Build Your Future campaign, both of which focus on awareness, promotion and job placement in the construction industry. Dig a little deeper, and it’s clear many local programs are working toward the same goal.

**MAKING AN IMPACT THROUGH MENTORING**

The ACE Mentor Program is a nationwide effort to introduce high school students to architecture, construction and engineering. With affiliates in 35 states and Washington, D.C., the ACE Mentor Program is far reaching, with 8,000 students going through the program each year.

Reid Miller became head mentor of the ACE Mentor Program of Raleigh/Durham, Inc. in 2007. He later took on the role of affiliate executive director, which entails mentoring and fundraising in addition to maintaining his responsibilities as chief cost planner for Lend Lease, Inc., Charlotte, N.C.
"I had mentors in my life and people who taught me how to do things. Now it’s my turn to give back," Miller says.

During his time with the ACE Mentor Program, Miller has expanded the program to three locations in the community,
each with eight mentors. He went from being unable to schedule a meeting with any high school representatives to having working relationships with all the career development professionals in local schools, allowing ACE to reach more students.

“Fewer and fewer people are finding these fields as ones they want to go into, so it’s good to give kids exposure about what they can expect,” Miller says. “It’s really important for the construction industry to share what we know and get people interested. This gives us a way to get the best and the brightest involved in construction.”

The program includes a two-hour session every other week for 14 weeks. About 60 students participate in each program, during which they work on a project chosen by mentors who represent many facets of construction. Projects involve working with subcontractors, developers, engineers and architects to paint the most realistic picture of what constructing a building truly entails.

This year, students designed a senior living community center that incorporated sustainable elements, such as a green roof and a garden. Though the community center is only conceptual, the location is real, which provides an opportunity to learn about the intricacies of prepping an existing site for construction.

Last year, the project involved building a complex shopping center with stores and a movie theater. Jose Torres, project manager for RMF Engineering, Raleigh, N.C., mentored the students about installing the building’s heating, cooling and domestic water services. He showed them how to distribute the electrical services to the site, as well as coordinate and design mechanical systems by collaborating with architects.

“It’s entertaining to explain engineering challenges because most people don’t see any obstacles in their ideas,” Torres says. “The assumptions people with more experience take for granted have to be explained.”

The program also helps Anne Seeley, mentor for two years and architectural intern with Raleigh-based Clark Nexsen, remember the essential aspects of her job that become routine over time. “It reminds me about all the interconnected components of building design and the importance of going back to all disciplines to make sure your design actually is integrated,” she says.

In addition to working with the ACE Mentor Program, Seeley is a mentor at North Carolina State University. Many students she met through ACE go on to study a construction-related field at the university, where she continues to mentor them.

ACE mentor Emmanuel Yelverton, senior project engineer with Skanska, Durham, N.C., teaches students about the construction side of building by answering any questions they have about mechanical systems and the project site.

“A lot of kids don’t get an opportunity to work in construction and may not have a chance to see what goes on, so they obviously wouldn’t choose it as a career,” Yelverton says. “I bring knowledge to the table and help them in their path.”

The ACE Mentor Program prepares kids for continuing education in a construction-related industry more thoroughly than high school classes. “They get a phenomenal understanding of the field they want to go into,” Miller says. “The kids that do it and go into design school come back and say they really knew what they were doing compared to the other kids.”

However, about 40 percent of all students who begin the program realize the industry is not a good fit. “The ones that drop out are the ones that will save the most in college because they find out it’s not for them through this program,” Miller says.

But 60 percent succeed, and some even return every year to build on their skills.

“It’s a great program and opportunity for us to introduce people to a profession that’s been around for as long as communities have been around,” Torres says.

Adds Yelverton: “It gives them an opportunity to see how engineering, architecture and construction are all related and required to build a building. It gives them insight they wouldn’t otherwise have.”

HANDS-ON TECHNOLOGY TRAINING

Associated Builders and Contractors’ (ABC) Greater Michigan Chapter has helped out with the annual Construction Technology Camp that takes place at Delta College since the event’s inception six years ago. The camp helps students ages 12 to 18 learn basic skills in wind and solar technology, automotive technology, welding, carpentry and machine tool/CAD.

“Many are younger than 18, so it’s a great opportunity to experience a skilled trade prior to determining their career direction,” says Michelle Revette, director of education for the ABC Greater Michigan Chapter. “The camp gives kids the chance to learn a skilled trade and also to have experiences they can use in a career and everyday life.”

During the week, students learn how to change oil, build structures and weld—often for the first time. Projects include building sheds to donate to Habitat for Humanity, building children’s play centers and welding lawn ornaments to donate to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, making wind turbines, and building and racing cars.
Campers also go on outings, such as this year’s field trip to the Great Lakes Safety Training Center in Midland, Mich., where they learned about safety apparatuses and how to distinguish between a safe tool and an unsafe tool. They participated in a fire extinguisher simulator, learned how to properly attach a harness and how to climb a wall, as well as what it feels like to be in a confined space—all aspects they would face on a daily basis working in the construction industry.

The campers come from Michigan’s Great Lakes Bay Region and predominately are considered at-risk, so spending time with other people their age with similar interests has added benefits.

“Spending the week with experts, mentors and kids with similar backgrounds is a great part of the week,” Revette says. “They really value the time they spend learning from each other.”

These experiences keep students coming back for more. Because they only experience one craft per camp, many come repeatedly to experience every craft possible. Some even return after they turn 18 to serve as a volunteer mentor.

Keeping the camp exciting and informative each year is the job of passionate volunteers from the ABC Greater Michigan Chapter and other sponsors and partners. They come up with ideas for the projects students work on each year, provide sponsorships and scholarships, and help the students with any questions or concerns. A small committee is charged with hiring the instructors, determining the projects, acquiring materials and enrolling students.

Their efforts are paying off. This year, 60 students attended—up from 40 students in 2011—due to heavier promotion from all sponsors, including Delta College, ABC and the Midland County Educational...
Anthony Saucier. “It falls in line with what we do in working with high schoolers and promoting construction as a career path.”

Participants include girls from six school districts throughout the greater Houston area. The three-day camp begins with a welcome session for the campers to get to know each other and a safety talk about personal protective equipment. They also compete to see who can put their gear on the quickest.

Then, campers learn about hand and power tools and begin working on their first project. This year, they built and painted flower beds that were donated to the Glenic Park Agricultural Center (where the camp was held) to grow vegetables and spices for its culinary program. Past projects include making a bookcase, toolbox and shelves, for which they did the finishing, sanding and painting. They also work on smaller electrical projects, such as mason jar lamps and marshmallow blow guns.

This year, an all-female team of scaffold builders came to speak to the girls about their trade, while other presenters covered welding and crane simulation.

“It’s a hands-on, fun learning experience for the girls to explore basic construction fields and really get to know people,” says CMEF Schools Program Director Steve Horton.

The girls also participated in various sessions. The first (“What Would You Do?”) was an exercise in determining safe and unsafe working procedures. Another addressed the human resources aspect of working by teaching them how to apply for a job, including tips on how to interview and dress professionally.

Horton also spoke with campers about education opportunities, including craft training available through the CMEF and community colleges. The CMEF also sponsors a scholarship awarded during MAGIC Camp.

On the last day of camp, families and friends were invited to a lunch to see what the girls have worked on during the past few days.

“I was a little taken aback, but thrilled to see so many family members showed up this year to listen to their children talk about what they did,” Horton says. “I really appreciated that interaction.”

By the end of the camp, Horton says the campers go from “apprehension to aggression,” meaning they assertively work on the projects and are confident in their work.

Many girls continue training after participating in the camp. Four years ago, one girl rode multiple buses and walked a mile to get to the camp from the other side of Houston. Her determination was apparent in her skills as well, and she now works in the construction industry after completing a welding program. Another camper participated in ABC’s 2011 National Craft Championships, and another camper joined the industry after attending the camp and seeing construction work as her
way to self-sufficiency after growing up in a struggling single-parent family.

CMEF puts on the annual event with the help of the ABC Greater Houston Chapter and local member contractors, including Becon Construction Co., Inc. and Brand Energy and Infrastructure Services.

In addition to encouraging young people to join the industry via MAGIC Camp, CMEF held its 2012 Construction Expo at the Pasadena Municipal Fairgrounds. This was the first time the event was held in years due to economic conditions, and it attracted nearly 250 students from more than 19 local high schools.

“It gives students the opportunity to explore the many facets of the construction industry,” Horton says. “They have a chance to speak with craft and college professionals and have one-on-one conversations about their futures.”

Students tour the expo, which consists of vendors showing concrete finishing, personal protective equipment and safety gear, insulation, painting, scaffold building, electrical wiring, carpentry, pipefitting, and crane, excavator and instrumentation simulation. Students also participated in a drywall competition and two companies created a safe site for participants to learn how to weld.

“It’s very beneficial for teachers, too, because they can get out and talk to craft professionals to see what is actually needed in local businesses and to learn about job opportunities,” Horton says. “It’s priceless for educators to get out and visit with professionals in the industry.”

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From construction professionals to financial experts, every industry has credentials or certifications that can bolster people’s careers and enhance their credibility. Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce reports nearly 60 million people, or 42 percent of the workforce, need some form of occupational certification, registration or licensure to perform their jobs. For everyone else, the value of a credential hinges largely on employers’ views in a particular field. In the construction industry, where the skilled workforce shortage is becoming more pronounced, employers recognize the importance of credentials as a way to validate their craft professionals’ training.

“The construction industry changes all the time, and training is vital for staying up to speed on new innovations,” says Boyd Worsham, vice president of construction support at The Haskell Company, Jacksonville, Fla. “As technology increases the complexity of construction techniques and equipment, more education is required to operate equipment and execute the work.”
CREDENTIALS BENEFIT EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS

Similar to employers in other industries, construction companies want to ensure the craft professionals they employ reach a standard level of competency, whether they’re located in Oregon or Maine.

“The inability of construction and manufacturing firms to find qualified skilled workers only highlights the immediate need for training that provides industry-recognized and portable credentials,” says NCCER President Don Whyte. “Certain sectors of the construction and maintenance industries now require proof of qualification for each person performing work on a site. This is prevalent on industrial construction, maintenance sites and pipeline projects.”

“Craft training also can help construction companies comply with government requirements that apply to certain projects. For example, the U.S. Department of Transportation oversees the country’s gas and hazardous liquid pipelines through its Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration. Anyone performing work on a regulated pipeline must satisfy Operator Qualification requirements that show a person can perform certain covered tasks and respond to Abnormal Operation Conditions. NCCER’s pipeline training curricula and assessments allow companies that employ pipeline workers to provide critical training while ensuring they also comply with federal regulations.

UPWARD MOBILITY

In addition to gaining industry recognition, credentials significantly increase earning potential and upward mobility. A 2007 study by the Construction Industry Institute (CII) found craftworkers who achieve the NCCER “certified plus” designation receive an average of $2 per hour more than uncertified workers in the same field. The study also found salaries for workers in formal apprenticeship programs can as much as double between the first year of training and final certification.

“Recently we discovered some companies will offer increased starting salaries if new apprentices produce credentials from the NCCER Registry,” says Thomas Cecere, an apprenticeship-related instruction specialist for the Virginia Community College System. “Our local industry, owner and contractor members require NCCER training and certification.”

Many employers give craftworkers access to training through tuition reimbursements for coursework, paid craft training programs and in-house training. To promote craft training, employers also provide incentives to their workers, such as opportunities for promotion or salary increases.

“We have people out there performing journey-level work. If they have a good attitude, a good safety record, their attendance is good and they are being productive, we want to make sure they are fairly compensated for the jobs they do,” says Mittie Cannon, director of workforce development at Robins & Morton, Birmingham, Ala.

In keeping with that philosophy, Robins & Morton instituted a wage structure that rewards its craft professionals for reaching milestones in NCCER training, such as the helper and journey stages. In addition, the company offers training to all of its craft professionals and continuously evaluates feedback from trainees to improve its programs.

Certification or formal training also can put a craftworker on the fast track to an upper management or ownership position. Scott Givens, who is now vice president and part owner of M.W. Mielke, Inc., Medina, Ohio, started his career in construction as an apprentice craftworker in 1999.

“The sky is truly the limit in construction,” Givens says. “Anyone can go from being an apprentice to being the owner of a company. I don’t know any other profession that provides that type of opportunity.”

Indeed, this path to ownership is one few industries offer. For instance, the probability of an assembly-line employee for an automaker becoming the president of the company is low, says Carole Bionda, vice president of Nova Group, Napa, Calif. “The odds of a carpenter, electrician or plumber becoming the owner of his or her own firm are far greater than in other industries.”

OPPORTUNITY AND VERSATILITY

As America recovers from the economic recession, even an entry-level job may seem evasive. But, the right credentials and training can help graduating students and job seekers make inroads into the construction industry.

“Formal training programs in conjunction with work experience are the best way to ensure advancement and satisfaction,” Worsham says. “Credentials are a very important way to demonstrate and validate your training. They document your efforts to be better at your job and the hard work you have put into being knowledgeable and trained in your craft.”

“It’s like having the right equipment in your toolbox,” says Robert Stuart, foreman electrician for Stronghold Engineering, Inc., Riverside, Calif. “NCCER credentials provide proof that you have the proper training. You can take them to any employer and show that you have fulfilled the requirements and have a well-rounded education.”

Construction sectors with the most promising short-term outlooks include power, petrochemical, green building and health care. As the big picture of industry recovery and growth continues to evolve, the credentialed craft professionals in high demand today will be the frontrunners for the hottest jobs in the market.

“Take, for instance, a biomass power generation technician,” says Jennifer Grove, workforce development coordinator for Alabama-based Gulf Power Company. “At least 80 percent of the core skills, both technical and academic, that he or she will need to do that job are exactly the same core skills that we’re teaching today; they’re just going to be applied to different technologies.” The same is true of wind and solar facilities, according to Grove.

A GOOD INVESTMENT

Industry-recognized credentials are equally valuable to employers. The CII study, which analyzed the benefits and costs of construction craft training, found employees who completed training showed an increase in productivity and a decrease in absenteeism, injuries, turnover and rework rates. The study also determined the total benefit for every dollar spent by employers on craft training for employees ranged from $1.30 to $3.

Given the statistics, it’s no surprise companies prefer to promote from within, using training and certification programs as a tool to identify their strongest employees.
CREDENTIALS BENEFIT EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS

and keep them in-house. According to the CII study, companies that train workers on a project are more likely to rehire them on subsequent projects, which can help employers significantly reduce hiring costs.

Safety training also significantly impacts the bottom line, as contractors with a lower incidence of jobsite accidents can reduce their insurance premiums and create a positive public image.

“Successful owners and contractors look at lower than average incident rates and EMR as leading indicators of contractors that work hard at building and maintaining a good safety culture,” says Chip Pocock, safety and risk manager at Buckner Companies, Graham, N.C.

The added importance construction firms place on safety means safety training is a valuable component of any craft professional’s credentials. NCCER integrated safety training into its curricula so employers can track and verify the amount of safety training acquired by any credentialed worker before hiring them. NCCER’s core curriculum covers basic construction safety topics and complies with OSHA-10 training requirements, while NCCER craft training curricula contain safety training specific to each craft.

Cannon says her company incorporates safety into every aspect of its workforce development efforts. “It’s an opportunity for repeat business because safety is something that’s attractive to clients when they’re looking at you as a potential contractor.”

Aside from the tangible benefits, many in the industry believe employers have an ethical responsibility to provide craft training to their workers.

“The greatest aspect of being involved in training and development is the opportunity to improve the lives of our employees, their families and even future generations,” says Katrina Kersch, director of workforce development for the Texas-based Marek Family of Companies. “We have a real obligation to give back to the industry and hopefully leave it in better shape for the next generation.”

Cannon agrees: “You have to be willing to make that investment in people. If you don’t have great people in your organization, the bottom line isn’t going to matter because they’re the ones that help you get there.”

In construction, it’s clear that credentials in a craft are key to future success and career satisfaction.

“In order to ensure we have the workforce needed to meet the demands of our customers, we must find a way to offer our employees a great place to work where they are valued and appreciated. Providing opportunities to earn credentials is one way to achieve that,” Kersch says.

Bryan McClure, training manager for L.P.R. Construction, Loveland, Colo., says providing craft training built a sense of trust among employees that helps the company grow while maintaining high standards.

“Being able to show credentials for their hard work and countless hours of studying has truly enabled our people to call themselves construction professionals instead of just construction workers,” he says.

As the number of construction industry employers that recognize the value of standardized training continues to grow, the career prospects for credentialed craft professionals will undoubtedly follow suit.

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