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DEVELOPING FUTURE SKILLED WORKERS



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CONTRACTORS LEAD THE WAY IN FIGHTING COVID-19 AT WORK

ALSO INSIDE:

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FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Helping you navigate through the pandemic



THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF ABC MEMBERS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES AND HUNDREDS ACROSS THE STATE OF WISCONSIN. Collectively, we cover virtually every trade and come in almost every size. This diversity has always been a strength of the organization.

How your company has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic may vary as much as the makeup of our membership. For some (mostly in other states) construction came to a complete halt. Others saw a few projects delayed and many kept working through their backlog, albeit with new procedures to keep employees safe. As we talked with our members around the state and as I talked with my colleagues around the country, everyone was experiencing the current events differently. Everyone agrees there will be a new normal; some of it negative but some of it positive.

This range of experiences created challenges for ABC of Wisconsin too. How do we best serve members in this new reality? How do we remain “essential” like the industry we serve? How does an association “associate” under social distancing requirements? From very early on we had a three-part strategy:

1. Work with state officials to ensure that construction was deemed an essential business so that you could continue to work on projects if you needed to.
2. Develop, identify and distribute best practices for keeping your employees, your clients and the public safe.
3. Provide you with the latest information on changing rules, regulations and opportunities for relief and assistance.

I am proud of the work our team has done. We have worked hard to accomplish the three objectives above. We received many messages of gratitude from members who were grateful for our work. But what matters most is that we played a small part in helping our industry navigate a difficult environment.

Perhaps our most difficult work lies ahead. We have now added a fourth point to the plan. From the halls of state government to the White House, ABC has joined with other trade organizations to advocate and plan for the “reopening” the economy as soon as and as safely as possible. The future is uncertain and there are likely troubled waters ahead. Know that we will be working hard to help you navigate them.

— John Mielke

“
EVERYONE AGREES THERE WILL BE A NEW NORMAL; SOME OF IT NEGATIVE BUT SOME OF IT POSITIVE.



PROVING ESSENTIAL

CONTRACTORS LEAD THE WAY IN FIGHTING COVID-19 AT WORK



Wellness screening areas are just one of the many new protocols put in place by contractors in response to COVID-19.

As the clock ticked closer to the April 24 expiration of one of Gov. Tony Evers' COVID-19 emergency orders, Wisconsin learned the wait for the "new normal" would be extended. But on a hopeful note, there were metrics outlined that, if met, would plot a path back into the economy. From a unique perspective, the construction industry looked on knowingly. While COVID-19 swept the country, ABC and others fought for construction to be

ruled an "essential" business to keep working in Wisconsin. In a victory for the industry, infrastructure and the people of the state, construction workers became the frontline testers for new safety protocols to both protect public health and economic progress.

It was as it should be. Construction can't really press "pause" indefinitely. Hospitals need infrastructure improved to get people well in better ways. Families need infrastructure maintained to protect drinking water, ensure electricity, and keep communication open. Businesses, schools, governments and households need infrastructure built for evolving expectations and growing needs. So, when this crisis started ripping through our nation, the industry acted fast to figure out how to achieve both safety and

continued results. Turns out you are good at solving that puzzle, because building safely is what you do every day.

Within days, on jobsites across Wisconsin, there were new safety procedures geared toward protecting workers. Employers, deeply invested in keeping their workers well and their jobsites safe, engineered and implemented wellness protocols. Many companies, swiftly adapting to new data, have not only kept early practices but added more wellness efforts. There are more hand-washing stations and tool sanitation. Portable restrooms are changed more frequently, hand sanitizer levels are checked more frequently, and jobsite door handles are disinfected more

frequently. Some contractors have chosen to tent entry points and take workers' temperatures at a distance to make sure they don't come to the job with a fever. Other contractors have workers record their own temperatures and answer a series of health questions before they come on site. Employers are more reflective than ever, asking themselves: "Am I doing all I can to protect my employees? My subs? My company's and my industry's future?"

There are social distancing rules that trigger ingenuity: workers are performing tasks on scissor lifts one at a time, people are using masks regularly, and workers are taking breaks in their vehicles instead of as a group in trailers. Others have implemented policies ending carpooling from different households, sharing tools or heavy equipment without first sanitizing the cab or steering wheel. Where

there are shortages of hand sanitizer, some companies have turned to vodka distilleries that have begun to produce the product. Though it has been considerably more costly, employers are sparing no expense to protect the trained, nimble workforce on whom they depend.

Thankfully, this crisis will not diminish the valuable talent pool that has been progressing toward fulltime work in the industry. Even in apprenticeship there have been fast adaptations made to accommodate for the "new normal" while continuing apprentices' courses of work and study. ABC has worked with apprenticeship instructors and the Wisconsin Technical College System to ensure the apprentice pipeline does not get clogged. Apprentices are following the extra safety and wellness protocols for their jobsite learning and have moved to doing their classroom portion of study online.

Plato once said, "necessity is the mother of invention." Indeed, it is necessary to both protect public health and build the public's

“EMPLOYERS ARE SPARING NO EXPENSE TO PROTECT THE TRAINED, NIMBLE WORKFORCE ON WHOM THEY DEPEND.”



Signs like these are becoming more common on jobsites.




Wash stations like this one are now common and necessary on construction jobsites.

“

SAFE AT WORK IS POSSIBLE.

infrastructure. That is why ABC and its members have invented safety and wellness procedures that prove Wisconsin does not have to choose between health safety and economic activity. You are doing both, so people get what they need (the building), and not what they don't (sick).

As Wisconsin navigates the return to "normal," the construction industry is an effective thought leader and example. You have learned a lot from your experiences. Whether your safety policies are used as best practices for manufacturers or tourism destinations, or your experiences in online apprenticeship are shared with K-12 educators and colleges, others can benefit from your understanding of what works to keep people safe. "Safe at work" is possible. There is a path out of this crisis, and ABC and its members can show people the way that's been taken so far. 



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COVID-19 CAN'T STOP APPRENTICESHIP



ABC Apprenticeship Coordinators are conducting new apprentice orientations online.

In February, the ABC Apprenticeship program was operating with nearly 1,500 apprentices and no major disruptions. Then came COVID-19, which caused an upheaval in the way the program is run.

In mid-March, things changed very quickly

over the course of a week. Apprenticeship coordinators were conducting in-person class visits before the pandemic, sitting down with apprentices individually for status reviews. At the time, the idea of shutting down or postponing the apprenticeship classes seemed like only a remote possibility; a last resort that likely wouldn't happen.

Soon after, events around the state were being canceled and the landscape was changing quickly. Within days, four-year colleges and technical colleges began to close, too. Many of our technical colleges made the decision at that point to cancel in-person class for the remainder of the semester.

"That's when we knew our apprenticeship team had to react quickly and work with our technical college partners," said Leigh Emrick, Director of Apprenticeship at ABC of Wisconsin. "We had to figure out how we would continue delivering instruction, always knowing there is a possibility this could extend past the Stay-At-Home directive in late April.

"I am happy to report that the apprenticeship team worked endlessly with the college instructors to keep the apprentices on track for completion of the school year," said Emrick.

Here is how the apprenticeship landscape changed:

- Our Apprenticeship team—while working remotely themselves—began coordinating with instructors and school staff to transition the apprentices to online classes.

- Apprentices who are used to a full eight-hour class day that consists of labs and hands-on activities are not used to online learning.

- Apprentices, employers and instructors had to adapt to their new "classroom" being in a virtual format. It has presented its challenges, as apprentices typically learn best with visual and hands-on experiences, but the instructors and technical colleges have pulled together with ABC and are offering the best alternative format for class.

- Apprentices can virtually collaborate and communicate with their instructors and classmates as they would be doing if face-to-face classrooms were still an option.


- Each instructor is doing things a bit differently, but the apprentices and their employers have been adapting well.

"How well they have adapted speaks to the resiliency of this industry," said Emrick. "I'm proud of the way they have adapted.

"The new creative solutions that come out of this pandemic might be the new norm for apprenticeship programs for the foreseeable future, but that could also come with many efficiencies for apprentices and employers," she said.

Just like contractors working on the jobsites, ABC of Wisconsin will not let the virus disrupt the continuation of the program. ABC continues to contract apprentices for next year.

"We are continuing to receive applications and several technical colleges have now implemented online placement testing," Emrick said.

This includes working with the State Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards to facilitate a virtual orientation to contract apprentices through any type of safer-at-home order. 

YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

TRIAL RUN IN CONSTRUCTION LEADS TO REWARDING CAREERS

*By Elizabeth Roddy — ABC of Wisconsin Recruitment & Training Director and
Kyle Schwarm — ABC of Wisconsin Marketing & Communications Director*



Caleb Warnke,
Ersparmer
Plumbing, at
the ABC of
Wisconsin Skill
Competition



The Youth Apprenticeship (YA) Program has only been available in construction for five years, but the success is being realized in the development of its participants. Two former youth apprentices – who have progressed into the Registered Apprenticeship (RA) program – are among the best apprentices in our state.

The two, Caleb Warnke, Erspamer Plumbing, and JP Rubenzer, Altmann Construction Co., Inc., advanced to the ABC National Craft Championships with gold medal performances and the ABC of Wisconsin Apprenticeship Skill Competition in January. The championships have been rescheduled from March to August.

Both Warnke and Rubenzer set a great example for how the industry can attract young people into great hands-on careers with a little exposure in high school. Both guys talk about the industry being a great fit for them. They just needed to take it on a trial run and be exposed to it.

“I knew I wanted to do something in the trades, and I knew, I mean, I didn’t want to go to college and then end up in huge amounts of debt,” said Warnke. “And then I was like, ‘well I might as well try this.’”

“I never really enjoyed the thought of graduating high school and going right back to a classroom for the majority of my time in college,” said Rubenzer. “I was always a hands-on learner and liked to be out and active. So, once I started the youth apprenticeship, I knew it’s what I wanted to do.”

“I think it’s more misinformation than anything and I mean, people, people just don’t know. That’s exactly what it boils down to,” said Warnke. “You’re being pushed to go to college ... but having the ability to do that my senior year and, you know, try it out for nine months to see if this is something I actually want to do. I mean, that’s valuable.”

Youth apprenticeship is a school-to-work initiative by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development designed for high school students interested in combining classroom instruction with onsite occupational experience. On-the-job training follows state approved specifications while students receive instruction from qualified teachers and skilled work-site mentors. Youth apprentices meet high school graduation requirements and get a head start on a career.

“There’s been more interest from students to work for some of these local companies,” said Rachel Fredricks, Franklin School District Community Experience Coordinator. “I think so many times that mentoring part is so important. You know they see it a lot more realistically when they get to know someone that’s in that career area.”

Fredricks believes the contractors who connect with high school programs have an advantage.

“I mean, talk about the best kind of job interview where you can actually see how a person really is right there; no commitment on either end and then they get that experience plus, you know, the contractor helps out a little bit, so it’s

a really cool experience if contractors are able to do that," Fredricks added.

There were 552 students who participated in the Architecture & Construction YA program during the 2019-20 school year, a 29% increase over the previous year. While there is a significant increase in our industry, this comprises a mere 9% of all students in 11 YA programs in the state. The number of employers participating in Architecture & Construction YA increased by less than 3% last year.

Perhaps employers need to realize how positive the experience is for many of these students, especially on the job side of it, which may be surprising to some people.

"The most positive experience I got from the program is that I was treated like a worker and not just some kid," said Rubenzer. "I was given responsibilities that were important and made me have to mature and become competent."

And there were no second thoughts about pursuing the adult registered apprenticeship program after being exposed to the crafts through the youth apprenticeship.


"I remember right after graduation I faxed my diploma into ABC because they did my apprenticeship contract signing.

They let me do it a month before," Warnke said. "So right after I graduated and got my diploma, I faxed it into ABC."

And that led to a great experience in the adult apprenticeship.

"The registered apprenticeship has been great for me," said Rubenzer. "I have been able to learn so much in it and build a career I can make a living doing and enjoying. It's so satisfying to finish a project and be proud of what you just did."

"As far as family go, there are a couple family members and, you know, just people that I talk to," said Warnke. "They're like, 'Oh, you just graduated?' 'Yeah, I'm a plumber.' 'Oh, you didn't go to college?' And now it's like, 'Oh, how's the plumbing going?' 'How much do you make an hour?' 'You are how old? You make more than me!'"

Both guys continue to grow in their careers and know that apprenticeship is not the end, but just the beginning, thanks to youth apprenticeship. "I am currently just focusing on increasing my skills, but I've thought a little of the future," Rubenzer said. "Maybe I'll try to go the job supervisor route or even project manager/estimator route." 



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TECH ED VIEWS

THE CURRENT STATE OF TECH ED IN HIGH SCHOOLS

ABC of Wisconsin reached out to several high school tech ed instructors/coordinators around the state — who are promoters of hands-on careers and innovative career programs — to gather their perspectives on the current state of technical education. The good news is that most tech ed instructors agree that the traditional parental stigma of hands-on careers is changing slightly and school boards are supportive of building up tech ed programs. However, funding for equipment and tech ed instructors is still scarce. Here are some of the highlights:



**Dan Hertel, DeForest High School
Technology Education Teacher, says ...**

The problem is that we need to sometimes go back to the basics with hands-on skills and learning and developing the 3R's: respect, responsibility and reliability.

Soft skills and work ethics are our new battlefield. Once upon a time they were taught at home and church. How do contractors advocate for more technical education in the schools? Hire our students, if they're worthy, hire college-bound students in the summers. After a year at college they might come back to you. Companies are not tapping into that redirection of reality. That's super wrong and a missed opportunity.



**Travis Ray, McFarland High School
Technology Education Teacher, says ...**

I think that the future of education may be changing right now. As a result, who knows how the hands-on classes will have to adapt? Right now, I would not be able to

tell you what our September will look like, let alone the future. Prior to the current (COVID-19) situation, I would have simply said that our tech ed department was going to continue to move forward by updating our equipment so that kids coming out of our programs will have a better understanding of what industry is currently using. That may still be our goal for the immediate future, but time will tell if we have to go a virtual direction. Getting involved in the class is important for contractors. Field trips are costly and a pain to set up — even though they are cool. If a company can come in to do a project or something with the kids, that is a lot easier to arrange. Also, understand that if a teacher does have a heavy load, it takes a lot of prep work for these hands-on projects. As much as you can help (materials, drawings, timelines, providing someone to teach for the day) the easier it is to help a teacher [strapped with many tech ed classes and little time to dedicate to on industry].



**Brian Frerk, Green Bay West High School
Technology Education Teacher, says ...**

Schools are always being required to do more with already tight budgets. Upgrading equipment to get the latest, always-changing technology is very ex-

pensive and takes years of budgeting to be able to purchase that equipment. Once the equipment is in house, it quickly becomes out of date. Keeping up is a never-ending battle. Programs within the tech ed department then have to prioritize where those dollars in the budget get spent. I think with the trend of high demand for skilled labor and increases in pay, coupled with the growing cost of going to college, more students are considering careers in the trades. School counselors are also becoming more aware as well and are helping to promote the trades as an option for students. The real concern is the critical shortage of teachers in the tech ed area.

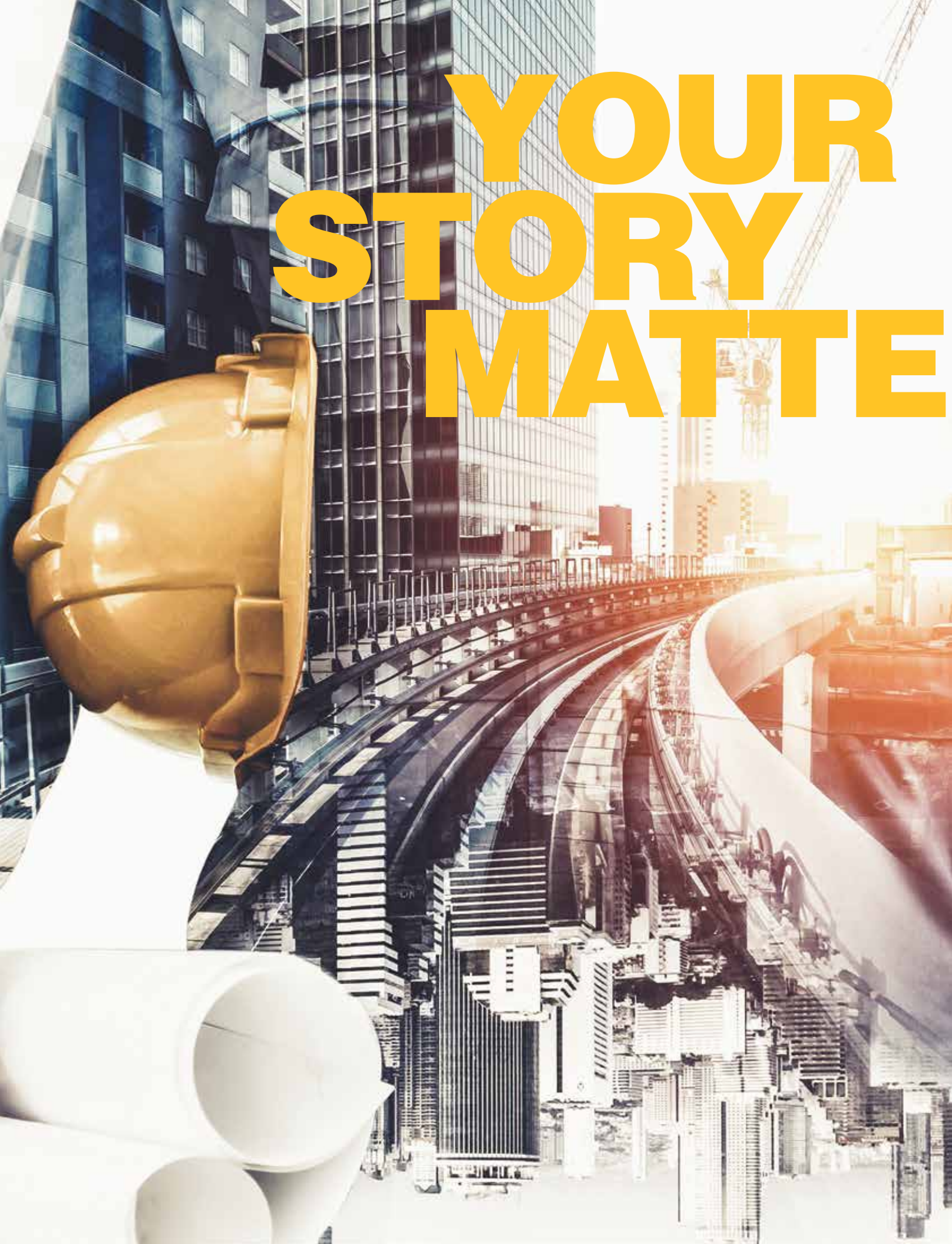


**Rachel Fredricks, Franklin School District
Community Experience Coordinator, says ...**

I would say the biggest challenge is for materials; just when it comes to like bigger machinery or updating or newer stuff. We've done a couple grants and the

district has backed a lot of that work ... I definitely think we'll always keep an eye on trying to keep up with the latest technology and things like that because that's obviously rapidly changing. We took our construction class and turned it into the amount of time that needs to be on site; basically, a half day every day they were out there; a lot of finagling with schedules and credits and getting school board approval to make it a good experience for them. Some people are totally on board and extremely supportive of it [tech ed], but still, we have a good chunk of our population that's very college focused/college bound and, that's the only option. 🇺🇸

YOUR STORY MATTE



WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT IN ATTRACTING AND RETAINING EMPLOYEES?

By Chad Kopitzke — NeXtGen Advantage

As a talent scout, I often ask employers what makes them better or different from everyone else. Why should people want to work for them? What do they offer that sets them apart?

What I've found is the companies that can't answer these questions default to competing on price, which in my world means compensation or salary. And companies that compete on price can easily lose their top talent to another employer who offers an extra

25 cents per hour—a nominal deal breaker. Then because the original company can't afford to lose that talent, they counteroffer another 25 cents per hour on top of the competitor's offer, and just like that the employer has removed 50 cents per hour from its bottom line because it does not know what it is promising to its employees.

Your differentiators matter. As an employer, you've got to know what makes you better and how to convey that message — or else you'll be at the mercy of an endless wage war, especially in the construction industry today.

Why do you do what you do? What makes your company great? Telling your story means letting talent know about your culture, values, and the type of environment you provide. This needs to happen every step of the way — through what I call the five phases of the talent lifecycle.

1. Attract
2. Recruit
3. Onboard
4. Retain
5. Exit

I believe differentiation — your story — is the red thread that holds the five phases of the talent lifecycle together. If this thread is not present within a company, these five phases will gap and drift away from each other. This creates an opportunity for higher turnover, lower productivity, disengagement, and people who are not loyal to us as leaders.

Want to avoid those pitfalls? Here's how to weave the thread tightly through all five phases.

The Attract Phase

The attract phase is the first impression of your company. It's where the message you share with the workplace community creates your employer brand — for better or for worse. What are your communication tools and methods actually saying to potential employees?

One of the ways you present your organization is through your job descriptions. Do your job descriptions attract talent or screen them out? Are you using them as an opportunity to tell your story, describing who you are, what you stand for, and what type of person you're looking for?

Most job descriptions I see are all about checking the boxes of skills and experience. What this actually tells an applicant is, "If you don't check the box, you're not welcome here." If your job descriptions are built this way, you might be missing some really good talent. I view this phase as the "window shoppers." Talent is watching you and tracking you without ever having to step foot inside your organization. Do you know what opinions they're forming of your company based on your job postings and descriptions?

The Recruit Phase

The recruit phase is where you now get the first official interaction. Recruitment engages a candidate who has either applied to your job posting or been referred to your company by a current employee. The key question here is—how long is your response time? Does that candidate hear back from you? How soon? And does your response come in a canned email that gets kicked out of your applicant tracking system, or is it a personalized message?

5 PHASES OF THE TALENT LIFECYCLE

- 1 ATTRACT
- 2 RECRUIT
- 3 ONBOARD
- 4 RETAIN
- 5 EXIT

WHAT DOES YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE SAY ABOUT YOUR COMPANY?

If the only purpose for your company brand reputation is for prospective clients, you should be re-evaluating execution of your branding. The purpose of branding should include recruitment.

A company's reputation matters more now than ever. Your reputation – or perceptions held by others -- is your brand. Think of it as your identity. It matters to job seekers and current employees.

The days of the employer holding all the cards in the recruitment process are over; at least for the best employees, regardless of how many people are unemployed as a result of the pandemic.

Think about a job you pursued at some point in your life. You may have asked yourself, "I wonder what it would be like to work there?" Today, this question is easily answered by applicants. They can check you out online. If they don't see what they like, they'll look elsewhere.

According to a study by Randstad, 86% of individuals would not apply for or continue to work at a company having a bad reputation with employees. Today, it's easy to get a glimpse of what it's like to work for your company on social media. This is why you should have a company presence.

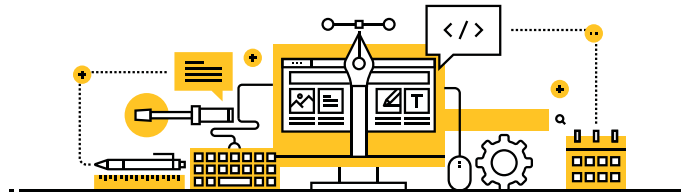
Today's workers have high expectations. While salary and benefits are important factors in the job search, they are not the only factors. More employees are leaving because of intangible benefits such as company culture, loyalty and profitability.

What does your company presence look like online? Do you have a professional website that projects an image of profitability or just getting by? Does it share images of employees

who enjoy their jobs? Better yet, does the website have a blog to document employee stories in addition to your projects? Do you have a Facebook page that shares news about your employees and your culture? Are your own employees engaged with that Facebook page? Does it congratulate employees on work milestones and personal stories?

Promoting the characteristics of your company environment and culture is key to attracting individuals who share similar values. Perhaps you can leverage employees' interest in social media to effectively communicate your brand.

Always remember, the brand must be true and genuine; and should be conveyed through the entire hiring and onboarding process in every step along the way. But it begins with attracting employees. It's important that employers demonstrate an appreciation for current employees to attract future employees.



Sadly, many applicants never hear anything back at all. Ignoring applicants has become so commonplace in today's market, there's a term for it now—ghosting. Please believe me when I tell you ghosting is one of the fastest ways to erode public opinion of your organization. I know it, because I talk to job seekers every day. And nothing discourages them more than silence.

People are looking to be treated like assets, not numbers. In this phase as well as all other phases of the process, I aim to treat candidates with a high level of respect, and I encourage you

to do the same. It goes a long way toward building respect and trust in the business community. And, quite frankly, it's just common courtesy.

Think of it this way. What if the tables were turned? Many employers expect a thank you note or email from the candidate they interviewed. My approach as a recruiter is to beat them to the punch and send them a thank you first. What kind of message does that send? The company that just interviewed me sent ME a thank you?! That is a powerful differentiator indeed.

The Onboard Phase

Onboarding starts as soon as a candidate accepts your offer. How welcoming is your organization to new talent walking in? Are you helping new employees feel like they're part of a community, or are they essentially strangers trying to figure it out on their own? Those that are welcomed into the "community" are likely to have a harder time leaving versus someone that never connects with others in the workplace. Getting the onboard phase right can significantly reduce turnover rates down the road.

Also, during this phase, I recommend filling any communication gaps that might exist. Usually there's a period of days or weeks between accepted offer and start day. Stay in touch during this time and consider scheduling an informal meeting to help the new employee feel special and welcomed. During this "expectation" meeting, divulge all the information necessary to be successful within your organization or department. I'm talking about those things that aren't written on the job description. Share the "unwritten" rules about your company or culture, tell them what you expect of them and what it will be like the first week, first month, first year. You will also need to ask the new employee what they expect of you. Make this conversation an open two-way street. There is often a disconnect between our expectations and the talent sitting across the table. We need to fill that gap and make sure we are all on the same page before the employee starts the daily job.

The Retain Phase

Retention is a massive phase within the talent lifecycle. We could spend days on the subject of helping companies retain their talent, but for now let's boil it down. Over the years, I have noticed a handful of persistent and common requests from talent. When I ask them, "What are your top three to five factors in deciding to look at an organization or leader," I often hear these four replies.

- First, people want a two-way open, honest, transparent communication channel within the organization. That includes upward, sideways and downward communication.
- Second, they want a chance to make an impact. This means they want their voice to be heard and encouraged, and they want to be considered for projects or ideas.
- Third, people want to grow. They welcome challenges and problems they can help solve.
- Finally, they're looking for an employer that is going to invest in them. They want their leaders to take a risk on them by helping


them pick up new skill sets, move into new functional areas, or be considered for promotions and growth opportunities.

If you can incorporate these four factors into your retention strategies, I believe you will be far more successful in keeping the talent you need to move your organization forward.

The Exit Phase

The exit phase is often not a pleasant one. However, employers that embrace it as an opportunity to align their message are the ones that earn a good perception in the marketplace. How are you treating your talent when they give notice? Do you tell them to get out? Do you slam the door on them as they're leaving? If they've been good employees, I would challenge you to keep that door open and welcome them back anytime.

As long as there is not a character or performance issue, even exiting employees can remain your allies. Sometimes employees move on in order to pick up some new experience you can't offer, or they simply think the grass is greener elsewhere. Encourage them in their transition, offer help, and let them know they are always welcome back. Benevolence might not be the natural reaction, especially if you're feeling slighted by a person's leaving. But it is definitely the type of response that will differentiate you from other employers and perhaps give the exiting employee greater reason to return one day. People remember how they were treated. And goodwill comes back around.

Throughout your talent lifecycle, I encourage you to look for opportunities to create a different and memorable experience for applicants, candidates, and employees. Ultimately the story you share is the one your employees will share, too; if you treat them in a way that walks the talk. And "talk" is the key word here. Even in an age of increasing automated systems and technology solutions, people still matter. So, treating everyone who comes in contact with your organization—customers and talent alike—as an asset, complete with open communication, feedback, and respect, will ultimately boost your productivity, engagement, and status as an employer of choice. 



Chad Kopitzke is the founder of NeXtGen Advantage, an innovative talent management firm based in Neenah, Wisconsin. As a human capital expert with specialized knowledge of generational issues in the workplace, Chad brings a unique vantage point to modern business culture. Connect with Chad at chad@nextgen-advantage.com.

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DEVELOPING FUTURE SKILLED WORKERS

By the Lafayette County Academy coordinators

Many people in the construction industry know that developing “pipelines” of talent is not going to happen magically. It’s going to take everyone around the state developing programs to generate interest in the industry. That’s what’s happening in Lafayette County in the birth of the Lafayette County Construction Academy.

“If you would have asked me a year ago, I could never imagine it even taking place, let alone becoming so successful,” said Tom Martin, CESA #3 School to Work Coordinator.

“When I look back on this past year, the Academy was definitely a high point for me. The impact it had – not only on our students and more importantly, our contractors – was beyond my expectations,” said Duane Elfering, Dean of Students for the Academy.

While the Lafayette County Construction Academy didn’t close out its year in the manner in which it wanted, its inaugural campaign was historic, nonetheless.

Back in July, county school officials were contacting Martin as to whether CESA #3 would be able to start an Academy. “I was really nervous about the prospects,” Martin said. That was until Duane Elfering came to mind.

“I spoke with our team about Duane [and his prospect] and even called him,” Martin said. “Duane would have been perfect, but his situation was unsettled.”

“When Tom called me, his request seemed surreal at the time,” Elfering said. “I had some things to figure out, but it [the Academy] was what I wanted to do.”

Eventually Elfering committed. Martin then sat down and worked with Elfering to develop the curriculum, which closely resembled the State’s Youth Apprenticeship Construction curriculum.

As the school year began, Martin started recruiting on October 7, 13 students from Lafayette county schools as well as Iowa-Grant and Barneveld High School convened at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville to begin the Academy.

Elfering aligned Academy classes scheduled for Wednesday nights and some Saturdays, October through March, to help students learn the basics in rough and fine framing, electrical, plumbing, masonry, carpet laying and heavy equipment.

“When I spoke with contractors, they felt that this ‘cross-training’ approach – in which students were instructed in several areas – would be a successful one, so we adopted it and to tell you the truth, it really worked,” Elfering said.

One of the Academy’s highlights was a daylong building workout sponsored by ABC member JG Development, Blue Mounds. It occurred just days before Christmas, as students had yuletide visions in the back of their minds. In the end, it was JG Development

Owner Jeff Grundahl who was the one receiving a gift.

“When I watched these students, I told Duane that they could build better than many adults,” Grundahl said. “I was so impressed with every student’s ability and realized that, even in its infancy, the Academy was making an impact. I already committed to another event for December 2020.”

Dan Carey, Carey’s Seamless Doors & Gutters, Belmont, who became one of the Academy’s Instructors, spoke of his teaching experience. “I was very apprehensive [about teaching] at first. I mean, I’m a contractor, not an educator. Having Duane there to support me meant so much.



Going into year two, I told Duane I wouldn't necessarily need him there as I feel so much more comfortable around the kids."

"The Academy was a dream come true," Carey added. "I was in front of my future workforce every week and, while I had already put in a full day by the time the class came, once I saw how respectful and responsive these students were, it was the shot of adrenaline I needed to go sometimes until 10 p.m. or later."

Students were transformed too.

A prime example of this was Breyza Murphy, Iowa-Grant junior and the Academy's only female.

"The Academy changed my life forever," Murphy said. "Before the Academy, I had some reservations about going into the construction industry. Because of the Academy, I go into my senior year of high school enrolled in the second year of the Academy, registered at Southwest Wisconsin Technical College's Carpentry program with my career goal of enrolling in the state's Registered Apprenticeship Program to become a master plumber."

Students like Jason Sedbrook see a real purpose to the program. "I initially only wanted to take the Academy for its Masonry unit, but I rarely missed a class and at the end, I feel that I'm more employable as a result," Sedbrook said.

I WAS SO IMPRESSED WITH EVERY STUDENT'S ABILITY AND REALIZED THAT, EVEN IN ITS INFANCY, THE ACADEMY WAS MAKING AN IMPACT.



Students in the Lafayette County Construction Academy learn drywalling.

Elfering and Martin provided an online OSHA 10 certification, First Aid/CPR credential and related coursework from the industry to substantiate the weekly laboratory activities.

In the second year of the program, Elfering said concepts will employ many similar concepts, but extend beyond residential and more toward commercial and industrial.

All told, Elfering, Carey and the contractors involved impacted 16 youth; five are expected to return for their second year.

"We will miss the seniors, especially the way the year ended," Elfering said. "Despite that, Tom and I have made some modifications and year two will be even better."

Dr. Jill Underly, Pecatonica Area School District superintendent and Academy advocate concluded, "What Duane and Tom did this past year was a testament to their determination to ensure that county students become our future contractors. I'm already working with my county administrators to recruit for the fall, regardless of what happens."

"I just want to thank everyone who helped us this first year," said Elfering. "Once this new normal comes to be, the Academy will happen again in October." 🇺🇸

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529 COLLEGE SAVINGS ACCOUNTS CAN NOW BE USED FOR APPRENTICESHIP

By Congressman Glenn Grothman



Rep. Glenn Grothman (left) with ABC member Pat Donovan of Northcentral Construction (back) and his family

While we are currently experiencing a brief economic speed-bump, I am hopeful that by this time next year, our economy will again be strong, and we'll be facing the challenge of finding the qualified skilled laborers necessary for construction, manufacturing and health care.

We tell our kids to stay in school, study hard, then they will be able to go to college. For many years, it has been widely accepted that "college" means going to a liberal arts school and earning a four-year degree, but is this the best option for all students?

Though earning a traditional four-year degree is an outstanding achievement and has many benefits, we often push students into thinking that this is the height of achievement when, in fact, many of them would be happier, earn more money and accrue less debt by learning a construction trade.

As I travel around Wisconsin, I hear this story too often, "I graduated high school at 18, got a bachelor's degree at 22 and worked in that field for five years. I did not like what I was doing, was not making a lot of money and could only make minimum payments on my student loan debt. So, I quit my job, went back to school to learn a skill and now use the skill in my new job, where I am happier and making more money than I did before. I am now 35 and finally starting to make a dent in the student loan debt from my bachelor's degree."

I am glad that these individuals have found a job they love with a salary that allows them to truly live. But they could have started their journey to being debt-free, owning a house and starting a family when they were 22 instead of 35 if they had known about technical college, apprenticeships and all the career and technical education options available. Instead, students are too often told that traditional four-year degrees are the turnkey to a great life.

Young adults should start choosing higher education paths that best suit their needs, while incurring the least amount of student debt and learning skills that are always in demand. There is a bias in our society that a traditional four-year degree is the best option for every student. In reality, many of them would be happier, and often make more money, if they had pursued a construction trade after high school. I often speak with employers who tell me that they are in desperate need of skilled employees but cannot find anyone with the necessary skill sets. These are important jobs and we need to be encouraging students to consider going to technical school and completing apprenticeships to obtain them.

We need to let our children know just how in-demand skilled jobs are and how much money they can make. Over the past several years, companies ranging from small businesses to large multinational corporations have experienced a significant skilled labor shortage. By encouraging students to pursue a hands-on skill, we are increasing opportunities for Wisconsinites to join the skilled labor force and acquire the local high-demand, high-paying jobs that employers are eager to fill.

Other areas in the country do not look like Wisconsin. Not only are the people and the climate different, but they have different industries. We have far more factories, heavy machinery and manufacturing jobs than most parts of the country. In fact, Wisconsin ranks second in total percentage of manufacturing jobs. This means that, while you and I know that the skilled labor gap exists and is a growing problem, people from different states, including their Con-



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gressional representatives -- my colleagues -- do not have a grasp on just how serious a problem this shortage of workers is.

Apprenticeships offer a way for those seeking to enter the high-demand skilled labor market to get invaluable on-the-job experience. The U.S. Department of Labor has reported that 94% of individuals that complete apprenticeship programs not only find jobs, but make an average starting salary of \$70,000, much higher than most four-year college graduates. And the bonus is that they are earning their certification without a mountain of student loan debt.

I believe we are rapidly making progress in the fight to prepare students to fill these skilled jobs. As part of a larger appropriations bill in December 2019, Congress included provisions that will allow individuals with 529 college savings accounts to use the money they have saved for apprenticeship programs.

These 529 plans work much like a retirement account. You can contribute a certain amount each year and the sum will be invested into the stock market, handled by a professional and grow at a faster pace than a traditional checking or savings account at the bank. New parents will often open 529 accounts for their newborn children so they will have a pool of funds to draw from to pay their tuition when the time comes. The only caveat is that this money was only for K-12 or college tuition.

With apprenticeships gaining popularity (rightly so), this change

was long overdue. The wealth of a country does not come from how many lawyers or politicians it has, but by what it builds. By allowing 529 plans to be used for apprenticeship programs, apprentices can apply their 529 savings to buy necessary tools and equipment. It helps more people to reach their potential and build the things we need.

Building things is part of the Wisconsin tradition. We are on the cutting edge of a movement in higher education that will allow us to replenish the skilled labor force and continue our proud tradition. I look forward to the continuing the fight to build recognition for technical education and apprenticeships and advocate for our children to be better equipped to fill the skilled jobs of tomorrow.

As I (tongue-in-cheek) tell people in my travels throughout Wisconsin to fish fries, county fairs, firemens' picnics and the like, skilled labor is not for everybody. Some people cannot work with their hands and will invariably be forced to get a traditional four-year college degree. But, for those who have the skills and ability to help our society advance, I will strongly encourage a skills-based education and the apprenticeships that are so vital to it.

In closing, I would like to thank the contractors reading this. I have always believed that being involved in construction provides not only the satisfaction of seeing what you have built, but the reward of knowing that you have contributed something positive to society that others use every day. 🇺🇸

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• **Arbor Vitae Electric**
Ashley Roach
1489 Old Highway 51 North
Arbor Vitae, WI 54568
Phone: (715) 892-6225
Description: Electrical Contractor
Sponsor: Tom Altmann, Altmann Construction Co., Inc.
Beam Club Members-to-date: 38

• **Everlight Solar Construction**
Nick Manion
6720 Fairhaven Road
Madison, WI 53719
Phone: (608) 290-6187
Description: Electrical Contractor
Sponsor: Dan Bertler, Supreme Structures Inc.
Beam Club Members-to-date: 45

• **Mega Concrete Construction**
Jeremy Nachreiner
7190 Baxter Road, P.O. Box 176
Arena, WI 53503
Phone: (608) 753-2188
Description: Concrete Contractor
Sponsor: Casey Malesevich, Sure-Fire, Inc.
Beam Club Members-to-date: 5

APRIL 2020

• **The Starr Group**
Eric Messer
5005 Loomis Road.
Greenfield, WI 53220
Phone: (414) 421-3800
Description: Associate/Insurance
Sponsor: Troy Windorff, Marco
Beam Club Members-to-date: 4

MAY 2020

• **Bill's Electrical Contracting, LLC**
Mike Puetz
W8430 County Road V
Cascade, WI 53011
Phone: (920) 528-7789
Description: Electrical Contractor
Sponsor: Gerry Kerbsbach, K-W Electric, Inc.
Beam Club Members-to-date: 30

• **Excel Electric, Inc.**
Jim Rivest
5635 Town Hall Drive
Sun Prairie, WI
Phone: (608) 516-4324
Description: Electrical Contractor
Sponsor: Nick May, Refrigeration Installation Specialists
Beam Club Members-to-date: 11

• **KP Heating and Cooling**
Rick Peterson
5601 W. Integrity Way
Appleton, WI 54913
Phone: (920) 687-2665
Description: Mechanical Contractor
Sponsor: Troy Carlson, McClone
Beam Club Members-to-date: 18

• **KRL Electric, LLC**
Kevin Lawonn
8442 Linden Ridge Road
Allenton, WI 53002
Phone: (262) 224-1897
Description: Electrical Contractor
Sponsor: Roger Thimm, Wondra Construction, Inc.
Beam Club Members-to-date: 21.5

• **MJI Building Services, LLC**
Kayla Fournier
109 E 8th St., #300
Kaukauna, WI 54130
Phone: (920) 462-4382
Description: General Contractor
Sponsor: Matthew Burow, Catcon, Inc. dba Catalyst Construction
Beam Club Members-to-date: 1

• **Schu Electric, LLC**
Brad Schumacher
W4816 Golf Course Drive
Fond du Lac, WI 54935
Phone: (920) 517-4257
Description: Electrical Contractor
Sponsor: Pat Donovan, Northcentral Construction Corporation
Beam Club Members-to-date: 2

• **Superior Plumbing Services, LLC**
Matthew Whitlow
P.O. Box 20786
Greenfield, WI 53220
Phone: (414) 550-7524
Description: Mechanical Contractor
Sponsor: Jay Zahn, R&R Insurance Services, Inc.
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Amy Fischer

Fischer Construction, LLC, Brookfield

“Just wanted to send you a quick note saying how immensely grateful I am to be an ABC member at this time. The timely guidance that I am receiving is calming and absolutely necessary during this time. I was in a total panic last week with all of the government announcements and media. This week the emails and webinars that ABC has provided have gotten me off the ledge. I'm so happy to be a part of such a great organization and I can't thank everyone enough for helping small business owners like me navigate through this chaos.”

Steve Lulich

Dodge Concrete, Watertown

“I want to thank you and everyone on the ABC staff for the outstanding work on keeping us all well informed as we work through this crisis.”

”

Brian Kuhn

S&K Pump & Plumbing, Inc.,
Brookfield

“We've all been bombarded by coronavirus emails lately, many of which I delete, but I want to thank ABC for going to bat for the construction industry and for providing meaningful updates to help me answer critical questions to keep my business going.”

“

Dwayne Sweeney

Greenfield Plumbing, Muskego

“Thank you and your team for all the updates and information you have been sending out. ABC has been a big help to my company with staying on top of this very fluid situation.”

”

Tammy Meyers

Altmann Construction Co., Inc., Wisconsin Rapids

“

“Just wanted to give everyone at ABC a shout out ... You guys are doing great in response to all of the changes in our world. We are getting information spit out to us constantly and ABC is always our go-to ... Keep up the good work.”



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