

Dayton Picks Up the Ball

You can bemoan your fate or you can take action.

By Joe Salimando

WHEN THE BID PROCESS DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR STATE WORK CHANGED IN OHIO A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, all of the work had to be done through construction managers. As a result, a single organization—Messer Construction Company—would be handling the majority of state work in central and southwest Ohio—covering Cincinnati, Columbus, and Dayton.

It was clear to SMART local 24 Business Manager Scott Hammond and SMACNA Dayton’s Executive Director Robert Pope that the organized sheet metal industry needed to pick up the ball and get the attention of key executives at Messer.

That goal was made easier because both Local 24 and Messer have been active in the local Builder Exchange. Thus, when SMART and SMACNA broached the idea of a meeting to learn more about how the sheet metal industry work, the construction management company’s people were receptive.

On game day, six Messer decision-makers spent nearly three hours learning about the sheet metal industry from

- JATC apprentice coordinator Eugene Frazier;
- Kathleen Kerber of Kerber Sheet Metal, a trustee of the JATC, and a member of SMACNA’s national board of directors;
- Local 24’s Hammond; and
- Doug Mayse, president of Rieck Services, a SMACNA contractor.

Mayse provided a tour of his shop. It gave Messer management the chance to see how SMART-SMACNA training is put into action in the real world. SMART craftspersons demonstrated CAD and shop equipment and demonstrated the role of a sheet metal-plus-mechanical contractor in BIM-driven projects.

“We talked about how our coordination effort on each project leads the way in everything we do, even a simple piping job,” Mayse explains.

During the shop tour, Mayse says it became clear that Messer executives were not used to seeing work performed to SMART and SMACNA’s high standards. But it was not just Messer decision-makers who got an education. “We learned about how our industry is viewed by those outside of it,” Mayse says.

‘We think they know all about it’

Kerber felt that Messer decision-makers were very impressed with SMART-SMACNA programs. “We were able to tell them not only about the types of training we offer, but also about our routine focus on safety.”

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He says Messer's executives seemed especially impressed by the fact that SMART and SMACNA have integrated use of BIM software into training and into the production of sheet metal in the shop.

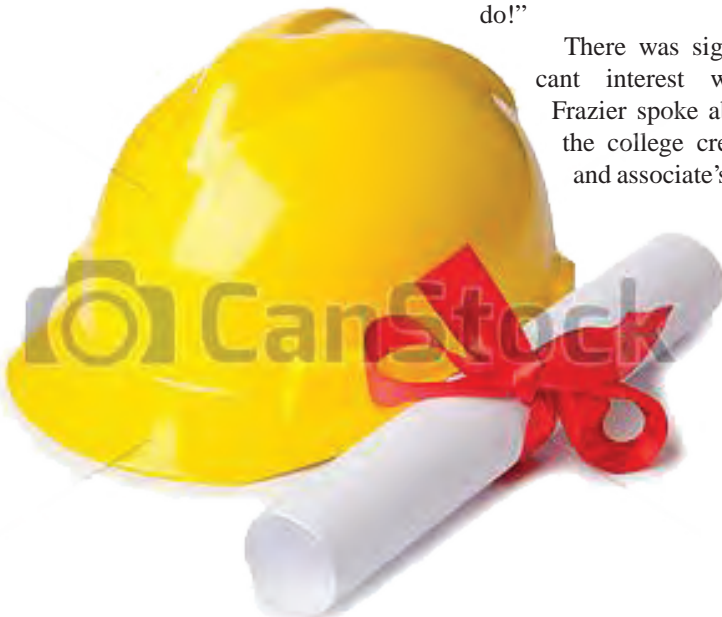
According to Hammond, Messer's people were quite engaged by the presentations and demonstrations. "They asked questions that indicated they were listening and they wanted to know more," he says.

"One thing that we learned is to not take for granted what we know," Hammond adds. "We live in the sheet metal industry every day. The training center is a given part of our industry. We all know about it, and we don't get excited about it anymore."

Pope believes that the three younger Messer executives had never really understood the organized sheet metal industry's training programs until that day. "Eugene explained how our apprenticeship program works, what average apprentices learn, and the things they have to do to demonstrate competence. It was all new information for our visitors."

For Pope, it brought home a message: "We can't forget that there are young people working in the construction people who don't understand what we do. We've never really explained it to them. We think they know all about it. And they don't know very much at all. We need to do a better job of telling people about what we routinely do!"

There was significant interest when Frazier spoke about the college credits and associate's de-



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grees that apprentices can earn through their training. "When I talk about this, I don't say 'it's just like college' or 'they get to earn some college credits.' For our sheet metal apprentices, this IS a college!"

Overall, the experience reinforced the importance of talking to people, Pope says. "You have to give most of the credit to local 24 for being active in the Builder's Exchange," he adds. "That's what created this opportunity for our industry."

Further, the success of this first "formal" venture has led to a perception of broader opportunities. The industry is already talking with two other construction management companies about similar events—and there's even some discussion about extending invitations to state legislators for special sessions aimed at their interests. ■

Salimando is a Northern Virginia-based writer.