

Partners **IN** Progress

SMACNA & SMART—Building a Future Together

May 2014



The Go-Round with the Bear

CONTENTS

MAY 2014 - Volume 11, Number 1

- 1 HOW ARE WE DOING**
Readership survey results.
- 3 JB HENDERSON AND THE GO-ROUND WITH THE BEAR**
A New Mexico contractor stays profitable during the recession.
- 5 LONG-LASTING BENEFITS OF DOING GOOD**
Sheet metal apprentices to gain an advantage, while simultaneously giving back to the community.
- 6 GET SMART**
Technology tools are transforming the sheet metal industry.
- 10 A DAY IN THE LIFE...**
A series of articles depicting the daily activities of a business manager, contractor, a sheet metal apprentice, a chapter executive, and a training director.
- 16 LABORS OF HERCULES**
A Denver-based contractor builds upon its strengths.
- 19 CLEVELAND PARTNERS ELEVATE TRAINING**
- 21 DAYTON PICKS UP THE BALL**
You can bemoan your fate or you can take action.
- 23 MIND THE GAP**
Oklahoma adjusts apprenticeship—two generations, one goal.
- 25 WHEN IT WORKS, IT REALLY WORKS**
Win-win stories of labor-management cooperation in British Columbia.

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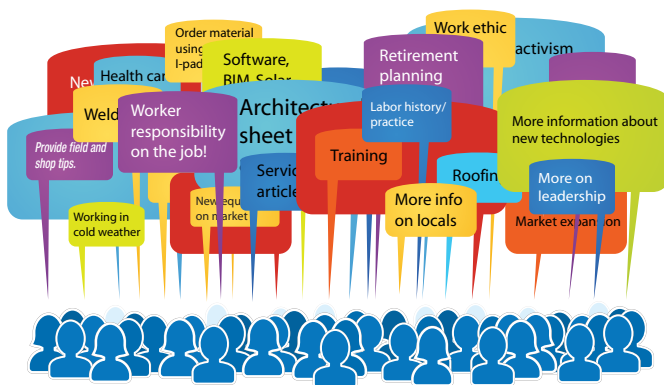
How are **we** doing?

By Kaarin Engelmann

NO MATTER THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY, the organized sheet metal industry is more likely to prosper when management and labor work together. Indeed, about half of the respondents in the latest *Partners in Progress* Readership Survey said the primary reason they read the magazine is to learn about best practices for labor-management cooperation.

Two-thirds read it to learn about SMACNA and SMART programs, just over a quarter read it to learn about best practices for market expansion, and about a third read it to learn about upcoming events. (Respondents could choose more than one answer.)

Almost all respondents are reading their own physical copy of the magazine, and it turns out that about three-quarters would prefer to continue to have a printed copy mailed to them, compared to 10 percent each who prefer to access it via email or online. It's possible this result is related to the fact that one-third of respondents are retired and more than 50 percent are 50 years old or older.



Despite their desire for a paper version of the magazine, many readers are active on the Internet, with 40 percent visiting the SMWIA/SMART or SMACNA websites within the past three months. A third of readers visited the *Partners in Progress* website, Sheet Metal Network, or Facebook during the same period.

Some of the most popular articles have included “*Be a Better Leader*” (Vol. 10, No. 1; pg. 3) and “*IMHO: Facts vs. Imagination*” (Vol. 10, No. 1; pg. 18). Success stories are popular because readers find value in reading about personal experiences. Some respondents commented that they liked that stories include both labor and management, though a few wanted to see more from the labor side.

Partners in Progress is slowly getting the word out about the Expertise branding program. Just under half of respondents were aware of it. In addition, the magazine is the standard bearer for the Sheet Metal Network (sheetmetalnwork.org), with about 40 percent of readers learning about it in those pages.

The magazine also served as the primary source of information about the 2012 Partners in Progress Conference for about half of readers responding. However, almost none of them actually attended the conference. About a third indicated willingness to attend a future Partners in Progress conference.

Generally, content seems to be hitting the mark with readers. Half of them value it enough to save an article or issue and half have discussed or forwarded an article or issue. About 10 percent said that reading the magazine caused them to contact a labor-management partner. One reader said that he talked to his employer about expanding into service work.

Finding ways for organized labor and management to communicate what works to other members, identifying areas to improve existing business and expand markets, and assisting with workforce issues—in other words, making a difference—is why *Partners in Progress* exists. We encourage you to contact us to tell us about your success stories and ideas, and give us feedback. Email editor@pinpmagazine.org.

Congratulations to Wayne Lemke of Toledo, Ohio, who won an iPad from *Partners in Progress* in the drawing from among all those readers who submitted completed surveys. ■

JB Henderson and the Go-Round with the Bear

A New Mexico contractor stays profitable during the recession.

By Stephen Grieco

SOMETIMES YOU EAT THE BEAR and sometimes it eats you.

Finding ways to stay ahead of that bear is high priority for JB Henderson Construction Company (JBH), a signatory contractor based in Albuquerque, N.M.

“JBH is professional, committed, flexible, and conscientious,” says Hoffman Construction Company project manager Greg Johnston. “But mostly they are tough.” JBH is a key subcontractor for Hoffman, a general contractor.

In the extremely demanding markets where JBH operates, being tough is a necessity.

Few things illustrate this more than JBH’s status as a preferred contractor working with Hoffman on clean room environments for a Fortune 500 semiconductor giant building microchip fabrication facilities in New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and Arizona.

Johnston says this came about because JBH built a reputation for top quality workmanship, meeting aggressive schedules, an impeccable safety record, and an ability to tackle the challenging situations that inevitably arise at any work site. “JBH always comes through for us. They’re not scared of tough jobs,” he adds.

Some of those jobs have included high purity piping, complex waste systems, specialty gas systems and other niche expertise areas that make the company attractive to customers in the microelectronics, nuclear, and other high-tech industries.

Just this past year, the company finished a \$13 million project at Los Alamos National Laboratory’s Radiologi-

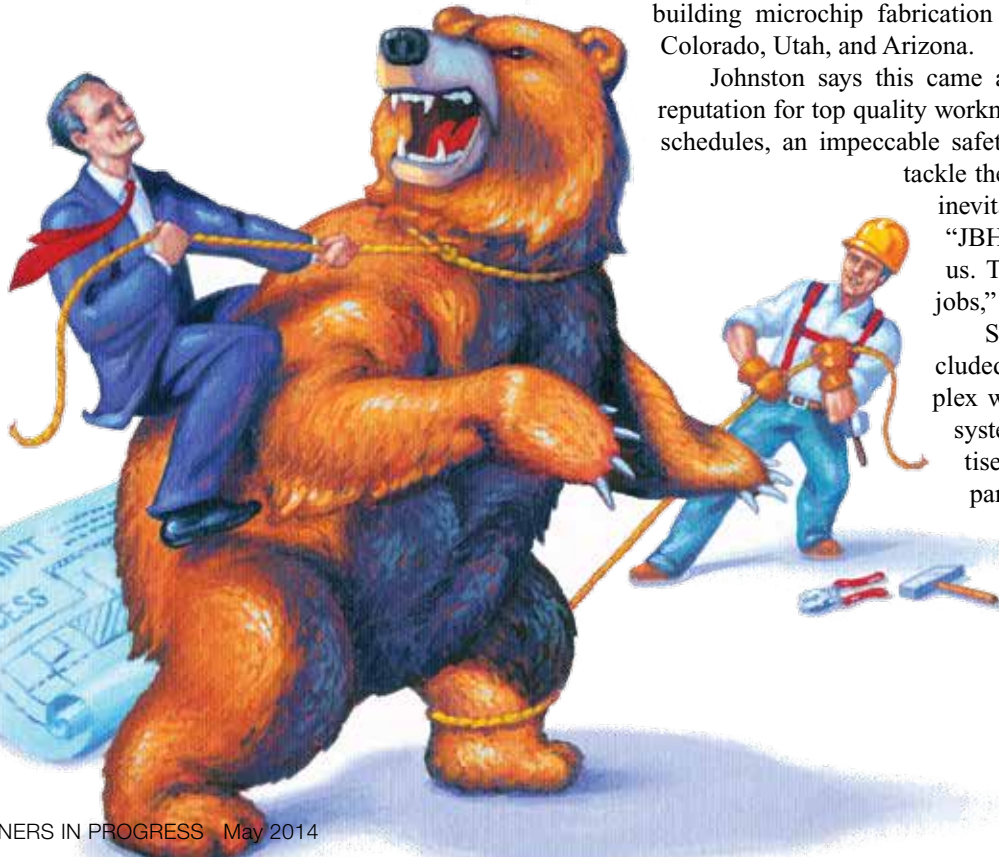


Illustration by Eric Westbrook

cal Laboratory Utility Office Building. The building achieved both the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) status and LEED Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

At Sandia National Laboratories, JBH was the mechanical sub-contractor helping to build a unique system to test the use of molten salt as a source of alternative energy. The company's fabrication and installation work included the fabrication of several unique components and specialty HVAC equipment.

This Molten Salt Test Loop project won the *Engineering News-Record's* Best of 2012 project award for the southwest region along with the Associated General Contractors-N.M. Building Branch's Top Specialty Project award for 2013.

ENR also named JBH the Top Specialty Contractor for the region in 2012—celebrating the company's industry advancement, community involvement, and revenue growth that included a 63 percent increase in mechanical revenue from 2010 to 2011.

Richard Espinosa, business representative for SMART Local 49 in Albuquerque, N.M., said labor is proud to partner with JBH and help the company continue its success well into the future.

"JBH is a highly sought after company among our members," he adds. "The relationship between labor and management is outstanding, and the company really seems to care for its employees. They always go the extra mile for safety."

According to Espinosa, JBH invests a lot of money in employees, allowing them to qualify for various federal and corporate clearances. These clearances and related certifications bring mutual benefits for JBH, clients, and SMART members who can extend their careers and take advantage of more work opportunities.

Espinosa and Johnston attribute JBH's success and culture of integrating teamwork to Mark G. Henderson, the company's CEO. For more than two decades, Henderson has led JBH with a focus on the core values of honesty, integrity, safety, and quality. "It starts at the top," Johnston says. "It's how Mark has run the business forever."

A family business

Jack B. Henderson founded the company in 1959 to provide general contracting services. JBH added a mechanical division in 1967, and Jack's son Mark started working there soon thereafter. He joined Lo-

cal 412 for plumbing and piping as an apprentice and later earned his New Mexico plumbing and gas piping licenses.

Mark took over as president and CEO in 1990. He combined his practical experience with an ambitious corporate vision and effective leadership strategies to build JBH into one of the top general and mechanical contractors in the region.

In 1993, Mark oversaw the addition of a pipe fabrication facility to manufacture black iron, stainless steel and other materials. Next, he built an in-house Class 100 cleanroom facility to keep up with the needs of the microelectronics industry. A few years later, Mark was sending a team of JBH employees to Costa Rica to perform work for a long-time semiconductor client building a new factory.

Under Mark's direction, JBH grew from about 40 employees to nearly 400 and opened branch offices in New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona. Gross revenue increased from about \$4 million to as much as \$100 million.

Currently, the company provides architectural, mechanical, pipe and sheet metal fabrication, design-assist, and design-build services to customers. JBH performs up to 85 percent of its contracts with in-house personnel.

Getting there has required significantly expanding the company's capabilities, clientele, and geographic reach...without stepping into a bear trap. "We measure the size and duration of the work, and determine if the competitive environment is one that we can survive in," Mark says.

"We have the ability and appetite to do what it takes to meet customers' demands, but we have to be able to establish our culture of safety, quality, and profitability," he adds. Otherwise, even in the best economic times, JBH could be a tasty snack instead of staying in the hunt.

Built to perform

To better serve so many big customers, JBH changed the way it conducts business—structuring its operations to meet strict qualification criteria and improve performance. For instance, the company has a separate safety department with 11 employees and a dedicated quality department with four staff.

"As you can imagine, the risks involved on a nuclear project are quite different than those of the typical construction project—failures can lead to

continued on page 4

continued from page 3

catastrophic consequences,” says JBH’s Vice President for Corporate Support Maria Guy.

That’s why Los Alamos National Labs won’t accept a safety professional shared across other departments for most projects. JBH’s other clients are similarly demanding. A semiconductor client requires one safety professional on site for every 25 workers.

Its quality department allows JBH to take on NQA (nuclear quality assurance) projects, most of which are ASME (American Society of Mechanical Engineers) and ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) code driven.

Currently, the company provides architectural, mechanical, pipe and sheet metal fabrication, design-assist, and design-build services to customers. JBH performs up to 85 percent of its contracts with in-house personnel.

“Not only is the traceability of the material important, but the fabrication of the end product is documented throughout the process to ensure we are meeting industry standards. This may involve non-destructive testing, inspections and proper handling and storage of materials and fabrications, just to name a few,” Guy says.

Even the way JBH receives shipped material is thoroughly documented and procedures are strictly enforced. “The entire process is fairly rigorous and requires highly qualified and certified individuals from auditors, inspectors, and welders to forklift operators,” Guy adds.

It all adds up to a lot of training and safety implications for JBH’s staff. “Unions are the most effective partners for JB Henderson and our customers,” says JBH President John Stroud. (Mark Henderson continues to serve as CEO.)

JBH employs 25 members from SMART Local 49. The local works with JBH and its clients to provide members with project-specific training covering subjects like clean room processes and how to work with uncommon materials like corrosion-resistant fiberglass reinforced plastic (FRP) piping.

Leish Weger, JBH’s HVAC estimator, has experienced the benefits of an effective labor-management partnership—receiving respirator training, confined space training, and site-specific training for different workplaces. “It’s made me more qualified

for other positions,” explains Weger, who is the third generation in her family to choose a career in the sheet metal industry.

With so much specialization in personnel and operations, JBH doesn’t bid on jobs in residential and some commercial markets. “We can’t be all things to all people,” Guy says. “Meeting the needs of core clients requires a big internal structure. That fixed overhead means we can’t compete for smaller jobs.”

However, meeting those needs has worked well. More than 91 percent of JBH’s 2011 revenue came from repeat customers. “We understand what we’re good at and sticking with it,” Stroud says. He explains that success comes from understanding customers’ businesses and their needs.

Preparing for the future

JBH isn’t betting its entire future on existing clients. Even when JBH lost the anchor customer for its Colorado branch, the contractor was able to keep its office open for three years by working at places like the U.S. Air Force Academy and Fort Carson.

“Opportunities were pretty limited,” Mark Henderson recalls, “but we were able to get enough work to meet profit goals at that time.”

Company strategy is to not be dependent on economic conditions. “We try not to demobilize during slow periods, rather to keep a presence in the market and prepare for the next wave,” he adds.

While, JBH did eventually close the Colorado office, the company is preparing for a new wave of projects in the nuclear industry—building uranium mill/mining facilities. “The nuclear world is expanding. It’s an emerging market,” Henderson says.

“We’re monitoring developments, conducting research, and making preliminary preparations to be ready for when the opportunities arise. It’s the next frontier and we’re looking to expand capability in that market. It’s what we already do, but on steroids,” he adds.

Another way JBH leadership is looking to the future—and beating the bear—is implementation of an Employee Stock Ownership Program. “It allows us to ensure that the company can continue serving government, high tech, industrial and commercial clients throughout the Southwest, for a long time to come,” Stroud concludes. ■

Grieco is a freelance writer based in Blacksburg, Va.

Long-lasting Benefits of Doing Good

By Karri Neves

IN TODAY'S ROUGH JOB MARKET, workers need every advantage they can get to stay ahead of the competition. In Albuquerque N.M., they've found a way for sheet metal apprentices to gain that advantage, while simultaneously giving back to the community.

How? The JATC for SMART Local 49 has partnered with the Greater Albuquerque Habitat for Humanity. "Working with Habitat provides our apprentices phenomenal experience," explains John Pennebaker, full-time instructor with the local.

"Approximately 86 apprentices worked on the first three houses combined," says Jerry Arms, coordinator at the New Mexico and West Texas training center. "The experience in real-world problem solving has allowed them to gain experience not otherwise found at the training center."

Industry contributions in the project included \$700 in materials.

Learning to plan ahead

Benefits extend beyond experience, however. Building in the real world also saves materials that would otherwise have been discarded.

"Our students traditionally build small-scale in the classroom," says Pennebaker. Often, once graded, the small-scale projects were dismantled, with materials discarded. The Habitat partnership enables apprentices to build—full size—and install the finished project in a home. No significant discards!

"It teaches them value. It forces them to plan ahead and think through the entire job," Arms says. "It also gets them into the residen-

tial market, which is important because few of the guys have previously been exposed to it. Most are more aware of the commercial market."

Gaining from skilled volunteers

Aside from enhancing his students' education, Pennebaker believes that it is important to make contributions to the community. "A person should not just have a job; he or she should be a person of value to the community. Part of achieving that is volunteer work," he says.

"Apprenticeship is a serious undertaking, but this slice of the curriculum in Albuquerque brought smiles to the students," Arms notes. "It's been a really good experience. All the apprentices seemed like they really enjoyed it. A few have volunteered with Habitat for Humanity on their own time as a result."

Pennebaker contends that the effort benefits more than just Habitat for Humanity and the students—it does good things for the industry in general: "Contributing to the community through our partnership with Habitat for Humanity gives unions a better light in which to shine."

On the Habitat end, there are smiles, too, according to Judy Lucero, executive director for the Greater Albuquerque Habitat for Humanity. "The bulk of our volunteers are not skilled," she says. "To have a group like this, it's definitely a win-win for all of us. We would really be handicapped without it."

"What's more," she adds, "with apprentices at work the job goes so much faster. Typically, it takes 12 weeks to build a 1,100-square-foot home from start to finish. When we have groups like this involved, it cuts our build time by a couple weeks, saving money and keeping our program going forward."

"As an added bonus," Lucero remarks, "it really is a training, on-site classroom for apprentices." ■

Neves is a freelance writer based in Idaho.



GET
SMART

Technology tools are transforming the sheet metal industry

By Stephen Grieco

VIADUCT SHEET METAL'S FABRICATION SHOP in British Columbia, Canada, used to be a chaotic environment. Hand-drawn work orders were sent via facsimile to the shop where two tradesmen spent their day accepting and reviewing job tickets with the field crews to ensure nothing was missed.

As this British Columbia business grew, using an outdated method of ordering became taxing for both the field and shop.

Viaduct President Mark Halvorsen wanted a better, more efficient way to order, manufacture, and install ductwork products. Unable to find any commercially available solution that fit the company, Halvorsen and his team developed their own solution—Webduct—a web-based ductwork ordering, pricing, and manufacturing system.

"We have been fully integrated and using the system for the past three years," Halvorsen says. "It has helped streamline every part of our operations from the shop floor to field installations, time card management, estimating, costing and reporting."

An increasing number of SMACNA contractors are testing and deploying a variety of tech tools—even everyday smart phones—and seeing impressive results, including significant time savings and increased productivity. Most of these smart tools are off-the-shelf technologies available from famil-

iar names like Autodesk, Trimble, and Apple, while some contractors are creating their own high-tech programs.

Either way, smart technologies are transforming old-school sheet metal and HVAC industries across the United States and Canada.

Smart technologies, generally speaking, are tools that offer greater control and convenience. This typically means simplifying systems, employing more automation, and using resources in a better way to make people's lives easier.

In the business world, smart technologies enable companies to offer higher quality products and services that are delivered faster and at lower cost.

For Brandon Charter, a SMART-trained sheet metal foreman for The Waldinger Corporation in Des Moines, Iowa, the benefits of smart technology came from using a common iPad. Management decided to put these computer tablets in the hands of a few field foremen and encourage them to "bubble up" some ideas for how to use the technology to improve construction workflow.

"At first I didn't know how to make the iPad a useful tool," Charter recalls. "Then I became more familiar with the options, and it started to fit into my daily routine. It has made everyday tasks a lot quicker and easier."

Some of the apps that were useful to Charter and the other foremen include email; Facetime for video conferencing; and Weatherbug, which allows field crews to check weather forecasts and radar from the jobsite and plan their work accordingly.

Others include Dropbox, which uses “cloud” storage of computer documents and drawings, including very large files that would otherwise be difficult to email; Fleetmatics to track trucks in the field; and GoToMeeting to enable multiple employees, subcontractors, and clients in remote locations to look at digital drawings at the same time.

Charter found the PDF Expert app to be especially helpful. The program, which uses the iPad’s talk-to-text feature, allows him to conduct daily business more quickly and easily—transforming the old tedium of filling out form after form into a simple paperless process. Now it takes only minutes for Charter to mark up PDF documents; open prints; capture signatures and photos; complete timesheets, two-week schedules and daily logs; and submit safety reports.

“Before this technology, we faxed and did anything on a computer in our job trailers,” Charter says. “It takes a lot of time to walk out to the trailer and back to the work site. I am hopeful that those days are behind us. With the iPad, I am more productive because I have everything I need with me on the work site.”

Waldinger’s Director of Operations Technology, Stacy Zerr, says the focus of the company’s mobile device application strategy is to share more information faster and more easily with field staff. “The goal is to equip foremen so they can make decisions more quickly, thereby increasing field productivity and ensuring safer jobsites.”

“Using mobile devices and technology is especially useful during fast-track projects,” Zerr adds. Zerr notes that on these projects, design changes in the field and remodels require one or two new fittings here and there. “Typically, foremen don’t know what is needed until they get to the job site.”

“There is no question that there have been gains,” says Guy Gast, president of Waldinger’s Iowa division. “We’ve seen a significant increase in production and layout. Our ability to do more with less is certainly enhanced with mobile tools. By harvesting technology gains we’re getting more duct up in the air.”

“Using tablets in the field is a great starting point for SMACNA contractors and their SMART part-

ners who want to explore the benefits of smart technologies,” says Mike Miller, senior vice president for Southland Industries in Dulles, Va.

He believes that given the inherent efficiency challenges associated with field operations, a modest investment in some hand-held devices can produce a nice return on investment.

Miller is accelerating the integration of BIM software at Southland by working with Autodesk to customize a Revit design program. “We’re enhancing the content of their material libraries, then using the concept of design build delivery to have our engineers draw our systems coordinated with real parts and pieces,” he explains.

“This technology allows us to go directly from design drawings to tool downloads in our shops to build duct and pipe using less time and saving costly labor dollars,” Miller adds.

In the business world, smart technologies enable companies to offer higher quality products and services that are delivered faster and at lower cost.

Like Viaduct, Waldinger and Southland are also using smart technologies to streamline job entry and manufacturing production. Waldinger uses Trimble’s Field Fitting Input (FFI) app to enable field foremen to communicate directly with the QuickPen software that operates the plasma cutter. Southland created an in-house computer program for the same purpose.

Webduct, FFI, and Southland’s programs all facilitate the flow of digital project data—integrating data that already exists and seamlessly sending information around the organization.

Field foremen can send as-built information from the job site back to the office, where a detailer simply imports the data into the cutting software, creates a job, and puts it into the shop. Field personnel also can remotely request change orders.

Features for these smart technology products vary, but the more sophisticated versions enable foremen to electronically transfer design software files to layout equipment in the field. Change orders received

continued on page 9

No More Shoe Phones! Time for a Website

A few years ago, a CNN news report from Africa featured Rwandan children using computer laptops. For many of these children, an observer said, their first English word was “Google.” Today, the world is even more immersed in technology—most of which is designed to satisfy an ever increasing demand for access to and content from the Internet.

Thanks to social networking sites like Facebook, everyone from teens to grandparents now has a personal presence on the Internet. Small businesses, however, are not keeping pace with current Internet trends.

According to Scott Flood, a marketing consultant and writer, a recent study found that fewer than half (42 percent) of the nation’s small businesses (companies with fewer than 250 employees) have a website.

“If that alone doesn’t sound like a big deal to you,” Flood writes, “consider that coverage of the study also noted that 97 percent of consumers will search for local businesses online. A business or community that doesn’t have an online presence essentially doesn’t exist anymore.”

Even if an organization doesn’t “do business online,” a website establishes and provides legitimacy.

Two decades ago, companies established that they were real and viable through other means. The standard glossy four-color “corporate” brochure was one of those means; having the largest ad in your corner of the Yellow Pages was another.

People want information before they make a decision to buy a good or service. Today most consumers, including B2B prospects, get that information online.

“Consider what I do when I’m choosing a restaurant for a nice family dinner,” Flood explains. “I’ll think of a couple restaurants I haven’t visited, and then I’ll try to take a look at their menus to make sure they’ll have something everyone will like. If a restaur-

ant has a website and a menu, it’s in the running. If it doesn’t, I quickly lose interest.”

“If your business or community doesn’t have an online presence, you need to get one,” Flood advises. “If you’re not online today, you stand a

much better chance of being out of business tomorrow.”

Flood offers the following recommendations for SMACNA contractors and their SMART partners:

1. Hire a pro when creating or updating a website. Just as you would discourage homeowners or business owners from doing their own HVAC work, don’t try to tackle the Web on your own. Otherwise, you’ll end up paying a pro more to fix things.
2. Spend a couple hours looking at websites for sheet metal/HVAC contractors in distant cities. Bookmark sites and features that you think are effective. Go back and look at those sites a second time, and you should have plenty of ideas for improvement.
3. Don’t try to dazzle people with wild graphics and technology. Be authentic. Be proud of what you do well. Case studies are an effective way to demonstrate your expertise.
4. Sites for consumers need to be less technical. Instead, make them reassuring. Think of the type of customers who make up the majority of your business and what those individuals want to know when they are considering doing business with you. Focus on those points.
5. Simple and clear are good objectives. Check all the navigation to ensure that it works. Have your pro test your site on several different browsers and with mobile devices.
6. Remember, the best companies don’t always have the best websites, so don’t assume that contractors you look up to will have great websites.



continued from page 7

at the office, for example, can be sent to layout instruments in the field where personnel can pull up 3D CAD or BIM models that display all layout points.

Information in the model can then be used with laser devices to locate sleeves and hangers—essentially automating installation points.

Standardization of processes includes use of a library database of ducts and fittings that foremen select from when submitting electronic tickets to the fabrication shop. Shop-specific templates for each type of fitting further expedite the process. System-generated reports also make it easy for managers to stay on top of projects.

With these smart technologies, processing orders takes a few hours, compared to a few days with the traditional paper approach. Prior to having access to the Trimble FFI app, Waldinger's Charter used hand tickets and either faxed or drove them to the shop to place an order. It wasn't unusual to need seven to nine different fitting forms to fill out a single order.

"You know what you are getting using this app because you are the one doing input," he explains. "This has saved a lot of redundant work between jotting down fitting details, filling out the hand tickets, and then having the shop input everything into the fabrication system."

Charter says inputting his order "live" from the field and sending it directly to the shop has also increased the accuracy of orders.

Viaduct foremen are equally happy with Webduct, which has enabled the company to trim shop production times by up to 50 percent. Halvorsen also has seen numerous side benefits. "Standardized ordering has made it easier to move manpower from project to project," he says.

Halvorsen indicates that cloud-based ordering has enabled his foremen to gain better control of production from the shop for their field installations. "The system has everything they need right at their finger tips," he says. It includes a complete set of company manuals, as well as sub-trade, supplier, and customer contact information.

"The field no longer needs to have the shop verify what they order because the system does that automatically. Thus, phone calls and faxes have been eliminated," Halvorsen adds.

Viaduct had such success with their technology that they decided to offer the service to other sheet



metal contractors by creating Webduct Systems, Inc.

"Fax machines are obsolete in most industries. Computing and technology as we've known them are fundamentally changing," says Joe Perraton, president of Point One Media Inc. and a partner in the development of Webduct.

"They are changing for the same reason as any industry or business should change, because there is a faster, better, and cheaper way," he says. "Your customers and the next generation of sheet metal professionals will demand your participation."

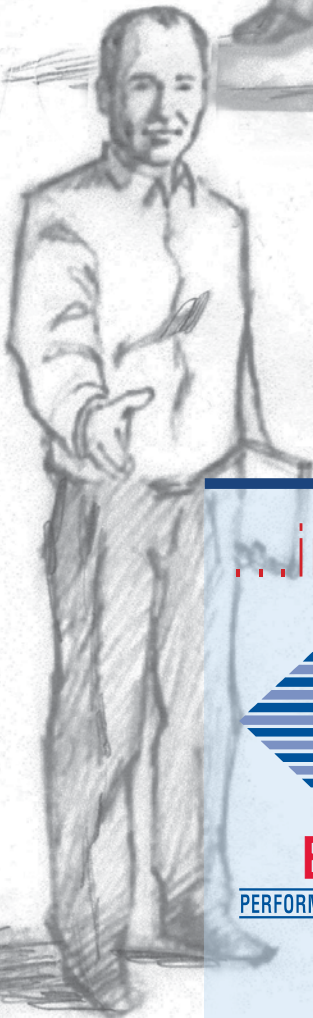
"Go ahead and take the leap," advises Southland's Miller. "The payback over time may include unexpected benefits."

For Gast at Waldinger, using smart technology is an important way to ensure that he's not wasting the company's intellectual assets—his employees, who expect their employer to be forward-thinking and abreast of industry developments.

"There are a lot of smart people out there at all levels of the organization," he says. "In order to get the most out of these newer technologies, we have to put them in the hands of our most experienced people—whether it's a young man or woman who grew up with technology or a more senior employee who has always been willing to learn new things. Smart and willing people get the job done." ■

Grieco is a freelance writer based in Blacksburg, VA.

a day in the life



...in the sheet metal industry



AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHERE YOUR LABOR OR MANAGEMENT PARTNER is coming from is critical to building a good working relationship. With a general idea of your labor or management partner's daily life, you can figure out how best to approach him or her as well as gauge where you might share similar goals and interests that can create a working foundation.

Read on for a glimpse into a day in the lives of

- a business manager,
- a contractor,
- an apprentice,
- a chapter executive, and
- a training director.

Note: The artwork provides a generic glimpse of members of the industry. It is not intended to portray any specific individual.

Illustrations by Eric Westbrook

...of a Business Manager

By Cari Bilyeu Clark

MEMBERS ARE SMART'S HEART AND SOUL; each local union exists to serve them. But in any organization, there must be someone who listens, looks (at the market, for instance), finds out where the entity needs to go—and leads the way.

On the local level, that person is the elected business manager. One such elected industry leader is Patrick Landgraf, who takes seriously the trust placed in him by members of SMART Local 18, based in Waukesha, Wisc.

Landgraf has worked in the sheet metal industry for 34 years. In 1998, he became an organizer for Local 18; in 2002 he became a business agent. Six years later, he became acting business manager, finishing out the term of a predecessor. In 2009 and 2012, he was elected to three-year terms in his own right.

How did all that happen?

"I never intended to become a business manager," Landgraf says. "The office is 60 miles from my home." After other agents working for Local 18 encouraged him to assume the unexpired term, he says he gave in to destiny. "I wanted to serve the best interests of the local and the membership."

What's involved

"I manage all the business affairs of the local," Landgraf says. Local 18, which represents 3,300 workers and 1,000 retirees, covers most of Wisconsin (Local 10's jurisdiction covers four counties in the state's upper reaches). "I'm also the health fund chairman and sit on other local funds as a trustee."

Landgraf isn't alone in his work. Local 18 has nine agents, a financial secretary-treasurer, an organizer, and four admin-

istrative assistants. On average, the local's members annually work 4 million man-hours.

"This is not a nine-to-five job," Landgraf laughs. What is a "typical" day? There isn't one!

"It's a revolving door, he says. "I answer questions or concerns raised by my agents, settle grievances, and work on contract negotiations.

"I make sure all contract negotiations throughout the local go smoothly. I make sure language in the agreements matches what was negotiated by the union and the contractors."

Landgraf also does a lot of traveling, such as to monthly satellite meetings around the state and to meetings for boards that he sits on representing the local union.

Now a General VP, too

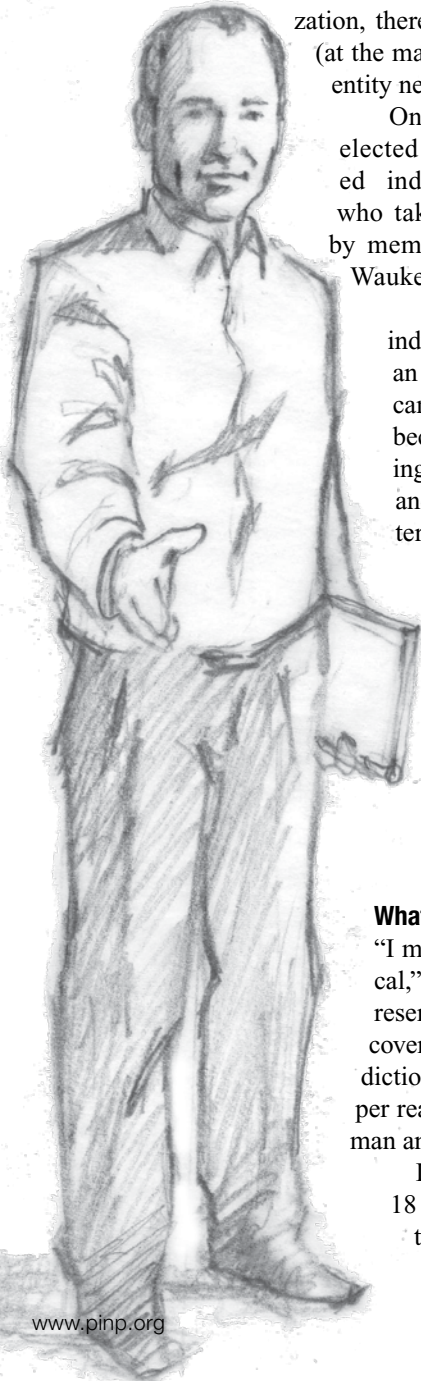
In November 2011, Landgraf was appointed to SMART's General Executive Council (as 10th General Vice President—he currently sits as the 6th General Vice President). How has a man who began working as a sheet metal worker transitioned to represent so many?

"The education department of SMART has great classes," he replies. "The Dynamic Leadership class was especially helpful. It includes psychological tests to help you to find out about yourself, your strengths and weaknesses."

He says that it's also important to learn how to manage other people, understand human resources, and to identify the management strengths and weaknesses of others so that you can work with them. "A certain temperament helps, too," he adds.

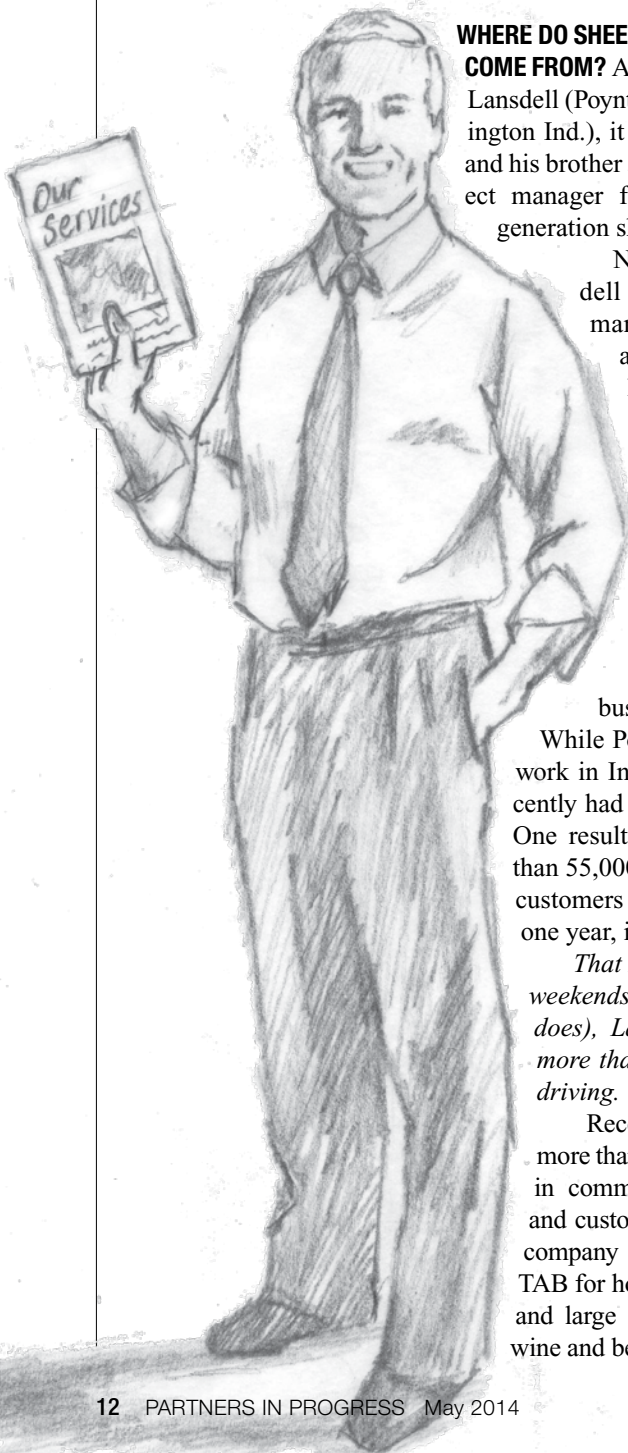
"Most of all, it's important to understand that this isn't about you," Landgraf says. "If you are in management for self-serving reasons, the local will suffer. That doesn't help anyone. You need to always keep in mind the best interests of the local—the workers who are relying on you for representation." ■

Clark is a freelance writer based in Northern Virginia.



...of a Contractor

By Cari Bilyeu Clark



WHERE DO SHEET METAL CONTRACTORS COME FROM? Answers vary. For Joseph Lansdell (Poynter Sheet Metal, Bloomington Ind.), it started with family. He and his brother Jon—an estimator/project manager for Poynter—are third-generation sheet-metal workers.

Now 42, Joseph Lansdell was first attracted into management late in his apprenticeship when he found work as a shop foreman. His career between that point and becoming Poynter's president (in late 2007) was spent in operations or project management.

Today, Lansdell is a busy company president.

While Poynter does much of its work in Indiana, the company recently had jobs going in 10 states. One result: Lansdell drives more than 55,000 miles annually, seeing customers and visiting job sites; one year, it was 68,000 miles.

That means in order to spend weekends with his family (and he does), Lansdell has to average more than 225 miles per day of driving.

Recently, Poynter employed more than 270 SMART members in commercial/industrial HVAC and custom decorative work. The company works on HVAC and TAB for hospitals and science labs and large stainless-steel tanks for wine and beer manufacturers.

What one contractor does

"When I get into the office, I go through the mail and my physical inboxes," Lansdell says. This can be demanding. Each week he sorts through—and responds to, as needed—an average of 1,800 emails.

"Then, I usually make or return about 12 phone calls," he adds. "Today, for example, I had a conference call regarding a bid we are working on—that took about three hours. Then I met with my shop people. We just purchased a new laser metal cutter, and we had to figure out how and where to place it in the shop."

The "shop" is actually a 100,000 square foot facility on 30 acres in Bloomington.

"Twice a week, I schedule a meeting to cover our entire project list with my staff. That takes about three hours," he notes. Lansdell also works out of Poynter's Indianapolis location. Additionally, he oversees Poynter's sister business—an air and water balancing service that employs 11 people.

Although Lansdell doesn't bid jobs, he reviews Poynter's submissions (with a staff of nine estimators) before they go out the door on any bid day. Last year, the company completed and submitted 2,250 bids.

Kids come first—then late-night work

"I try to do a good job of balancing work and family life. I don't take it home. I don't discuss work over the dinner table," Lansdell says. "When my kids go to bed, I put in a couple more hours on work, but when I'm with them, they get all my attention."

Recently, Lansdell finished out a five-year term on SMACNA's National Board of Directors and was named vice president of SMACNA's National Board. Additionally, Poynter's noteworthy success won him a spot on the "40 Under 40" list put together by the Indianapolis Business Journal (see article and video at <http://bit.ly/PoBuCJ>). ■

Clark is a freelance writer based in Northern Virginia.

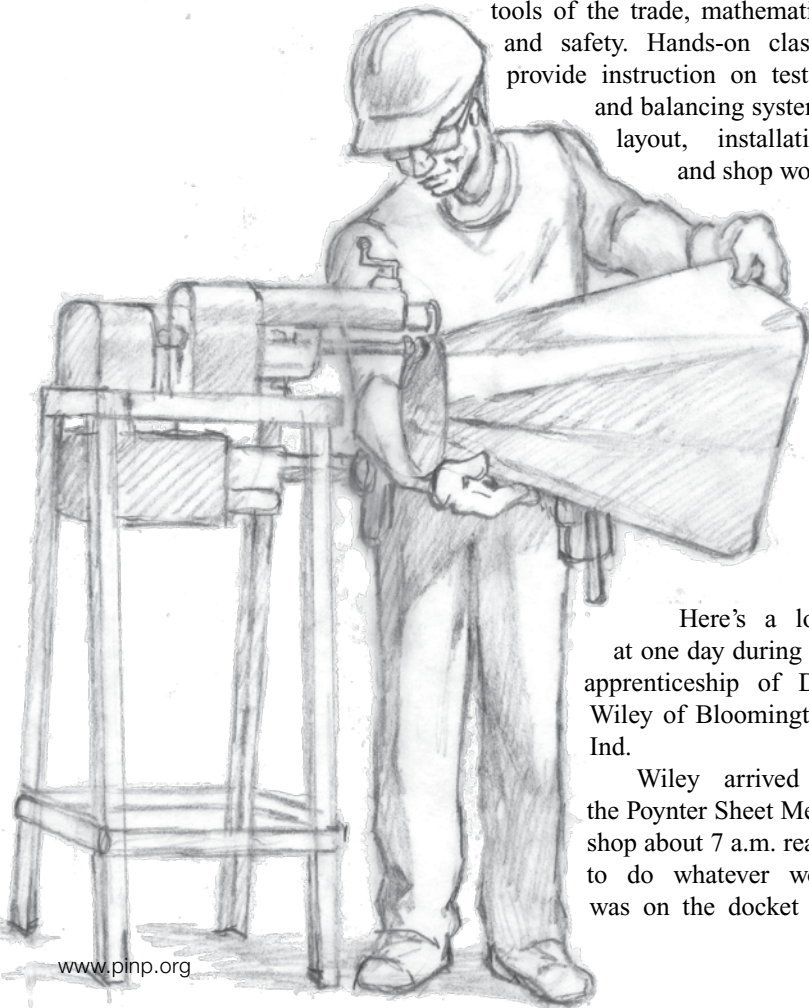
...of a Sheet Metal Apprentice

By Cari Bilyeu Clark

TRAINING IN THE SHEET METAL INDUSTRY PRESENTS challenges, which vary by geography. In Indianapolis, Ind., for example, five times each year apprentices spend one week absorbed in classroom and practical training.

“We require our apprentices to do these things because we want them to know how to survive on the job site,” says Tim Myres, apprentice coordinator at the SMART Local 20 training center. “They can’t be texting or talking on the phone on the job, and most jobs don’t allow smoking.”

First-year apprentices spend their eight-hour class days learning the basics—the tools of the trade, mathematics, and safety. Hands-on classes provide instruction on testing and balancing systems, layout, installation, and shop work.



Here’s a look at one day during the apprenticeship of Dan Wiley of Bloomington, Ind.

Wiley arrived at the Poynter Sheet Metal shop about 7 a.m. ready to do whatever work was on the docket for

the day. “I recently went to a customer’s house with one of our salesmen to design a vent hood for a kitchen remodel,” Wiley says.

“I talked with the customer, made a drawing, and discussed what he wanted—to make sure we were on the same page.”

He went back to the shop, divvied up the work with other apprentices, and created the vent hood, which included invisible welds, a duct run, and laser cutting. When the hood was finished, he installed it.

More than one way to learn

Wiley, who graduated in 2013, says he is fortunate to have had exposure to a wide variety of state-of-the-art equipment and construction at his employer. But he also has praise for the traditional methods of design he learned at the training center.

For example, he received instruction in laying out, measuring, and cutting duct by hand. At Poynter, he got experience doing it on a plasma table.

“We aren’t getting the mathematical layout experience at work, so it’s good that we get it in class,” Wiley explains. “You see how things go together by hand and make sure you’re taking all the proper steps to get it done correctly.”

Student-specific teaching

Other activities in an apprentice’s day often include theory and hands-on tasks in auto-CAD detailing and TAB for industrial projects.

Working through the International Training Institute (ITI) core curriculum involves learning things like how to deal with employers and customers. Apprentices also work to complete courses in technical writing, human relations and labor history.

“Our guys receive an associate’s degree from our local community college when they complete our apprenticeship program,” Myres says. ■

Clark is a freelance writer based in Northern Virginia.

...of a Chapter Executive

By Cari Bilyeu Clark

SMACNA'S 93 LOCAL CHAPTER MANAGERS have jobs that can make an impact on the working lives of a lot of people.

That's true for Bernie Brill, executive director of the SMACNA Mid-Atlantic Chapter, comprising Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, and the eastern portion of West Virginia.

Constantly on the go, Brill's responsibilities entail wearing many hats. "No two days are ever the same," Brill says. "Every day presents new challenges and opportunities."

One of his prime assignments: To increase opportunities for his 40 member contractors, 25 associate members, and others who are signatories to the local collective bargaining agreement.

SMACNA Mid-Atlantic is a two-person office. Brill's day might include:

- participating in board and committee meetings;
- conferring with allied construction organizations on state legislative issues;
- writing and editing the chapter's monthly newsletter and website;
- training staff;
- attending briefing sessions on environmental issues;
- meeting with state officials on regulatory matters;
- visiting with member contractors and potential members;
- and much more.

Area legislative sessions may see Brill testifying at legislative hearings and/or meeting lawmakers at legislative receptions, while monitoring bills that have an impact on the construction industry and sheet metal companies in two state capitals—Richmond and Annapolis, plus DC's city council.

Meeting contractor-set goals

"Our chapter board meets quarterly and sets the direction for our organization," Brill says. "I oversee the day-to-day operations and execute the means for the chapter to meet its goals and objectives."

Those responsibilities entail meeting regularly with the elected president of the chapter. Discussion topics can include the budget, monthly reports, programming, and financial matters.

Additionally, he tries to raise the visibility of the industry. To that end, Brill is a member of the District of Columbia Chamber of Commerce (on the Legislative Affairs Committee).

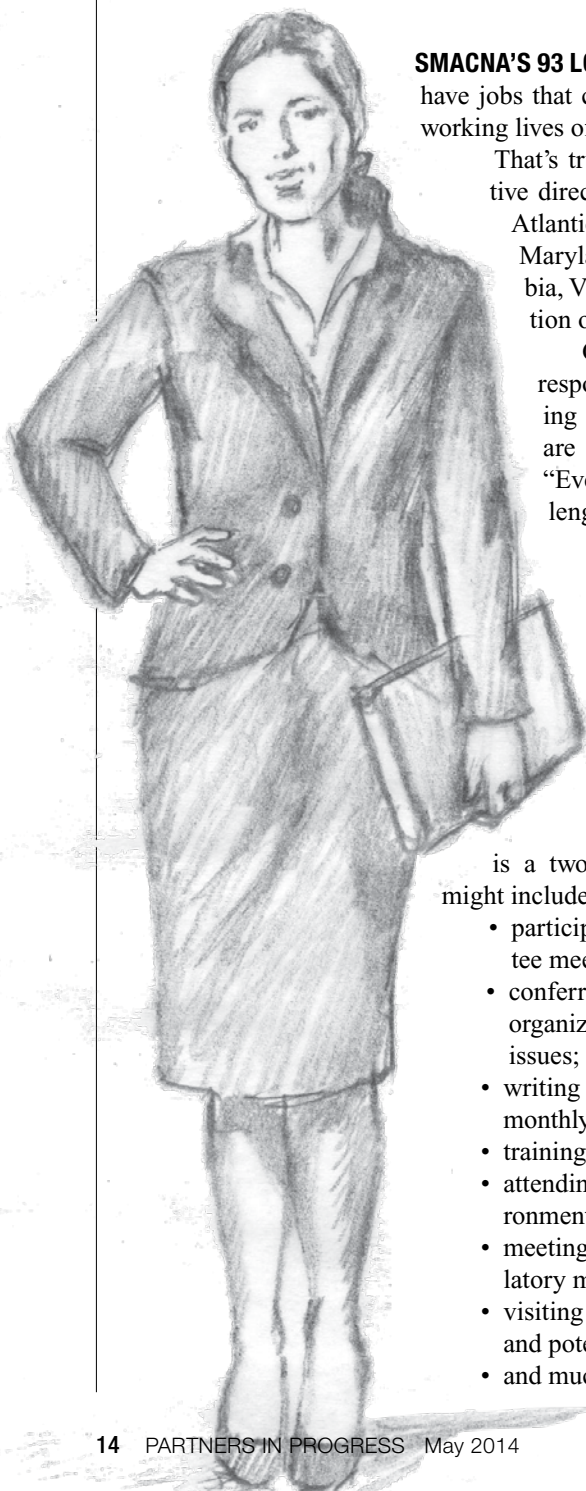
He also serves as a liaison with industry groups, such as the Washington Building Congress (WBC). Recently, Brill gave WBC members—mostly general contractors (GCs)—a tour of Stromberg Metal Works, Inc. in Beltsville, Md. The "hard hat tour" showcased the sophistication and the multiple products created by SMACNA and SMART.

Seeing CAD machines, plasma cutters, and automatic cutting machines gave the GCs a better idea of the sophisticated behind-the-scenes work that takes place in a shop.

The tours help smooth information flow between GCs and their sheet metal contractors, which decreases response time when problems pop up.

Beyond the tours, Brill works to convince GCs to bid work out directly to sheet metal contractors (via "Airside Direct"). ■

Clark is a freelance writer based in Northern Virginia.



...of a Training Director

By Cari Bilyeu Clark

THE LIFEBLOOD OF ANY LOCAL IS ITS JATC. Maintaining a high standard of education keeps the workforce at its best, and that is the goal of Burnett “Buck” Paulsrud, training director of Local 10 in White Bear Lake, Minn. Local 10 boasts approximately 4,500 members in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and northern Wisconsin. The training annex is in a suburb of St. Paul.

Early in his career, Paulsrud became interested in teaching, so he became a part-time

instructor. Now, he is in charge of training 275 to 300 apprentices at any given time, with a staff of 20 part-time and two full-time instructors. “Our format [for training classes] is one eight-hour day every other week, and 10 evening classes per year, for a total of 200 hours per year,” he says.

Paulsrud arrives between 5:30 and 6 each morning; the day school is in session from 7 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. “I plan my days, but the phone and whoever walks in dictate a lot of what actually gets accomplished on any given day,” Paulsrud notes.

Mark Szybatka is one of Paulsrud’s full-time instructors and acts as the JATC’s building supervisor. He was the youngest instructor in the history of the local when he began teaching part-time 25 years ago. He has been

a full-time instructor for 10 years. “Education never stops, because technology and innovation never stop,” he says. “There are so many, many facets to sheet metal work.”

Szybatka was recently certified to teach construction of the new phenolic board ducting product made of foam. “When I have an idea, I take it to Buck, and we decide what’s best for our members.”

One of those ideas is an open-weld class. “We allow the students to choose a project and coach them individually and help them by giving them options on how to construct that project,” says Szybatka. “It must be structurally adequate and built to code.”

He believes it’s important to ask students if they would buy their own work. “In our industry, it’s not acceptable to do a poor job. We have high standards for everyone,” Szybatka says. “It feels really good when students get it.”

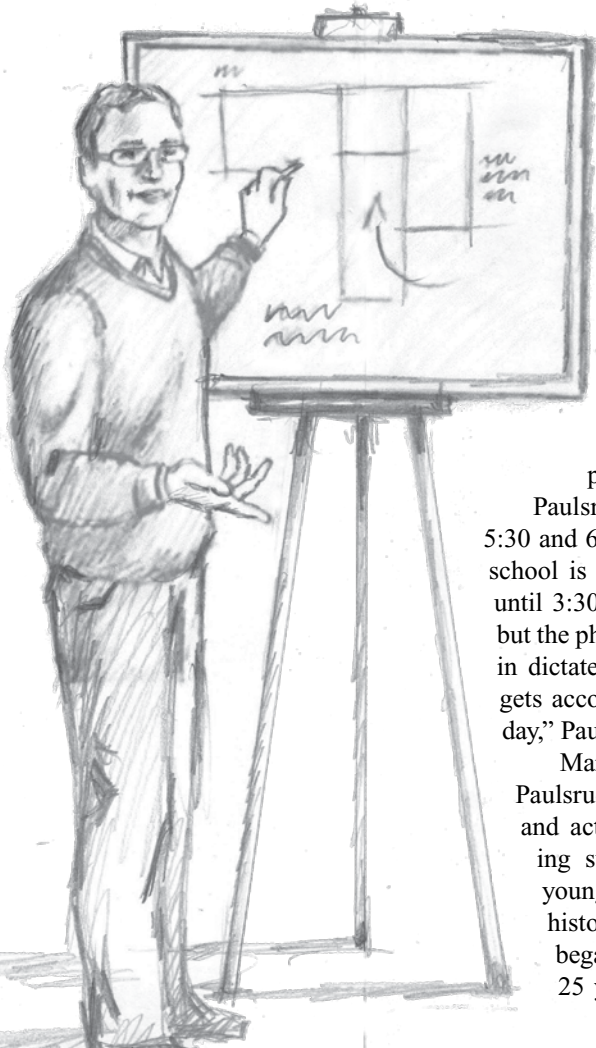
Something recently added to jobs is a hands-on mock-up of a two-story house inside the school to demonstrate installation and maintenance in residences. The training center also include classroom space for plans and specifications, a welding lab, an industrial sheet metal shop, and service training takes place in a mezzanine area. “It greatly improved the learning environment,” Paulsrud says.

Paulsrud is constantly improving class offerings, especially continuing education for journeypersons. One very popular class is Mechanical Code, which members need to pass the local certifications.

“If it is not economically feasible to run a requested class, the JATC arranges individual study for the member.” Paulsrud counts the development of a journeyperson-level training brochure as one of his most important recent achievements.

His goal is to keep and grow market share through upgrading skills, as well as maintaining and improving productivity. Paulsrud’s motto is, “Don’t wrap up—keep going!” ■

Clark is a freelance writer based in Northern Virginia.



Labors of Hercules

A Denver-based contractor builds upon its strengths—and those of SMART Local 9—to successfully face off with the bear market.

By Cari Bilyeu Clark

WHEN THE ECONOMY TOOK A DOWNTURN A FEW YEARS BACK, Denver's Hercules Industries didn't. Instead, the wholesale distributor and manufacturer of HVAC sheet metal products and equipment leveraged its strengths to keep growing and thriving, opening branches in several states.

Not only did Hercules start producing duct sealants and adhesives, but also the company installed an upgraded steel processing line to provide new gauge range capabilities, opening up opportunities beyond HVAC.

What strengths enable family-owned Hercules to be so successful? "They treat their employees like members of the family," says Tom Keating, executive director of SMACNA Colorado. "I don't know of another employer that does as much for its employees."

Dan Grady, Hercules' commercial branch manager and member of SMACNA Colorado's board of directors, says it makes sense to treat employees well. "When you take a step back and look at Hercules as a whole, our single biggest asset is our employees."

When business was really slow on the production side, Hercules' management kept a majority of employees on-board. "Plus, they ensured people could work at least 25 hours per week to preserve health insurance benefits," says Eric DeBey, business manager for Local 9.

Labor-management cooperation like this requires SMART Local 9 and Hercules maintain an open dialogue. "Local 9 not only has union members' best interests at heart, but they also understand what contractors go through," Grady says.

"They're very creative in looking at ways and processes and methods to keep local work not only within the local, but also within the union, which I think is really important."

DeBey agrees. "We work together. When Hercules has a need, we see what we can do to help out. And when SMART members have a need, Hercules does what they can to help us out."



Benefits of partnership are exponential, DeBey insists. “As Hercules has expanded into other parts of the state, the company has been able to help other signatory contractors benefit by reducing the cost of transporting supplies.”

Without cooperation from SMART, Hercules wouldn’t have been in the ballpark for supplying ductwork for the new veteran’s hospital slated for construction. “Working with us, they’ve been able to get some of their prices down, and it looks like we’re going to do the straight duct here in town instead of seeing it brought in from another state,” DeBey says.

Local 9’s Resolution 78 market recovery concessions allowing reduced shipping costs helped convince a general contractor to switch from a different supplier to Hercules.

Good communication is especially helpful when problems develop. (Though, according to DeBey, problems are rare because “Hercules plays it pretty straight.”)

continued on page 18



Blueprint for success

1. Focus on the basics. (Hercules Industries’ commercial branch manager Dan Grady stresses these four with his employees):
 - **Be on time.** “Come in with an understanding that other people are relying on you.”
 - **Work safe.** “Nobody should ever leave work in an ambulance.”
 - **Work hard.** “One of the things that the union stresses with their membership is eight hours of pay for eight hours of work.”
 - **Respect other people.** “There can’t be any segregation (e.g., salesman vs. union members).”
2. Cultivate an open dialogue between contractor and union.
3. Play to your strengths.
4. Do your research.
5. Don’t be afraid to take calculated risks.

continued from page 17

“Problems can be handled quickly,” Grady says. “Nothing is brushed under the rug. If something comes up, we talk about it openly and honestly when details are still fresh and achieve mutual understanding. Everything works itself out.”

SMACNA’s Keating believes another reason Hercules has been so successful is that the company provides excellent service. “They do what they say they’re going to do, they do it on time, and they do it with a smile.”

According to Keating, these characteristics make the company a pleasure to do business with. “As a result, they’ve got a very loyal customer base that’s allowed them to grow—both within in the state and throughout the country.”

Beyond this, Keating says Hercules management is willing to take calculated risks to expand into new markets and types of work. “They’re always upgrading their equipment and their facilities. They’re continually developing new products.”

Grady believes due diligence is required for any type of vertical integration or expansion into new markets and product lines. For Hercules, that means taking into account company strengths, market size, market potential, distance from Colorado, and distance to Denver.



“It’s a matter of building upon a tradition of success,” Grady says, “through following principles put into place by the founder and improved over the last 51 years by the second generation and third generation.”

He’s pleased that his team members have responded beautifully to all situations presented to them. “When work or the market gets tight, they all respond brilliantly. We couldn’t do it without partnership.” ■

Clark is a freelance writer based in Northern Virginia.

Hercules Promotes Helmets to Hardhats

Many of Hercules Industries’ employees are veterans—and company founder, William E. Newland, was a devoted Marine. “Individuals who have served in some sort of military capacity have a certain power,” Grady says. “There’s a unique interconnection between purpose, work ethic, leadership, and drive—principles that blend well within a manufacturing or fabrication environment.”

Hercules was honored with the 2013 Department of Colorado American Legion Employer of Veterans Award for the Large Business category. This award pays tribute to employers that have established outstanding records in the employment and retention of veterans.

“A majority of our competitors cannot bring this blend of talent to the table,” Grady says. “Our general foremen and shop supervisors who have that background are individuals who can make decisions quickly and accurately.”

Several individuals throughout the years have gone straight from the Navy metal department to Local 9’s apprenticeship program. “Such apprentices bring discipline and leadership with them into the program,” says Eric DeBey, Local 9 business manager. “They excel in training and the trade.”



Cleveland Partners Elevate Training

By Steve Grieco

NOT LONG AGO, A TRADESMAN WAS BEGINNING HIS DAY by moving a scissor lift at a Cleveland, Ohio, job site. He didn't notice the lug nuts on one wheel had come loose. Fortunately, the lift was not extended, so the machine only tipped a few inches when the wheel fell off.

Nobody was hurt, but it was clearly a safety violation that could have had serious consequences.

"Inspecting lug nuts is part of the required pre-task analysis," says Pat Butterfield, superintendent for Rudolph Libbe, the Toledo-based general contractor that hired the subcontractor. The worker, who was not in the sheet metal industry, was given time off for not following proper procedures.

John Nesta, training coordinator for Cleveland's Local 33 Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee, has been working hard to ensure the same circumstance won't happen on a sheet metal job site.

He heads a team of trainers who recently received international recognition for work to keep SMART members safe when using aerial/power lift equipment. In just one year, they licensed 25 percent of their members through American Work Platform Training (AWPT)—a rigorous safety program developed by the International Powered Access Federation (IPAF).

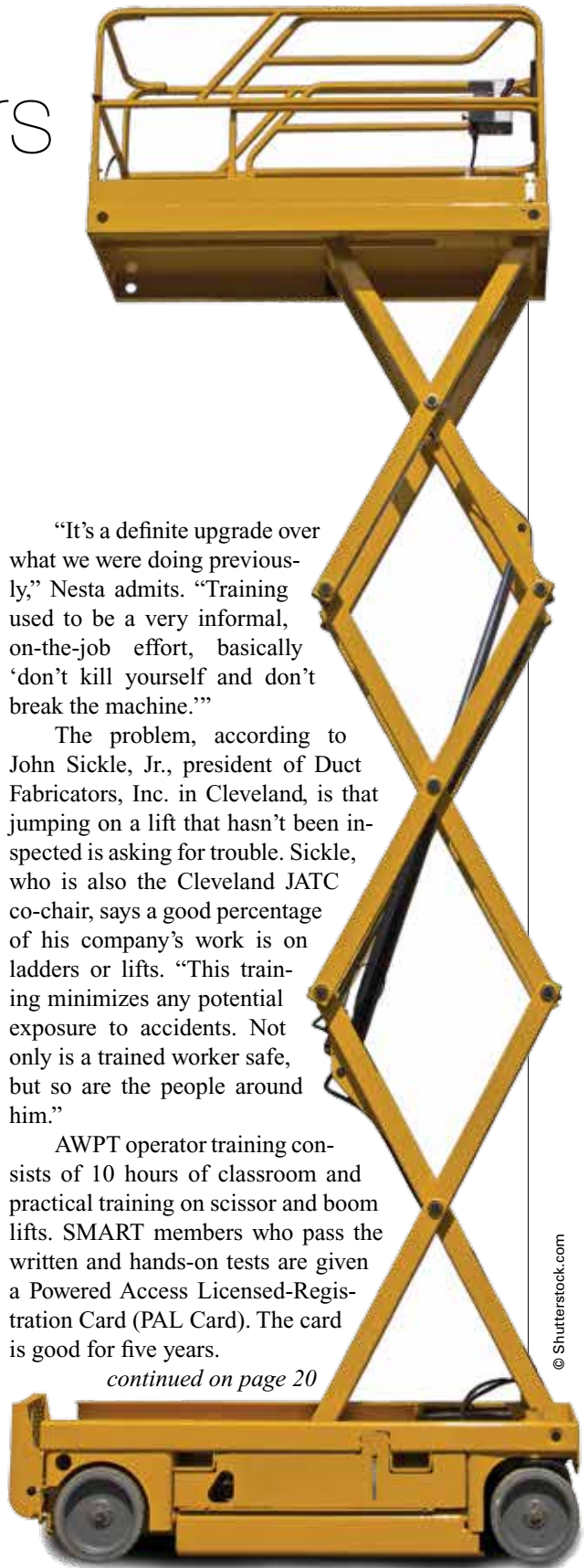
At the time of the award, the only SMART/SMACNA organizations approved to offer AWPT operator training were Local 33 training centers in Cleveland and Toledo and the Local 73 training center in Chicago. AWPT's comprehensive curriculum meets standards and requirements for both American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

"It's a definite upgrade over what we were doing previously," Nesta admits. "Training used to be a very informal, on-the-job effort, basically 'don't kill yourself and don't break the machine.'"

The problem, according to John Sickle, Jr., president of Duct Fabricators, Inc. in Cleveland, is that jumping on a lift that hasn't been inspected is asking for trouble. Sickle, who is also the Cleveland JATC co-chair, says a good percentage of his company's work is on ladders or lifts. "This training minimizes any potential exposure to accidents. Not only is a trained worker safe, but so are the people around him."

AWPT operator training consists of 10 hours of classroom and practical training on scissor and boom lifts. SMART members who pass the written and hands-on tests are given a Powered Access Licensed-Registration Card (PAL Card). The card is good for five years.

continued on page 20



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continued from page 19

By providing AWPT operator training, the JATCs in Toledo, Cleveland, and Chicago are offering their SMART members and SMACNA contractors another measure of safety and quality that separates the organized sheet metal industry from its non-union competitors. It also positions these organizations at the leading edge of safety standards that are increasingly being required by general contractors and corporate clients.

Nesta first heard about AWPT at the Eastern Regional Apprenticeship Conference. “After we were trained and approved as instructors, we were all amazed at what we thought we knew and didn’t know,” he says. “When they started talking about how wind speed can affect power lift operations, for example, we all had that deer-in-the-headlights look.”

Cleveland JATC initially trained Local 33 journeypersons and later made the program available to apprentices. AWPT is now required for all second-year apprentices.

“Feedback from our early training exposed a number of information gaps about the safe and proper use of aerial lifts,” Nesta says. “We know we can reduce—and, hopefully, eliminate—these gaps through AWPT.”

Nesta is extremely enthusiastic about AWPT, and he’s been sharing his excitement with other JATCs, such as Local 137 in Long Island, N.Y., which does a lot of elevated work in New York City. Pete Scaglione, financial secretary-treasurer and training coordinator for Local 137, says he immediately saw the value in working with AWPT and IPAF.

“AWPT is the best aerial training I’ve ever seen, and it’s a great addition to what we’ve been offering our members and apprentices,” Scaglione says. He expects to begin offering AWPT operator training in 2014.

Butterfield says Rudolph Libbe requires all subcontractors to submit proof of aerial lift training. “We don’t work with companies that have a poor safety record,” he says. “Better trained subcontractors are more competitive in the bidding process.”

More and more clients are developing increasingly stringent safety requirements. The Cleveland Clinic, for example, demands a 100-percent safe environment. To win work at the Clinic—Cleveland’s largest employer—“you have to be on top of your safety game,” Sickle says.



When training began, members who have been operating various lifts—scissor lifts, extension booms, articulated lifts—for many years were skeptical. But even they have been impressed with AWPT.

“I was a skeptic, but now I would recommend it to other members,” says Tom Kall, a Local 33 member who works as a foreman for Castle Heating and Air. “It’s a good mix of practical knowledge and theory that makes you more marketable.”

Something he was surprised to learn was the importance of model-specific familiarization as a supplement to operator training. “I had no idea that the guys dropping off a machine from a rental company were supposed to offer familiarization,” he says. “I probably never had familiarization, even though I’ve accepted machines dozens of times.”

Kall, who has been using power lifts for about 20 years, is a big believer in taking advantage of training opportunities. “Training and knowledge makes us better,” he says. “It separates us from other contractors.”

Sickle agrees. “We don’t want to do just the minimum. We want to far exceed the minimum to deliver a top-quality product and put our general contractors’ and owners’ minds at ease.” ■

Grieco is a freelance writer based in Blacksburg, Va. For more information about American Work Platform Training, visit www.awpt.org or email tony.groat@awpt.org.

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 Builders Exchange. Thus, when SMART and SMACNA broached the idea of a meeting to learn more about how the sheet metal industry works, 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.”

continued on page 22



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continued from page 21

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.

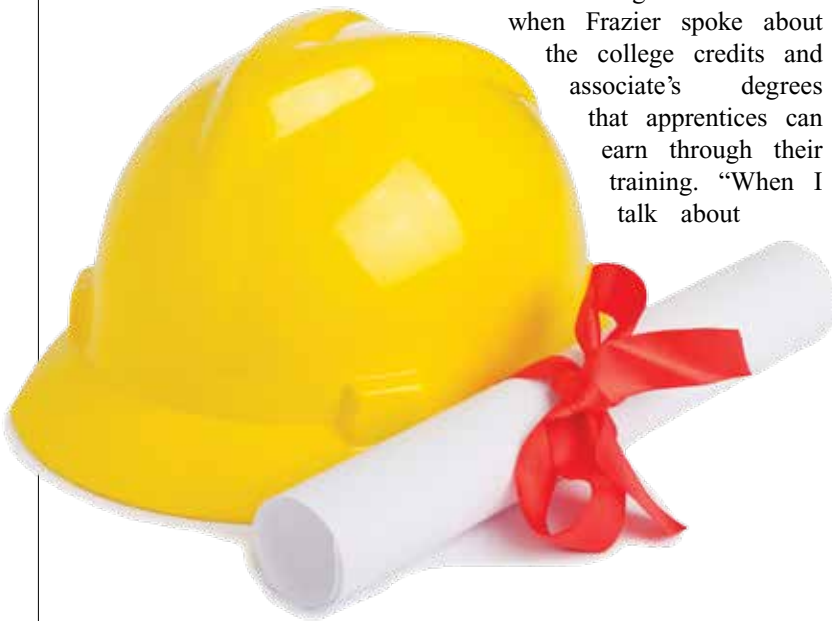
According to Hammond, Messer's people were quite engaged by the presentations and demonstrations. "They asked questions that indicated they were listening and they wanted to know more," he says.

"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 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 degrees that apprentices can earn through their training. "When I talk about



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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 Builders 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.

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Oklahoma Adjusts Apprenticeship— Two Generations, One Goal

By Nic Bittle

AT A SMACNA BOARD MEETING in Oklahoma City, Okla., the following questions were on the table:

- Who will be the industry's next leaders?
- What generation will fulfill workforce requirements?
- What will happen to our company, and our industry, and the union (SMART Local 124) if the next generation of talent is not prepared for the challenge of change and the tasks ahead of them?

Answers? The room grew very quiet.

Soon afterward, the conversation shifted from “We can’t afford to train this next generation of leaders” to “We can’t afford not to!” One participant summarized it: “If we’re going to provide a superior service, we must take the necessary steps to ensure we are working with a superior work force!”

Not Like Us

How can the industry accomplish the objective of superior service? A shift in mindset and a commitment to a long-term solution is an investment that will pay—in many ways—for years to come.

Like many other markets across the United States, Oklahoma City has begun to see a decline in the education of journeypersons graduating from the apprenticeship program. Although their technical skills may be sufficient, new graduates seem to exhibit attitudes, habits, beliefs, and behaviors that are not consistent with the work ethic and work effort of generations past.

While it’s easy to fit large groups of people into cubbyholes, it seems to many that the typical “Generation Y” apprentice—born between 1980 and 2000—is of a different stripe.

These individuals run their lives with a different mindset than those in the “Baby Boom” generation. And it’s the Boomers who run the majority of construction companies.

It’s not an exaggeration—or a gloomy assessment—to conclude the recruiting, attracting, training, managing, and motivating today’s workforce is far different than in years past.

Communicating Across the Gap

So how do we bridge the gap between the generations? Working together through their JATC, Local 124 and SMACNA of Oklahoma brought in a consultant—me!—to assess the situation and provide a solution.

My proposal was a three-step process outlining a path for the present and the future:

1. complete an assessment of the current apprenticeship program,
2. develop and implement a curriculum, using a pilot semester, and
3. roll the customized curriculum out to all students in the apprenticeship program.

Moving Forward

After careful assessment, we determined to include
continued on page 24

continued from page 23

four content modules in the pilot semester:

- professionalism,
- communication,
- entrepreneurship, and
- leadership.

These modules focus on best practices—from improving communication, leadership, listening, conflict resolution, and financial skills to developing integrity and character, showing respect, taking initiative, and enhancing courtesy and general appearance.

There’s never been a better time to rethink and retool the educational curriculum to cover both the technical and non-technical requirements of the job to create better leaders and managers—and take advantage of the unique talents inherent in members of Generation Y.

Along the way, sheet metal contractors and SMART leaders in Oklahoma City came to these conclusions:

- It is no longer good enough to just do the job.
- What got us here will not get us where we want to go.
- Now is the time to create a different approach to creating a superior workforce.

“If we’re going to provide a superior service, we must take the necessary steps to ensure we are working with a superior work force!”

Fast Forward

Currently all four years of apprentices in Oklahoma City are going through this curriculum. Twice a month, they are participating in a remote lesson that is laser-focused on one of the four core competencies. Thus far, it is going well. More than 90 percent of the apprentices are actively engaged in the process and the material. Still, the question remains, are apprentices really transforming into leaders?

Current leadership in Oklahoma City understands that changing the mindset of an individual is no quick fix. At the core, what we are really doing is giving apprentices what they need to know and what they need to do in order to make better decisions in life and on the job. Thus, we did not expect to see any positive results within the first couple of years.

Perhaps we were too pessimistic.

Initial response by apprentices has been heartening. We’re already seeing behavioral changes in the apprentices. Many of them are considering the consequences of the decisions they make.

A few weeks ago I asked the apprentices what they have changed as a result of our time together. Below are a few of the responses that I received:

- “I have been working on saving money as best as I can. I’ve started bringing my lunch every day instead of going out to eat, which has saved anywhere from \$50 to \$75 a week. I never really noticed how much I spent on lunch and breakfast, but the extra \$200 to \$300 a month I am saving helps me chip away at my savings goals. I know it’s not much, but at least I’ve made a bit of a change for the good.”
- “I have consciously tried to make two changes as a result of our topic conversations. The most drastic would have to be understanding and altering how my body language affects the way others perceive my attitude. The other change is trying to accept criticism without taking it personally; and, in turn, trying to learn something from others’ criticism.”
- “My focus has been mostly on lesson one: Be the solution to every problem that we run across. It has paid off! I have had a great response from the foreman that I work for!”
- “Recently I had the opportunity to accept not-so-constructive criticism from my journey-person. As I was about to defend myself and snap back, I could tell by his demeanor—and the fact that we were in front of other journeymen—that if I were to take such action there would be no good ending in sight. I’m thankful for that lesson on body language because his face and his tone talked to me as clearly as if he were saying “this isn’t the time or the place to challenge me now!”

Most of the apprentices in Oklahoma City have sent me similar responses.

These changes have happened over the course of a few months. Imagine what can happen after each apprentice works through this professional development program for a few years! ■

To hear more about this process contact Nic Bittle at nic@nicbittle.com.

When It Works, It REALLY Works

Win-win stories of labor-management cooperation in British Columbia

By Cairine Caughill

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S SHEET METAL INDUSTRY has stayed fairly steady lately. “We’ve weathered the economic storm a little better than some areas,” says Jim Paquette, business manager of SMART Local 280. “There is mining, for example. Our industrial segment has picked up recently.”

It helps to be ready for such opportunities. “The membership is trained really well,” Paquette points out. “So they’ve been able to move from one area that’s cooling off into another that’s hotter.”

“Readiness” has also been a theme for labor and management in the province. They’ve crafted creative win-win solutions that allow the contractors to be more competitive and keep union members working.

Communication that goes two ways

Neil Deppiese, president of Horizon Metal Systems, is a member of the local SMACNA-SMART joint conference board. “You’ve got five owners sitting around with six union guys, and you’re finding ways to work within the four-year agreement,” he explains.

“Everybody throws different ideas out there and nobody takes offense. It may be odd, but we talk—and we do actually come up with things.”

Adds Bruce Sychuk, SMACNA-BC’s executive director: “It’s what we do on a day-to-day basis. We look at things as an industry, not ‘us vs. them.’”

A similar relationship exists between SMART Local 276 (covering Vancouver Island) and VISMCA (Vancouver Island Sheet Metal Contractors Association), according to Mark Curtis, business manager.

“It’s just part of doing business nowadays. The nice part is we’ve reached a point where contractors feel comfortable enough that they can pick up the phone and say, ‘Hey, here’s what I’m attempting to do. This is what I want to do.’”

Curtis doesn’t always say yes. “But there’s no wall between us. A lot of times we look at it and we go, ‘Yeah, we can do something. We can try to make it work.’ At the end of the day, all I’m trying to do is put my guys to work.”

Concrete examples of how B.C.’s labor-management cooperation works:

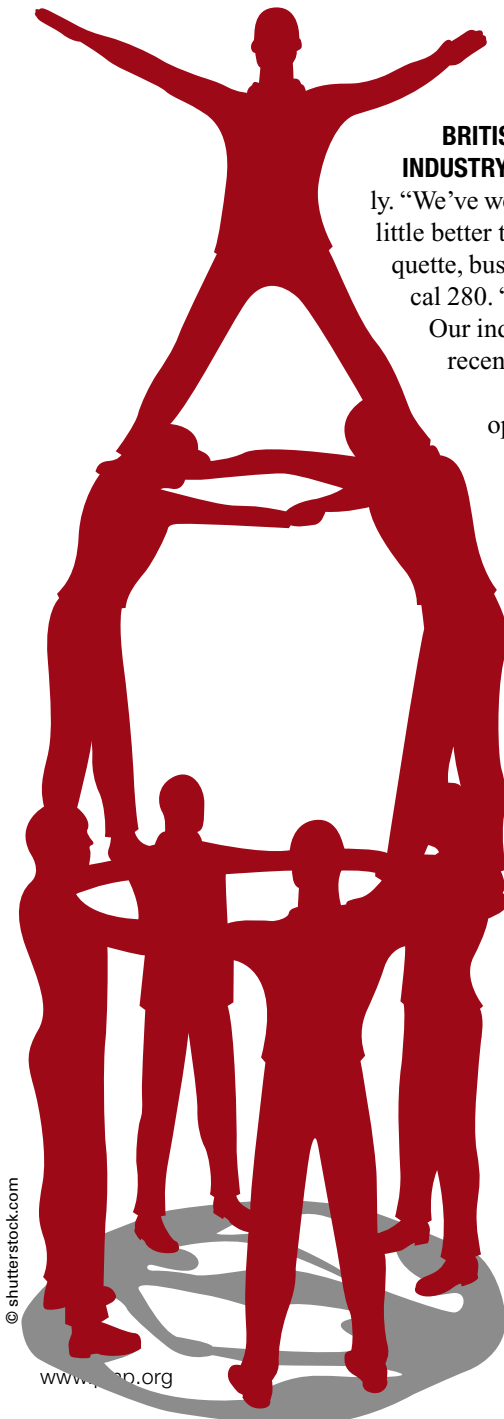
1. Helicopter base, Vancouver Island

Curtis wanted a union contractor to win here—a large, high-profile job. Additionally, the timing was good on his end. “When we looked at jobs coming out and timing, it would just fit. It was a really good space-filler for hours for us.” In this case, SMART helped out using market recovery funds and giving the contractor a couple of extra apprentices for the job.

2. Architectural project, Fort Nelson, B.C.

“The client had certain conditions regarding hours of work and rates of pay,” Paquette recalls. “Work-

continued on page 26



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continued from page 25

ing with the contractor that had been invited to bid the project, we were able to come up with a workable solution that modified overtime rates of pay with minimal effect on the membership. We also changed travel provisions so that the members were flown back home every two weeks for a rest break.”

3. Adjusting travel requirements

One contractor needed to win the job of roofing a new Walmart store (set to be built in Campbell River)—to have work over the winter. “Travel was becoming an issue. He can’t be competitive using our current travel arrangements,” Curtis says.

“The plan was—I’ll meet with my guys, and the contractor. The question was—‘Hey, what are we going to do here? We’ve got some choices.’ Now, we can either sit home and be unemployed . . . or we can maybe make a few less bucks a day—and get the work.”

Bottom line: With a combination of market recovery funds and no travel pay, the contractor was able to succeed—and Curtis’s members had work for most of the winter. ■

Caughill is a writer based in Ontario, Canada.

If the proof is in the pudding, pick up a spoonful:

Before starting the labor-management partnership, the unionized sheet metal industry on the mainland of British Columbia (Local 280/SMACNA BC) had 29 percent of the market share.

Today, estimates put that number at around 80 percent!

How Contractor Apollo Benefits

When Apollo Sheet Metal sought a large hospital project in Fort St. John—more than 900 miles north of its company HQ (Coquitlam, B.C.)—it was obvious that travel (and additional expenses) would need to be factored in.

However, Apollo’s costs could be reduced if local people were put to work on the project.

“Through organizing, we were able to locate some new members in the area to help them offset their costs,” reports Jim Paquette, business manager of SMART Local 280. “Apollo didn’t have to send as many people out, put them up in hotels, and provide living-out expenses. That was beneficial to them.”

Perhaps what’s more important, Paquette points out, is that Apollo’s executives “were comfortable giving us their requirements. They were comfortable with the people that we were able to find.”

Another Apollo project—a residential high-rise tower in Vancouver—is “the crown jewel of success” for cooperation, according to Paul Daniels, shop foreman at Apollo Sheet Metal. Daniels, a member of Local 280’s executive board, is also a pension plan trustee.

Why such a royal rating? Daniels says the project sticks in his mind partly because it happened in the B.C. partnership’s early days. “We were getting beat up pretty good by the non-union, and by allowing a

flexible work week—Monday to Friday, Tuesday to Saturday—to help with the concrete schedule, we basically took the market back.”

ECONOMY

continued from page 25

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