

# SMAC NEWS

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## THE BALANCING ACT TAKES CENTER STAGE WITH COVID-19

SMACNA testing and air balancing (TAB) members across the country now find themselves serving as essential service providers for hospitals and healthcare facilities.

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## Together, From A Distance

As I reflect on the past month and the impact the pandemic is having on all of us, I am struck by the broad spectrum of experiences our members are having across North America.

SMACNA recently held a virtual board update so we could all get the pulse of what our members are experiencing. I walked away from the call with two impressions. One, that we as an industry are faring well compared to many other sectors of our economy. Many are actively working (albeit partially), our bidding is intense, and our eyes are focused on the opening of the economy and what the job site will look like going forward.

And the second impression is just how unique the impact is to each individual contractor based on their geographic location, the services they provide, and the type of work their clients do. Layered on top of that is the difference in how the virus has hit each region and the local and state governments' reaction to it. For example, some cities, like Philadelphia, have been hit harder with up to one-third of workers out of work, but right across the state line in New Jersey, they are super busy. Here in the Bay Area, initially all jobsites shut down, then only coronavirus-related sites opened up until the 4th of May when they opened all construction (to our relief).

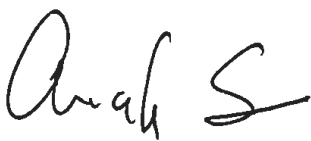
As we went through the call, some common themes were expressed:

- Like many other essential industries, we are also having trouble finding PPE equipment.
- Bidding activity is busy for most of our membership, with only a few exceptions.
- A few projects scheduled to start now have been put on hold, some indefinitely. This begs us all to assess how real is our current backlog of work.
- Staffing is a challenge with many choosing to stay home, whether it be out of fear or because of financial implications.
- For some there are significant opportunities in education and healthcare sectors — the former because it is quiet, the later for opposite reasons.
- Productivity is being significantly impacted as we adjust to new protocols: hazard abatement procedures, PPE requirements, and the limits placed on the number of workers working in close proximity to one another. If this is the new reality, it will have a noticeable impact on pricing of future work.

Like all of you, my partners and I have been grateful for the constant support and guidance from SMACNA through this crisis. SMACNA's staff has provided a steady stream of information and educational opportunities that directly helps all of us manage a business through this unprecedented crisis in our nation's history. From establishing new communications channels to scheduling webcasts, conference calls, and webinars, SMACNA is keeping us all plugged in and current.

I am sure during the coming months the fog will lift and we will have a much clearer view of the road ahead. I look forward to the opportunity to once again interact directly with SMACNA members and chapters as we share our best ideas for keeping our workforce safe and our businesses thriving in what will undoubtedly be a new reality.

Sincerely,



Angie Simon  
SMACNA President



### CAPITOL HILL UPDATE

#### Pension Reform Amid COVID-19 Legislative Frenzy

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting health and economic devastation has certainly diverted a lot of attention from the pension issue, but key members of Congress and staff have continued the negotiation process. In fact, there was an effort to get pension relief into the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

A majority of Senate Republicans and Democrats appear to support some type of relief

for failing multiemployer pension plans which, when they fail, will force the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) — the safety net for participants in failed plans — into insolvency itself. However, the two sides need to agree on the depth and degree of a rescue plan, including the amount of federal dollars that would be needed and on the structural reforms wanted by Republicans that they feel are necessary to avoid future plan failures.



## FEATURE STORY



*Poynter Sheet Metal of Greenwood, Indiana, was hired to convert patient rooms at an Indianapolis area hospital to negative air environments.*

Democrats did take a big step when the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee Ranking Member Patty Murray's (D-WA), CARES proposal included a PBGC partitioning plan rather than the House-passed Butch Lewis direct loans to plans. Partitioning is what Republicans proposed in the Grassley-Alexander reform plan in 2019.

Bipartisan agreement is key to getting a final bill, and when agreement on the amount of federal dollars that would go to the PBGC and other key details could not be reached, negotiations stalled. It is not clear whether agreement can be reached in time for pension reform to be included in any upcoming COVID-19 relief bills.

Composite plans continue to be in the discussion but are not driving the process. SMACNA's job is to let members of Congress know Composite Plan design must be included in any comprehensive pension bill. Too many multiemployer defined benefit plans are unstable and cannot be sustained, especially as we continue to see recurring volatility in the stock market and continue to lose contributing employers.

SMACNA remains active on this issue

and encourages every SMACNA member to contact members of both parties in both the Senate and the House to urge pension reform that includes Composite Plan design as a voluntary option for plans. Composites require agreement by labor and management to be implemented.

The hybrid design takes the best features of the Defined Benefit (DB) plan model and the Defined Contribution (DC) model for an improved secure retirement option for the future, while also ensuring that no participant would lose benefits from their frozen legacy DB plan.

SMACNA will also be working with the NCCMP and others to secure temporary relief for plans similar to plan relief enacted after the 2008 stock market plunge which allowed plans to temporarily freeze their zone status and curtail the impact of investment losses on actuarial value of assets.

*To learn more about the Composite Plan design, visit [smacna.org](http://smacna.org). To contact your congressional representative, visit [ContactingCongress.org](http://ContactingCongress.org) or [contactingcongress.org](http://contactingcongress.org). For further information on Pension Policy, contact Dana Thompson, policy specialist in SMACNA's Capitol Hill office, at [dthompson@smacna.org](mailto:dthompson@smacna.org).*

# Negative Air Creates Positive Environment for COVID Patients

## Mission Critical

As medical facilities deal with an unprecedented influx of patients in the wake of a global pandemic, SMACNA contractors that specialize in negative airflow HVAC system installation and maintenance are in high demand.

When an Indianapolis area hospital needed to quickly overhaul its HVAC system to maximize rooms for COVID-19 patients and prepare for the inevitable surge, they reached out to SMACNA contractor Poynter Sheet Metal. Employees at the Greenwood, Indiana-based company worked overnight fabricating and installing ductwork to meet the hospital's emergency timetable.

And when the owners of a medical facility in Albuquerque, New Mexico, wanted to change the air pressure in some of the patient rooms to limit the spread of contagious viruses like COVID-19, they hired Energy Balance & Integration, another SMACNA contractor.

As the United States and much of the world works to stop the spread of coronavirus, an illness that currently has no vaccine or cure and only limited treatments, many hospitals are expanding

operations and converting underused areas into patient rooms. In many cases, even after such efforts, demand for hospital beds still exceeds available supply. So local governments are transforming buildings such as hotels and convention centers into makeshift treatment centers.

But when dealing with a highly contagious, airborne pathogen such as coronavirus, installing patient areas is a lot more complicated than just placing beds and privacy curtains on a floor. In many cases, treatment facilities including units and sometimes whole floors must be placed under negative air pressure to prevent the spread of contaminants. Typically known as isolation rooms, the HVAC systems that serve these areas are designed to remove viruses and exhaust them outside while preventing the contamination of adjacent spaces.

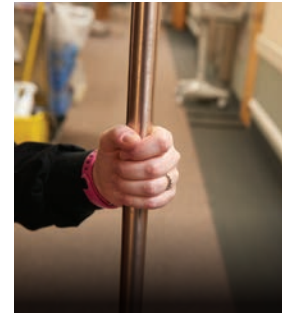
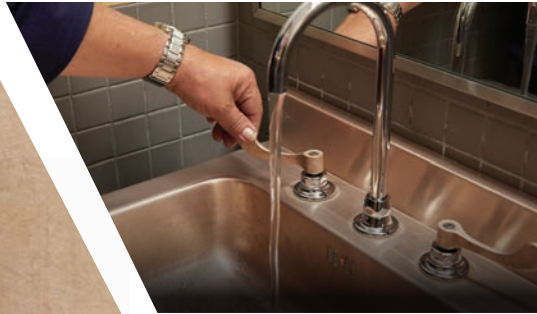
## Needed Expertise

That's where the expertise of SMACNA contractors such as Poynter and testing and air balancing contractors like EB&I comes in. Companies that have extensive experience working in health

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Some areas in public buildings, such as this handicap access automatic door button, are repeatedly touched by people daily. Installing hardware that contains copper alloys can reduce the spread of viruses, bacteria and fungi, researchers say. Pictures courtesy of Copper Development Association.



## Copper: A Shining Example for Germ Fighting

As scientists look for ways to battle the highly contagious coronavirus directly through vaccines, other researchers are studying a metal which goes back thousands of years as a way to potentially prevent its spread in everyday settings.

With experts saying a vaccine for COVID-19 is unlikely for at least a year, what if increased use of a common metal could help slow the virus' spread now?

It's a question more medical experts are asking after a study recently published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* titled "Aerosol and Surface Stability of SARS-CoV-2 as Compared with SARS-CoV-1" attempted to determine how long the novel coronavirus could live on surfaces typically encountered by the public in a normal day.

The study, conducted by government and university scientists, said COVID-19 could survive for 24 hours on cardboard, two to three days on plastic and stainless

steel surfaces, and just four hours on copper.

The fact that coronavirus doesn't last as long on copper surfaces is not a surprise to those who study the naturally occurring metal and its related alloys. Copper's antimicrobial properties have been known for thousands of years and were exploited by the ancient Egyptians and Greeks. Since 2008, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has allowed the registration of more than 500 antimicrobial copper alloys, permitting public health claims that the metals are capable of killing harmful bacteria.

Larry Peters, a project manager with the Copper Development Association and expert in architectural metals and the unique health properties of copper, agrees. Although the natural disease-fighting capabilities of copper are not surprising to many researchers, the broader medical community may not be as aware of them, Peters said.

"We've seen muted success in the hospital and health care mar-

kets, where much of the industry's product development was initially targeted," he said. "There is general awareness by health officials and the construction industry regarding the antimicrobial properties of copper alloys, but there is a need for more education on how to practically implement antimicrobial copper surfaces in building designs and health care systems."

Considering that there are numerous surfaces in every hospital — from call buttons and tray tables to railings and switch plates — that are repeatedly touched by patients, visitors and staff, it would seem like health care facilities are ideal for copper's antimicrobial applications. That position is reinforced by numerous studies, Peters pointed out.

"There is an extensive body of peer-reviewed evidence spanning several decades that demonstrates the broad-spectrum antimicrobial efficacy of copper alloys against viruses, bacteria and fungi," he said. "Antimicrobial copper offers a proven, attractive, cost-effective solution to reducing health care-acquired infections, patient in-hospital stays, and treatment costs due to infection."

The worldwide awareness among researchers and the public that viruses such as COVID-19 can survive and spread through high-contact public areas offers an opportunity to raise the profile of copper among the health care community, Peters said.

"One thing we can do to short circuit the chain of infection is to

strategically deploy continuously active copper alloy surfaces in high-touch areas," he said. "By depleting the reservoir of pathogens in the built environment, we can reduce the risk of transmission."

And unlike social distancing and frequent hand washing, Peters added, copper and its alloys work to fight disease without depending on humans to follow guidelines, making them an ideal supplemental line of defense.

As experts in indoor air quality and building environments, he said sheet metal contractors have an important role to play in this educational effort.

"SMACNA contractors have a new weapon they can deploy and advocate for in the fight against infectious disease," Peters said. "Incorporating antimicrobial copper alloys into product and system designs provides 24/7 public health protection. Heat exchanger fins, ductwork, drip pans and other HVAC components can be a breeding ground for human pathogens. Utilizing copper alloy materials in HVAC components can help reduce the potential transmission of pathogens in these systems."

Just like H1N1, SARS and Spanish flu, it's unlikely that coronavirus will be the last pandemic to impact the world's populations. The CDA says copper can be an integral part of efforts to contain and combat such illnesses.

"We have only scratched the surface, and more facilities and industries will need to embrace

*continued on page 12*



The main supply air duct for tent No. 2 is lifted into position.



Partitions create patient rooms inside of the hospital tent. The facility now houses 1,000 patient beds.



Heritage night shift foreman Steve Zambryski wears a protective mask at all times while working on the job site.

# Contractor Completes COVID-19 Facility in Just 21 Days

According to Jeff Porrello, the president and CEO of Heritage Mechanical Services, a New York City-area contracting company, its work on an emergency COVID-19 facility was more than just another project to him and his staff.

Employees at the full-service mechanical contractor in Farmingdale, New York, 40 miles east of the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S. — know plenty of people who have been affected by the virus. Too many, according to Porrello.

“It’s very, very personal,” he said. “My father passed away on April 9 from COVID. My dad had been around this company for a long time. A lot of the senior, and even the younger staff, knew him. It was tough.”

Despite those kinds of emotional setbacks, and even a few employees who caught and have since recovered from coronavirus, Porrello and the rest of the staff at Heritage Mechanical are working

on critical infrastructure projects to help the region cope, if not conquer the illness.

The company recently completed its work on a 1,000-bed temporary hospital erected by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Stony Brook University’s Long Island campus. The tent hospital project, along with another in Old Westbury, New York, is part of an effort by state and federal officials to increase the number of hospital beds available to treat COVID-19 and non-coronavirus patients in the region displaced by all the beds required by Coronavirus patients.

The temporary medical facility comprises five military-style field tents, with a 44-unit HVAC system designed by local MEP engineering firm Jaros, Baum and Bolles to isolate the most contagious patients from others in the hospital. Each unit produces up to 18,000 cfm.

### A Tight Timetable

Working under a large, well-known New York City-based

general contractor, Turner Construction Co., Heritage was given just 21 days to fabricate and install 210,000 pounds of 18-gauge, rectangular, lined ductwork for the makeshift hospital which incorporates X tents in a compound-like setting. Work began March 29. More than 100 Heritage Mechanical employees were involved in the project.

“We’ve been in some interesting builds over the course of my career, and this is probably one of the most difficult, basically because of the timeframe,” Porrello said. Meeting that kind of tight timetable required 12-hour days at the Heritage’s sheet metal shop in Farmingdale, and working well into the night at the construction site. Also making duct for the project were SMACNA members Eastern Sheet Metal and FRP Sheet Metal, both of Long Island. The first shipment of ductwork arrived April 6.

As a design-build project on an emergency schedule, Porrello said the facility was literally being

designed as it was being built.

The New York region’s early spring weather didn’t help the schedule. Three days of rain and wind gusts of over 30 miles per hour threatened to delay the project.

“It got really cold at night,” Porrello said. “One day, they shut the site down. It was just dangerous. We had 70-mile-per-hour gusts, and they didn’t know what was going to happen with the tents.”

### Staying Safe, Staying Healthy

Looming over the project, even more than the storm clouds, was the threat of COVID-19 infection. Being from the New York area, every employee understood the dangers of contracting the highly contagious virus. Heritage took extensive precautions, including checking the temperature of everyone at the job site before the start of every shift, mandating social distancing and the use of protective gear.

As a member of the EMCOR Group, Porrello said Heritage was always able to secure the masks

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# Wi-Fi Becoming the Standard for Home Thermostats

**W**ireless networking technology, or Wi-Fi, has changed many aspects of our daily lives — from personal computing to television viewing to backyard grilling — that it comes as no surprise Wi-Fi is impacting the heating and air conditioning industry as well.

Like other Wi-Fi technology, a Wi-Fi thermostat connects to a home's wireless network. Residents can then use an app on their smartphones and tablets to check and adjust the temperature in their homes. In other words, no more getting up from the couch to fiddle with the thermostat. They can also use the app to control and monitor the temperature when they're not home.

"Using the app is basically like

standing in front of the thermostat," says Jim Klopfenstein of Oregon-based Day Heating & Cooling.

A decade ago, consumers could search out Wi-Fi thermostats for their homes, so long as they were willing to pay a hefty price for the new equipment. At that time, the difference between a unit enabled for Wi-Fi and a regular thermostat could be hundreds of dollars. "You had to be a diehard techie to want to go that route," recalls Klopfenstein.

### The New Standard

The ubiquity of Wi-Fi technology has played a major role in bringing the cost of wireless-networked thermostats down dramatically. Scan through the options at a local appliance or big box store and you find that a Wi-Fi-ready thermostat today costs

only \$10 or \$15 more than one without it. In fact, Day Heating & Cooling doesn't even offer non-Wi-Fi-ready units anymore. "At that price-point difference, it's just easier to do it that way," says Klopfenstein. "If customers don't want to hook it up, they don't have to."

As would be expected, thermostat manufacturers have refined Wi-Fi technology significantly. According to Klopfenstein, early models tended to monopolize networks' bandwidth and could be interminably slow in how they

like burst water pipes. They can also program the systems to provide them with notifications when the temperature of the house drops below a certain level.

Klopfenstein points out that manufacturers could even use the Wi-Fi technology to keep an eye on the servicing needs of furnace units from afar, although he says customers probably aren't comfortable going that route yet. Nevertheless, Wi-Fi thermostats will only become more popular as more homeowners and landlords install smart home

**SCAN THROUGH THE OPTIONS AT A LOCAL APPLIANCE OR BIG BOX STORE AND YOU FIND THAT A WI-FI-READY THERMOSTAT TODAY COSTS ONLY \$10 OR \$15 MORE THAN ONE WITHOUT IT.**

transmitted information to connected devices. Those drawbacks don't exist with newer models.

For snowbirds who travel to warmer climates for long periods during the year, a Wi-Fi thermostat can be especially useful for keeping track of their home furnaces...and finances. The same goes for people who own vacation homes. By checking for updates on their apps, they can detect breakdowns while they're away and head off catastrophes

assistants like Amazon's Alexa and Google's Nest technology. "So many things require a Wi-Fi feature to tie them into smart home hubs now," he notes, "that people are coming to expect Wi-Fi for their thermostats."



DAY HEATING & COOLING  
[www.dayheating.com](http://www.dayheating.com)



The sheet metal shop at Partlan-Labadie in Oak Park, Michigan, has been much quieter due to a ban on "nonessential" work.



An apprentice wears a face covering while fabricating and sorting hanger supports. Partlan-Labadie Sheet Metal Co. in Oak Park, Michigan.

## Symptoms of a Slowdown?

**T**he spread of a highly contagious virus has forced many industrial SMACNA contractors to adapt to a suddenly uncertain future.

In his 25-plus years in the HVAC industry, Craig Pessina has never seen anything like the current business climate.

What had been a robust local construction market quickly skidded and then stopped as the worldwide coronavirus pandemic enveloped southeastern Michigan, where Pessina's industrial HVAC company, Partlan-Labadie Sheet Metal Co., has operated since 1889. The state's governor ordered all but a handful of "essential" businesses to close in mid-March as Michigan became a hot spot for COVID-19 cases. That quickly put a stop to a number of the company's projects.

As Partlan-Labadie's president, Pessina is used to the boom-and-bust cycles of the region's automotive-dependent economy, but the sudden fall took him by surprise. "I have ever been through anything like this, per-

sonally or professionally," Pessina said. "If anybody has, I haven't talked to them."

Pessina is far from the only SMACNA member trying to adjust to a post-coronavirus environment. Across the country, contractors are tearing up business plans and trying to figure out a sustainable way forward. Now, as the country makes its first steps toward reopening after weeks and months in limbo, many SMACNA companies are unsure just what a recovery will look like. President Trump has directed the nation's governors to establish their own criteria and timetables for reopening shuttered businesses and construction projects based on COVID-19 case numbers and the abilities of area hospitals to test and treat patients.

Many SMACNA contractors are still trying to figure out what it will all mean for their businesses. At Partlan-Labadie in Oak Park, Michigan, some employees were still working throughout the shutdown thanks to health care projects that met the state's definition of critical infrastructure, but

the sheet metal shop is quieter than it used to be, Pessina said.

A lot of contractors that specialize in industrial sheet metal develop decades-long relationships with clients, becoming the go-to company anytime their large manufacturing facilities need HVAC service or other types of work. In some cases, these contractors know the plants almost as well as the clients that own them, and they depend on the steady work those relationships provide. The sudden shutdowns related to coronavirus have thrown a kink into that business model.

Like in a lot of states operating under broad stay-at-home orders, many of Partlan-Labadie's industrial projects are not considered essential by state officials, which means work stopped in mid-March. Much of the construction across the state is at a standstill, and the impact on the industry was almost immediate.

"I would say that we're down probably about 70 percent from a staff standpoint, especially on the labor side," Pessina said, adding

that shop employees who were not laid off are working 40 hours a week while trying to minimize the spread of COVID-19. "We are taking a lot of precautions in following the guidelines of social distancing and making sure our parts and products are clean and disinfected."

Regardless of how clean his shop is, Pessina said he worries the business of getting paid soon won't be so tidy. Talking to other local contractors, Pessina said several of them are worried that collecting payment for work already completed could be a problem if the region's economy doesn't quickly bounce back. "What's really going to be difficult is a couple months from now, because typically our receivables are 60-day or 90-day pay terms," he said. "So right now we're still being paid for projects that we did back in December and January."

But by June, getting paid for work done in February, March or April could be challenging, Pessina said.

For now, officials with Partlan-Labadie say they are hoping to avoid cash flow problems — and the layoffs that often follow — with some help from the federal government. The company is among the SMACNA members that applied for the U.S. Small Business Administration's \$660 billion Paycheck Protection Program. Aimed at businesses

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## COVER STORY

# THE BALANCING ACT TAKES CENTER STAGE WITH COVID-19



*Matt Sano,  
President*

*continued from page 1*

While companies were busy adjusting operations and learning to adapt within the new COVID-19 environment (and its impact on businesses, employees) at the start of the pandemic, many SMACNA members like Fisher Balancing Company in Williamstown, New Jersey, had a team assembled and ready to go for essential work at hospitals in their markets. For Fisher Balancing Company and other TAB contractors, responding to testing and balancing needs in this pandemic is just like any other day — almost.

### **Fisher Balancing Company as an Expert**

Fisher Balancing Company has long been an expert in the industry as a certified member of the National Environmental Balancing Bureau (NEBB) and the Testing, Adjusting and Balancing Bureau (TABB). For more than 20 years, the company has worked with building owners, maintenance personnel, engineers, construction managers and mechanical contractors across numerous industries to provide customers with balanced systems and resources to meet their HVAC and environmental needs. The company performs important testing and balancing work

year-round that is especially critical in the healthcare space, as it makes the air as safe as possible while preventing the unnecessary spread of contagions like COVID-19.

As hospitals continue to turn hundreds of individual rooms into isolation rooms, or COVID-19 suites, testing and balancing professionals are now among the first people called in to ensure the air in each room never enters another room, protecting the health and safety of patients and healthcare professionals. That is where TAB contractors like Fisher Balancing Company come in.

### **Pandemic Work Being Done**

During the pandemic, Fisher Balancing Company technicians are flipping standard ICU rooms into negative air pressure rooms. They do this by modifying airflow, switching rooms to have negative pressure, and verifying the number of times air changes in the room to ensure overall health and safety. In fact, Fisher Balancing Company has a calculation to find air change per hour in a cubic foot and assess how long it takes for air to settle to determine the necessary time to flip patients in a room for constant use.





*Lohr, a TAB technician working at hospitals and in healthcare facilities, wears full protective gear on the job.*

**“THIS IS  
WHAT WE’VE  
ALL TRAINED  
FOR.”**

—JENNIFER LOHR



*Jennifer Lohr (r) with her sister, Lisa, who also works in the sheet metal industry.*

The CDC recommends that single-patient airborne infection isolation rooms, or AIIRs as they are called, have negative pressure relative to the surrounding areas. Air should be exhausted directly to the outside or filtered through a high-efficiency particulate air filter directly before recirculation. This guidance is in place to isolate people with a suspected or confirmed airborne infectious disease and help minimize person-to-person transmission.

“This is what we’ve all trained for,” said Fisher Balancing Company employee Jennifer Lohr.

As a journey person by trade specializing in air balancing within hospitals, Lohr has had 13 years of training and expertise. Airflow maintenance and room pressurization aren’t different from her day-to-day responsibilities, but in a global pandemic, she is tasked

with flipping many rooms in a short amount of time. For the last several weeks, she and her colleagues have been pulling 14-hour days, a few 24-hour shifts and are permanently on-call at several area hospitals and healthcare facilities.

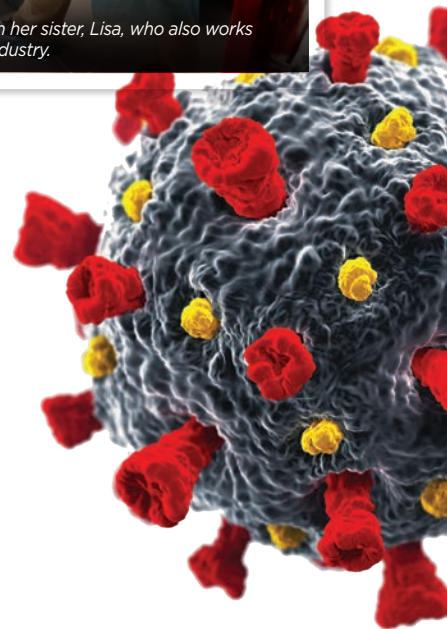
“Usually, we are the last people involved in a construction project before the owner takes occupancy,” she said. “No one sees us — sometimes they call us the ‘Air Ninjas.’ Now, we are the first person in, and people are turning to us first to flip COVID units on a tight schedule and keep the air properly maintained for patients, doctors and nurses.”

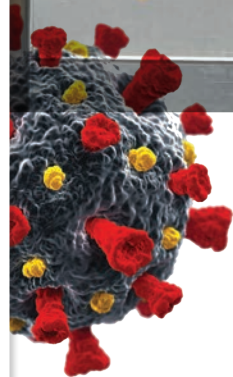
Fisher Balancing Company has existing relationships with regional hospitals and an understanding of the mechanical systems of those facilities. Since customer service is a priority for the company, it de-

livers when healthcare customers ask for help — especially for something like COVID-19.

#### **How Fisher Balancing Company Is Staying Safe**

To ensure safety of its technicians as well as those in the hospital setting (including doctors, nurses, patients and caregivers), Fisher Balancing Company has implemented several safety policies and protocols in line with CDC guidelines and also provides testing equipment and transportation for workers.





**“AT ALL TIMES, BUT ESPECIALLY DURING COVID-19, OUR EMPLOYEES PUT A LOT OF PRESSURE ON THEMSELVES TO DO GOOD WORK AT THESE HOSPITALS BECAUSE THEY KNOW IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE.”**

—MATT SANO



Technicians are more cautious and careful working within a compressed schedule, practicing social distancing, taking shifts to complete work, and utilizing appropriate personal protective equipment while on the job. Many have established an after-work routine to sanitize clothing, put belongings in a sterilizer, and take a hot shower before seeing their families. This is something Lohr was doing long before COVID-19 given her constant work at hospitals surrounded by germs and contagions.

**Results and Recognition for a Job Well Done**

Testing and balancing is critical for hospitals and healthcare facilities to maximize the effectiveness of their existing HVAC systems and the need for this essential work will only increase as the pandemic evolves. It is far from over, but if you talk to Matt Sano, president of Fisher Balancing Company, about the work being done and progress he has seen from his team thus far,

he only beams with pride.

“At all times, but especially during COVID-19, our employees put a lot of pressure on themselves to do good work at these hospitals because they know it makes a difference,” said Sano.

Sano isn't the only one supporting his employees. In fact, doctors and nurses recently gave Fisher Balancing Company technicians a standing ovation for their work on a COVID-19 floor. While it may seem like a small token of appreciation, receiving recognition from frontline healthcare workers is humbling and goes to show how essential the sheet metal and HVAC industry — and its professionals — are in times of need.

Sano sees this pandemic work as an opportunity to highlight a career that many people didn't know about before and point to a different type of essential work. “Knowing our employees are helping as many patients and healthcare workers as possible makes it worth it,” said Sano.



FISHER BALANCING COMPANY  
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LET'S TALK SHOP PODCAST  
<https://smac.news/episode-12>

# Negative Air Creates Positive Environment for COVID Patients

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care facilities and certifying the performance of the HVAC systems hospitals contain are finding their work in urgent demand. In fact, at a time when many states are forcing businesses to temporarily close to limit the spread of coronavirus, the work performed by SMACNA members with expertise in HVAC system testing, adjusting and balancing (TAB) has been deemed “essential” and therefore exempt from such regulations. In many cases, the work is absolutely vital.

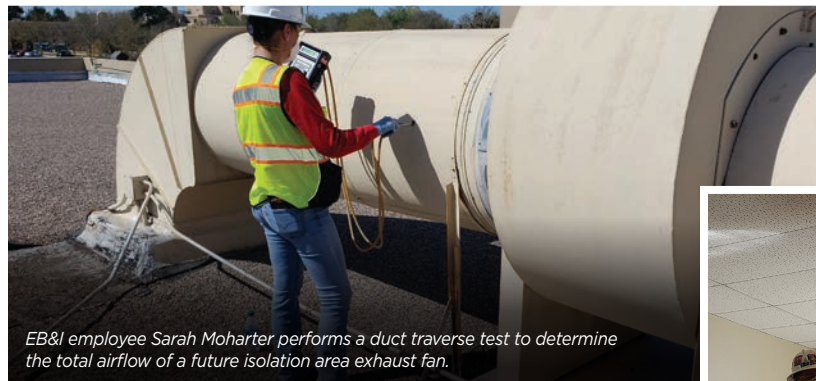
Eli Howard, SMACNA’s executive director of technical services, said that with the years of specialized training they complete, it’s understandable that the association’s members are currently involved in so many important health care projects. “It’s critical to make sure that these facilities are up and operational and they’re able to be maintained from an HVAC standpoint during this pandemic,” said Howard.

## Emergency Projects

Just ask Joseph Lansdell, the owner and president of Poynter Sheet Metal (and 2016-17 SMACNA president). His company has been on the frontlines of the Indianapolis area’s fight against COVID-19.

Poynter was recently brought in to install negative air spaces for COVID-19 patients at a local hospital after a water damage restoration company could not complete the project. Poynter, which works closely with a local testing and balancing contractor, had previous experience converting large sections of hospital facilities to negative air environments.

Since the Indianapolis area was seeing a surge in coronavirus cases at the time, the hospital needed the spaces converted to negative pressure as soon as possible. Poynter immediately brought in a crew, decked in personal protective equipment (PPE), to handle the project. They completed the work



*EB&I employee Sarah Moharter performs a duct traverse test to determine the total airflow of a future isolation area exhaust fan.*

in a matter of days.

“We ended up fabricating ductwork and installing throughout the night to create the negative air space,” Lansdell said.

Despite the deadline-driven nature of hospital work in the current crisis, Lansdell said his company still tries to find the best solution for customers. That was the case when officials at the same hospital contacted Poynter a few days after its all-night work to install the negative airflow environments.

This time, officials said the hospital was at capacity and in need of even more negative air spaces. Their idea was to have Poynter install an extensive network of fans, eliminating some private and semi-private hospital rooms in the process.

Poynter officials told the hospital that wasn’t necessary. Because of Poynter’s lengthy track record doing hospital air pressure projects, the company said it had a solution that would be easier to install and work better.

“We said you could just sacrifice one room or one area and create the negative fan room out of it, and then run the duct over the top. And you have one filter that takes care of multiple rooms,” Lansdell said. “And so we ended up going back in the very next weekend and converting and expanding their negative air space.”

## Increasing Demand

About 1,300 miles away, Anthony Kocurek, the owner of Energy

Balance & Integration, is also seeing an increase in demand for his services. At a time when other businesses in New Mexico are shut down and furloughing workers, the Albuquerque company, like Poynter in Indiana, has also been deemed critical by state and local officials.

For Kocurek, it’s meant the slowdowns related to coronavirus affecting so many construction firms haven’t hit his TAB company, which counts a lot of the large hospitals in the region as among its clients.

“We’ve not really felt any kind of a hiccup so far,” Kocurek said. “In the last two weeks, our workload has really increased because of the work that they want to do in these hospitals. I’m probably going to be hiring a couple of apprentices because we’ve just been tagged to try to convert an old hospital here into an emergency isolation setup for COVID-19.”

Ventilation protocols designed to prevent disease spread don’t do much good if the HVAC systems necessary to ensure they’re being followed aren’t working properly — and that’s where EB&I comes in.

“We fine tune it so that the airflow values, the air changes in each of these rooms are what the engineers designed for,” Kocurek said.

Just like at Poynter, many of these coronavirus-related conversion projects that EB&I are involved in require employees to

*Below: Richard Stoltenberg of EB&I measures supply airflow into a Gibson patient room using a flow hood.*



take precautions to prevent disease spread. While working while wearing protective gear is nothing new for EB&I employees, Kocurek said every facility is slightly different when it comes to the health and safety protocols hospital administrators want them to follow.

Kocurek said his employees are understandably worried about working in environments where there are known COVID cases, but no one has turned down any assignments.

“They have a heightened awareness of what’s going on,” he said. “They do a lot of communication with people at the hospital to ensure that we’re not crossing paths. All of the guys I’ve talked to are kind of excited about being able to do something positive and help out.”



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## Showing Up as Your Best Self

The default response for many leaders in our industry is toward action. So when a crisis hits, whether internal or external, investing even more time, even more emotional intensity, even more brute force seems like the obvious move. And while action will most certainly be required, there's another response that many of us never consider.

Every person who's ever flown in a plane knows the standard speech about what to do if the oxygen masks fall from the overhead compartment. "If you are traveling with a child or someone who requires assistance, secure your own mask first, then assist the other person."

The same principle applies to leaders during challenging times. If you don't take care of yourself first, your ability to take care of others will inevitably be compromised.

Every leader knows what it's like to show up with our best self. And we know what it's like to show up with...let's call it our tired self. When we are at our best, people thrive. Maybe you notice you think better, are more patient, have more energy to give, and are able to really focus on the people and issues before you in those moments. However it looks, we magnify the accomplishments of others when we show up as our best version of ourselves.

But when we're showing up tired — sleep-deprived, out of shape, restless, impatient or worried — relationships suffer. People grow tentative, afraid of making a mistake and potentially facing our wrath. We can become overly cautious in making decisions, waiting for more information. Our judgment becomes impaired, wisdom and insight diminish, and thought leadership evaporates. This is how our tired self actually diminishes the accomplishments of others.

Leaders can maximize their effectiveness simply by taking the measures necessary to show up each day, as much as they can, with their best selves.

If our respective organizations are to survive the days ahead, our job is to magnify the work of everyone and detract from no one. That means taking care of yourself first so your best self shows up every morning.

How can leaders do this? Some of the answers are obvious—exercise, sleep, spiritual nurturing, and paying attention to your emotional health. But let me offer just three more that aren't as obvious.

### Find a balancing source of hope and optimism

In an age of 24-hour sensational news, it's easy to be bombarded with worst-case headlines. How much so-called news do you actually need in any given day? Social media can be even more of an energy drain, if that's something you consume. Much has been written

about the effect of blue light from phone and laptop screens and how it affects our ability to sleep.

No one is advocating for sticking your head in the sand and avoiding the hard truths of our current reality, but at some point, enough is enough. We all need something to bring balance back to our inner world. For some people, religious faith is that source of hope. Others have daily practices like meditation or "think time" set aside, which can be cleverly disguised as an early morning walk with the dog. Still others find 30 minutes of laughter from a favorite sitcom to be the medicine they need to sleep at night. Get creative and find a source that fills your tank with hope and optimism, then share those resources with others.

### Bring Clarity about Direction

Consider the military leader in a combat unit. He or she cannot know the outcome of the battle to come. At the same time leaders must be crystal-clear about how they are going to engage. In times of uncertainty, people need clear direction. If we hesitate, we create more uncertainty. (If you need inspiration here, reread the leadership classic *Certain Trumpets* by Garry Wills.) Hesitancy can be a sign that we've forgotten our deepest purpose and values. True clarity comes when we process decisions with our minds aligned with our true north.

### Pay Attention to the Cost of Decision-Making

One of the most draining experiences a leader faces is the endless list of hard decisions. By definition, a crisis calls for hard decisions now to avoid even greater losses later. This is an opportunity to invite a trusted few to help think through those decisions. Many leaders of industry have formed "war rooms" to discuss the tough issues they're facing. Others form "tiger teams," a small unofficial group of trusted advisors (both internal and external). Some bring on outside directors to their board for the same reasons. This allows others to help carry the weight of responsibility and join in the eventual celebration of survival. And when those hard decisions must be executed, particularly those that involve people's livelihood, be clear, concise, and compassionate.

None of us know how this will turn out, but we can all agree it is a fundamental shift for our world, our industry, our companies, and our families. Regardless of what happens, being confident that we brought the best of ourselves to the battle is an outcome worth striving toward.

*Ron Magnus, managing director of FMI's Center for Strategic Leadership, with Ed Rowell, CSL consultant.*



## ARCHITECTURAL

*continued from page 4*

the capabilities of antimicrobial copper materials to help mitigate the impact of future outbreaks and pandemics," Peters said. "We'll need to think differently about how we can 'vaccinate' the surfaces in our environment through the strategic deployment of scientifically proven antimicrobial surfaces like copper alloys."



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## HVAC

*continued from page 5*

and other personal protective equipment workers needed.

"We have a distinct advantage being an EMCOR company," he said. "National purchasing helps in securing masks, sanitizer, everything that we need."

Even with those precautions, several employees requested not to work on the project, Porrello acknowledged.

I mean, you can't make them do it. And I understand exactly how they feel," he added. "Just about everybody in Suffolk County (where Heritage is located) has been impacted one way or another" by the virus.

Despite the challenges, Heritage met its deadlines and the Stony Brook facility admitted its first patients at the end of April.

"The workers did a great job," Porrello said. "It was a monumental undertaking. I'm really proud of these employees for what they have done, and in a time period that would have been difficult for a lot of people."



## Covid-19 Ripple Effects: Turning Crisis into Opportunity

We all knew it, we all talked about it, and statistically speaking, it was only a matter of time. We all remember the tech bubble bursting in 1991, the dot-com bust of the early 2000s, and the banking collapse of 2008, but this pandemic is an absolute shocker. The U.S. economy was on a roll, the stock market was at a record high, and unemployment was at its lowest point when COVID-19 hit. For many, the ripple effects will be dire. Lost income leads to an inability to make rent, pay the bills, and put food on the table. That happens up and down the economic food chain, and we are now headed for a cyclical shift into the recession we all expected was coming. Some companies will get stronger, some weaker, and some will fail.

That said, there may be a different story for our construction industry.

Business challenges are nothing new to entrepreneurs, and failure is more about attitude than results. We measure success with perseverance, creativity, adaptability, early mornings, late nights, and hard work. The question is, what should we be looking for during this inevitable turnaround?

What can we do as construction business owners, post-pandemic, to survive and thrive while the country climbs out of this mess? We can prepare for the ripples and make the most of this opportunity. Here are three benefits to consider in this uncertain time: new work, new organizational arrangements, and new systems.

### Take Advantage of Stimulus Programs

The federal government is funding state, county, and city coffers. In past recessions, the government pumped billions into the economy to stimulate growth. This time, they are pumping *trillions* (with a T) into new projects. There will be new public works, airports, schools and hospitals

to build, along with military base projects, and money available to fund them. When cash is cheap — and it has never been this cheap — people will borrow to build.

Construction companies that build or maintain large public projects should see increased opportunity. Some deep-pocket hotels are using the time to repair, remodel, and upgrade while closed. Those that deal with tenant improvements will also get a burst as the tenant turnover will require new spaces, new designs, and unique layouts. Commercial and industrial buildings formerly housing three tenants will convert into five or six smaller units for the business owner that now has employees working from home.

### Evaluate Your Organizational Structure

Take some time to examine your organizational chart; evaluate both your star players and your bench. Who are your A, B, and C players? Anticipate what the company's future staff needs will be and retain, train and hire accordingly. Your employees are doing the same thing. They are watching the business to see if it's going to go down, survive or grow. Now is the time to trade up and draft players that can grow with you as the market improves.

### Work on Your Business — and Yourself

According to Mark Augusten of California Sheet Metal, the coronavirus crisis is the perfect time to work “on” your business, and not just “in” it. “We are using this time to look at past practices, systems, and people and then ask ‘why?’ We’ve found old, slow iPads being used by the field, disorganized project folders, and other inconsistencies. We’ve even thought, ‘maybe we don’t need so many meetings.’”

Take time to evaluate all aspects of your

business. Get your senior management team together and do a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis for each department. Use the exercise as team building; connect with your employees, show appreciation for their work, and evaluate where you can improve. Focus on technologies that make you leaner. Consider different marketing platforms like Salesforce and Zoho and build out that customer database that's been on the project list. Evaluate project management tools like Asana, and data storage tools like Dropbox and Kobox. Examine HRIS, HRM, and benefit admin platforms, create SOPs or training videos to educate your staff. Improve your Excel skills, learn how to set up a video conference, or become an expert on your accounting software.

The ripple effects of COVID-19 will continue well into 2022 and beyond. As the world adapts to the new normal — whatever that turns out to be — business owners need to get ahead of what's coming. Focus on your best clients while looking for new opportunities and your best employees if looking for new talent. Improve your business systems as you prepare to grow your company.

We all know that history repeats itself, and we will be back to full force at some point in the future. We are resilient, creative, and hard-working. For business owners and workers alike, failure is not an option. Making the most of this time will make you better, faster, and leaner when it's time to start to grow again. For Augusten, “this is our time to lean out, be smarter, and not just keep doing what we always do.”

*John Ovrom is the founder and CEO of Exit Consulting Group.*



### INDUSTRIAL *continued from page 7*

with fewer than 500 employees, it provides low interest rate loans up to \$10 million to cover payroll and other operating debts for up to eight weeks. If employers do not lay off any workers during

that time, the loan and any interest is forgiven.

Since it was announced, the program has been inundated with applications from construction companies and other businesses.

The program was so popular, the initial \$349 billion budgeted for it quickly ran out. An additional \$310 billion has been added, which some experts say still isn't enough to help the country's small businesses.

Pessina isn't surprised at the program's popularity. “We're all in this together,” he said.

As of April 20, Partlan-Labadie was still waiting to hear if its loan had been approved.



## Mobilizing for the Future: Asset Management

As the world experiences increased uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of the construction industry in maintaining a robust civil infrastructure has been heightened. Many strategies that allow contractors and craft workers to thrive in normal socioeconomic conditions are still the cornerstone to maintaining a competitive advantage in the pandemic era. More than ever, companies are focused on creating safe environments for employees, securing jobsites from external threats, and elevating productivity for all levels of their organization.

Establishing a robust asset management strategy strengthens all facets of a construction organization. Asset awareness includes the allocation of site materials, consumables, accessories, equipment, fleet vehicles, and now, including handwashing units. Whether rented, owned, or charged straight to a project, asset management directly impacts the bottom line. Accurately maintaining inventory streamlines spending and decreases waste, which is more important than ever as contractors seek leaner operations.

Providing assets as needed by workers ensures teams are empowered and productive. As construction labor is often one of the highest project costs, confirming that a crew has the right tools and materials in the right place at the right time is paramount to a successful operation.

When strengthening an existing asset management program, examining the current process for material flow is an integral first step. The importance of fundamental techniques such as shifting from a paper-based tracking system to a digital platform cannot be overstated. Increasing visibility through a digital workflow enhances understanding of delays, pain points, and opportunities for improvement. Once a stronger level of transparency is achieved, the following tactics can be applied to substantially optimize asset deployment:

**1. Kitting** is a material management strategy designed to create a comprehensive “kit” of supplies for site installation. Kitting reduces project delays, on-site labor costs, and can be accomplished by a third-party vendor or internally leveraged through a warehouse or tool crib. When kitting directly through a supplier like Graybar, costs are reduced while the ease of order-

ing large quantities of components from multiple sources is improved.

**2. Direct delivery** of materials, tools, and equipment to a jobsite streamlines workflow by ensuring that assets arrive at the site at the appropriate time. By utilizing just-in-time delivery services such as RenoRun, materials can be ordered by the pallet to reduce downtime and ensure workers can focus on their primary field work with minimal interruptions.

**3. Equipment rental** is often advantageous for high-priced and specialized equipment needed directly for a project. Reduced visibility of inactive rental equipment on a site creates financial risk and can be alleviated with UR Control from United Rentals.

**4. Jobsite security** is a paramount concern as COVID-19 leads to more site shutdowns and reduced workforces. Jobsite cameras like those provided by Sensera Systems provide a comprehensive solution for remote site updates when workers are there, complete with real-time alert monitoring. Visual documentation provides opportunities for risk management on a site.

These methods ensure the right supplies are available for workers on active projects. Dedicated asset management systems are also paramount in providing accurate, real-time

Fast Solutions give workers instant access to consumable materials, allow contractors to monitor specific usage by employee IDs, and are completely supported by a third-party distribution team.

Tool and equipment platforms provide dedicated inventory movement and champion tactical, data-driven decisions to increase productivity and efficacy. The Milwaukee Tool ONE-KEY system is comprised of software and connected hardware devices backed by the industry’s largest tracking network.

Machine security systems provide control over equipment operation based on who can access a machine and when. Integrated into the electronics of heavy-duty equipment, systems like the Caterpillar Machine Security System leverage employee ID information for tool access based on training and compliance.

Fleet management software includes real-time GPS tracking, vehicle performance data, and maintenance information. This allows full visibility into vehicle behavior and lifecycle. Programs like Verizon Connect are instrumental in improving vehicle dispatch, routing, and location awareness.

Proper visibility into asset flow can be greatly assisted by implementing construction technology in the form of hardware, software, and best practices to strengthen inventory process-

**“AS CONSTRUCTION LABOR IS OFTEN ONE OF THE HIGHEST PROJECT COSTS, CONFIRMING THAT A CREW HAS THE RIGHT TOOLS AND MATERIALS IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME IS PARAMOUNT TO A SUCCESSFUL OPERATION.”**

information to drive critical project decisions. To determine the appropriate workflow for an asset, consider whether it is bought as a reusable corporate asset to return after job completion, charged to a project, rented for a project, or meant to remain on site upon project completion. The solutions listed below support tracking and managing inventory for multiple project components, including site materials, PPE, accessories, equipment, and fleet vehicles:

Material vending machines allow for streamlined point-of-sale access to everything from saw blades to PPE. On-site devices like Fastenal

es. As with all efforts that utilize construction technology, considerations must be taken for the priorities of an organization, current solution maturity, and the highest likelihood of return on investment. Above all, asset management must be viewed as a method for providing worker support, supplies, and advocacy. During this uncertain period — and at all times — healthy, safe, and skilled workers are the most valuable output that any construction organization can build.

*Tauhira Ali is senior manager of construction technology at Milwaukee Tool.*



Jason Watson (I) has been named SMACNA's executive director of labor relations.

## PROMOTION

### Jason Watson Promoted to Executive Director, Labor Relations

Jason Watson has been promoted to executive director of labor relations at SMACNA National effective April 26. He previously served as director of labor relations at SMACNA for more than 15 years. He has over 20 years of experience in labor relations and government affairs.

Mr. Watson has successfully and consistently helped SMACNA members resolve challenging labor related issues and disputes. "Jason has the optimal mix

of experience, knowledge of our industry and a deep commitment to serving the interests of SMACNA contractors," said Vince Sandusky, CEO of SMACNA.

Mr. Watson holds a Bachelor's degree from Cazenovia College and a Master's degree from the State University of New York at Utica-Rome.

*For more information about SMACNA's work in the area of Labor Relations, visit [smacna.org/labor](http://smacna.org/labor).*

## MEMBERS

### Welcome New SMACNA Members

Best Clima Engenharia E Instalacoes Ltda.	Sao Paulo, Brazil
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## SMACNA 2020 Associate Members

### PLATINUM



### GOLD

SMACNA welcomes new Gold Associate member Procore of Carpinteria, CA.



### SILVER

SMACNA welcomes new Silver Associate members Empower Air Technologies of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and Production Products of Charlotte Hall, MD.



SMACNA's Associate Member program provides an opportunity for industry suppliers to build long-lasting relationships with SMACNA members, the industry's premier contractors. To learn more about becoming an Associate Member, visit [smacna.org](http://smacna.org) or contact Scott Groves at [smacna@naylor.com](mailto:smacna@naylor.com).



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### MAY 2020

#### May 21

Small Business Contracting  
*Webinar*

### JUNE 2020

#### June 1

Council of Chapter Representatives  
*Virtual Meeting*

### OCTOBER 2020

#### October 18-20

Planning Your Exit and Business  
Valuation Program  
*San Diego, CA*

### FUTURE SMACNA CONVENTIONS

#### September 27-October 1, 2020

77th Annual Convention  
*The Broadmoor  
Colorado Springs, Colorado*

#### October 24-27, 2021

78th Annual Convention  
*Mauai, Hawaii*

#### October 23-26, 2022

79th Annual Convention  
*Marco Island, Florida*

#### October 15-18, 2023

80th Annual Convention  
*Phoenix, Arizona*

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