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Communities Rise to the Top

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Pushing out and reaching up

SMACNA and SMART work together

Success as organized sheet metal workers and signatory sheet metal contractors is possible as we embrace a high-performance standard, develop a long-lasting commitment to excellence and teamwork, demonstrate focus and perseverance, and have a willingness to change as technology and new market conditions require. John Foley’s keynote speech at the 2018 Partners in Progress Conference made those points clear, as covered in the article found on page 12 of this issue.

Foley, former lead pilot for the Blue Angels, reminded us that we can only develop the trust required to make these things happen by showing competency, commitment, character, and consistency. “Competency means you have to be good at what you do. Character means you right, no matter what. You must also have a deep commitment to go beyond what the job requires and what it takes to create excellence. Finally, consistency means you have to show up with your ‘A’ game every, single day.”

High performance is required not only in how we perform on the jobsite, but also in bidding on contracts in new markets, spreading the word about the value of our expertise in existing markets, and in working together to ensure we are competing on a level playing field. Thus, the project labor agreement that labor and management were able to negotiate in Seattle is helping contractors and their union labor keep busy on projects such as the baggage system at Seattle-Tacoma International. Read more in the story on page 8.

It is also vital in our efforts to recruit and retain a strong workforce into the future. Finding craftsmen who will replace those who are retiring and perform at a superior standard is not as easy as it once was. That is why we are finding it more and more necessary to reach outside of our comfort zones and identify those who might not realize the opportunities we offer.

Contractors and Locals in Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and beyond are increasingly forging alliances with inner-city organizations and developing pre-apprenticeship programs that help both the building trades and members of disadvantaged communities. Local 100 Business Representative Tom Killeen is excited about these programs. “It’s what unions are all about: helping people at the bottom rung,” he says in the article on page 4.
Unions and contractors are increasingly forging alliances to develop strategies that will hike recruitment levels. Daunting at times, it requires a strong will and a creative approach.

By / Don Procter
Mike Skraba, training coordinator for Local 73 in Chicago, knows that well. He regularly meets with coordinators from various building trades in Chicago to share ideas.

But Skraba goes one step further. He sits down with community groups, including a church on the south side of Chicago that has built a solid reputation for funnelling young African Americans of various economic backgrounds into the fold.

That church – St. Paul Church of God in Christ Community Development Ministries, Inc. (SPCDM) – puts young people through an intensive 12-week pre-apprenticeship course that prepares them for entry into a trade apprenticeship program. To date it has helped more than 200 young people find jobs in various building trades, including sheet metal. “It doesn’t sound like a lot, but the challenges (including funding) have precluded us from doing even better,” says Pastor Kevin Ford.

According to Ford, who says Skraba at Local 73 has given his unmitigated support, plans are afoot with the Local to place a number of St. Paul’s pre-apprenticeship grads in sheet metal in 2019.

The church takes an holistic approach to its curriculum, covering such topics as time management, agility, academic and communication skills, and even de-sensitivity training so students can “grasp the culture of construction,” explains Sarrah Fridge, St. Paul’s director of training and counselling services. “We get them ready for all the things they could otherwise trip and fall on.”

The success of the pre-apprenticeship program has St. Paul looking to “stairstep out,” says Pastor Kevin Ford, SPCDM. “We believe the model is one that would be well appreciated throughout the building trades across continental United States and Canada.”

Some of the church program’s applicants don’t have driver’s licences or they lack requisite reading and math skills while others – including a graduate of the University of Illinois and a few school teachers – “just needed to be brushed up,” Ford says.

Support for the program has come from many sources including builders like Chicago HVAC contractor The Hill Group, which has presented safety classes and other sessions that support the curriculum.

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Skraba says screening for apprenticeship entry at Local 73 solely consists of an aptitude test. There are no personal interviews, adds Eric Olson, organizer for the Local. “It is strictly merit-based: how well you do on the test.”
A pressing shortage of labor in Los Angeles has bolstered SMART Local 105’s efforts to look to tough neighborhoods for new recruits. A few years ago the Local trained about 100 apprentices annually; this year the number is about 320, says Steve Hinson, Local 105’s vice-president and assistant business manager.

But finding willing recruits from disadvantaged neighborhoods is one thing, preparing them to pass the apprenticeship entry exam is another. This is why the Local organized a three-step class in South El Monte and Riverside County that covers information young people need to know to meet the apprenticeship exam requirements. “Some of these kids didn’t grasp these skills in high school. Many didn’t graduate from high school,” Hinson says.

The Local’s apprenticeship graduation rate is 81 percent, and many of those grads are from tough neighborhoods. Hinson attributes the high success rate to careful screening, sound on-the-job training, and the education provided by the JATC.

Hinson says wages and benefits (including free education) in the sheet metal trade draw many young people who were making low pay in dead-end jobs. Local 105 collaborates with the SMACNA-SOCAL chapter contractors on recruitment efforts, including job fairs.

Victor Covarrubias got lucky when he found a career in the sheet metal trade. Raised in a tough neighborhood in North Hollywood, California, where drugs and crime were common, he followed the path of friends and family members into the world of street gangs when he was a young teen. “I liked the lifestyle,” he says. “It was all I knew.”

Over the years, Covarrubias even got used to jail time. “People looked up to me after I came out of jail,” he says. “It made me feel strong.” But after spending time behind bars five times and watching his wife walk out on him, he realized the toll of his unhealthy lifestyle.

In his late 20s he started taking odd jobs for non-union HVAC contractors, but they were low paying and training was minimal. Fed up, one day he met with a union rep for SMART Local 105. “I was really honest about my life and told him I wanted something better and I didn’t want my kids to grow up like I did,” Covarrubias says.

It was a turning point in his life. The business rep got him an interview with SMACNA contractor Acco Engineered Systems, and he was hired the next day. Covarrubias says his wages nearly doubled overnight as he began his sheet metal apprenticeship.

Now 45 and still at Acco, he is a journeyman and a foreman leading a crew of 15 at a 55-storey mixed-use complex in downtown L.A.
Tom Killeen, business representative for Local 100, and others say some of their best apprentices come from rough backgrounds, often having served time in jail. He suggests their success in the field could be because they see a trade as the next step in their rehabilitation.

Married with four kids, he credits the union and Acco for helping turn his life around. “What I like to tell young people is nothing is impossible,” Covarrubias says. “I came from nothing, and now I have everything.”

Outreach initiatives into tough neighborhoods are not new at Local 100 in Washington, DC. “It’s what unions are all about: helping people at the bottom rung,” says Tom Killeen, business representative. But those efforts can be a struggle because many residents don’t have access to transportation; many others lack a positive role model to help them succeed in the field.

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SMACNA and SMART have produced a video about the field in the DC area, he says. Collaboration is integral to recruitment success and a growing focus is on young people with backgrounds in technology to meet the changing work environment.

“If the kids in disadvantaged areas don’t take advantage of technology, they are going to be left behind in 10 years,” Killeen says. ■
The familiar crash, boom, bang of construction activity is alive and well at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport right now. Recent increases in passenger traffic have made it the ninth busiest airport in the United States, which in turn has made big projects like an upgrade to its outbound baggage handling system a definite need.

“There’s lots of cool things we did,” says Apollo Account Executive Scott MacColman. “Wish I could tell you more.”

Details of the multi-year baggage job are scant because a lot of the work is happening in highly secure areas, but he does know that when it’s done, the baggage system will be able to handle 60 million pieces of luggage a year or about 20 million more than it does now.

He also knows that the project is keeping contractors like SMACNA’s Apollo Mechanical busy and unions like SMART’s Local 66 actively filling their needs.

Another thing MacColman can confirm was the placement of two 4,000-pound air handling units through a hole in a wall and over existing pipes and tanks. “It was a very difficult and painstaking operation to make everything fit in the space that we had,” MacColman says.

According to MacColman, what helped was having Local 66 guys on the job. “They know airport work well, they always do a great job, and they’re quality people. If we didn’t have airport experience or experienced workers with us on this job, people who are used to working at the airport, we would have fended poorly. We wouldn’t be where we’re at in terms of the schedule.”

MacColman gives credit to two additional people who he says are deserving of special attention—superintendent Troy Barry, who has worked at the port for two decades and provided invaluable knowledge that would have been missing otherwise, and foreman Mike Cota Robles.

“Mike was a new foreman to Apollo, and he did an excellent job,” adds MacColman. “He did a lot of creative hand designing and made great recommendations to the engineering firms to turn their conceptual drawings into actual constructible drawings.”
Along with filling those manpower needs with experienced sheet metal workers, Local 66 played another key role here: helping negotiate and administer the five-year project-labor agreement (PLA) with the Port of Seattle (the airport’s owner/operator) that governs recent major projects like the baggage system upgrade.

“It was a total team effort on this PLA,” says Local 66 business agent Sam Hem. “We take turns going to port commission hearings to talk about the importance of PLAs, and we sit in those negotiation sessions to make sure our members and our contractors are represented when they get the work. We’re securing the playing field.”

Getting Seattle-Tacoma airport work generally happens by one of two means. Either contractors work directly with the airport on more service-related jobs like upgrading or replacing emergency service equipment. Or, as is usually the case with Apollo, they get maintenance and facility work through different general contractors who have contracts with the Port of Seattle.

Either way, any project that costs half a million dollars or more right now is covered under the PLA that Local 66 helped secure. That includes the baggage optimization project, which is estimated to cost about $320 million once it’s done in 2023.

Other than the baggage system upgrade, Apollo has worked on everything from food court buildouts to the control tower reconstruction to the new International Arrivals Facility at Seattle-Tacoma. “We’ve been involved with pretty much all aspects of the airport,” MacColman says.

As for the future of Apollo and Local 66 working together at Seattle-Tacoma, it’s already happening. Those big increases in passenger traffic mean that a few other large projects are already underway or soon will be.

One of them is the most complex capital development project in the history of the airport — the construction of a new $968 million International Arrivals Facility that will increase passenger capacity by more than double.

Another is a five-year, $658.3 million expansion and renovation of the North Satellite terminal, which, when it’s done, will feature a new upper level mezzanine with open circulation areas, natural light, and a new full-service dining venue with dramatic airfield views.

A third is the ongoing dining and retail improvements that could increase dining and retail square footage at the airport by 35 percent by 2025.

Apollo is already at work on some of these projects, and it expects to be awarded more, particularly more of that restaurant work. No doubt Local 66 will continue to provide them with some of the best manpower in Western Washington, says Sam Hem.

In the meantime, Local 66 is busy negotiating a successor project-labor agreement with the Port of Seattle for at least $700 million worth of upcoming work. Not only will the airport be included in that, but the seaport as well, meaning all of the marine infrastructure that the port owns.

In other words, that familiar crash, boom, bang of a hyper-active construction industry will continue to reverberate well into the 2020s at the Port of Seattle. “It’s a good time to be here,” says MacColman.

Jordan Whitehouse is a freelance business journalist from Vancouver, British Columbia, who writes for magazines, newspapers, and online publications throughout Canada and the United States.
The Lincoln High School Engineering and Construction Academy in Stockton, California, is helping build a skilled workforce for the United States construction and trades industries.

In collaboration with industry partners, Jeff Wright, award-winning teacher and general contractor, founded the academy in 2010, believing college is not the only successful career path for students and that the building trades are for everyone.

Students take traditional classes in the comprehensive high school while receiving instruction through the academy in four career areas: residential and commercial construction, construction technology, cabinet making and woodworking, and mechanical construction.

When Michael Mark graduated from Lincoln High in 2001, the academy hadn’t yet been officially founded, but through mechanical construction classes already in place, he recognized his opportunity for a career in the sheet metal industry. Over the next 17 years, he worked his way through apprenticeship to foreman in the field to his current position as business representative for Local 104. In addition, Mark serves as president of the San Joaquin Building Trades Council.

“This program gives kids an opportunity to see there is a true career path in the construction trades,” Mark says. “Twice a year I present to students and inform them about apprenticeships, how they have a leg up on the pathway to success as they gain better knowledge of their chosen industry.”

A great deal of credit for the program’s success goes to industry in its continuing support. “Through memorandums of understanding with the laborers’ and carpenters’ unions, grads can bypass the initial pre-apprenticeship program and go to work directly with our business partners,” explains Dave Dabaco, one of the academy’s four dedicated teachers. “It’s awesome how so many contractors and companies – more than 150 – are willing to step up and invest in these kids.”

“Working through the public school system means all kids have access to this training,” Wright says. “When they graduate senior year, they receive their high school diploma and a Certificate of Completion sponsored by the Builders’ Exchange of Stockton and endorsed by hundreds of developers and builders in the area.”

From the beginning, Matt Smith, owner of Smith Heating & Air Conditioning, has been a huge supporter through his company and his involvement in SMACNA. “SMACNA contractors and the SMART Local here continue to support the program,” he says. “We’re in constant communication with the academy, providing funding and ensuring they get the materials they need for projects.”

The entire construction industry is involved and excited about the program. Recently, the International Code Council (ICC) delivered new code books to the school. Simpson Strong Tie Company Inc. has donated lumber and offers scholarships and job opportunities to kids pursuing careers in the building and trades industries.

“Over the past eight years, scholarships funded by supporters, including SMART and SMACNA, have totaled at least $200,000,” says Dabaco. “These range from $500 to $1500 and go to kids entering a four-year institution or to buy boots and work clothes for those moving directly into the trades.”

Other scholarships through the Introduction to Construction Engineering class cover the cost of driver’s education and getting a driver’s licence so students are work-ready.
The generosity and support of industry doesn’t stop there, explains Wright. “Donaldson Company Inc., an international sheet metal fabricator, gave us more than $15,000 as a grant. We’re really excited to be able to buy a new digital readout machinist lathe (DRL) and still have money to put towards mechanical construction costs.”

To help fund their programs, students make and sell doghouses, sheds, and furniture. With the recent purchase of a CNC plasma cutter, they can now add iron and metal products to their list of projects.

“We’ve been very involved with building the newly finished training center,” says Smith. “It’s a huge, completely weatherproof structure with unfinished interior walls exposing all the electrical, plumbing, heating, and air conditioning. Underneath, the floor is open so students see everything that goes into a building, learning first by installing and then by removing all the systems for the next class.”

Wright notes how the academy struggled at first to keep classes full, but now almost 600 students are registered. “We’ve ‘regrown’ to two sections of construction technology and two of mechanical construction, and might soon expand to three full sections of mechanical—this is unheard of at the high school level.”

The Jim Lambert Exchange Design/Build Competition is hosted by the Sacramento Regional Builders’ Exchange. At this year’s 32nd annual event, after designing and submitting original plans, 28 teams from across California had two days to build a shed from scratch. Putting all their training to work, the Lincoln team took the top prize—Best of Show.

“We’ve become a model program with people coming from all over the nation to tour and see what we’re doing,” says Dabaco.

“The local SMACNA and SMART continue to support the program. We’re in constant communication with the academy, providing funding and ensuring they get the materials they need for projects,” says Matt Smith, owner, Smith Heating & Air Conditioning.

Two years ago in Sacramento, Robert Fong, owner of RFK Consulting, along with several local labor unions founded Mechanical Electrical Plumbing (MEP) Career Pathway Academies to fund a similar construction academy program in a local high school. With Wright consulting on the process, the school’s existing shops became a design center equipped with computers and technical equipment used today in construction, and this year the Rosemont High School Engineering, Construction & Design Academy opened with its first 144 students.

The success of the Lincoln High School Engineering & Construction Academy is bringing new optimism to an industry struggling with a decreasing skilled workforce. Helping young people understand the options for successful careers in construction and the trades is one of the best things that can be done for the future of the construction industry.

Read more about the program at Lincoln High School in Partners in Progress November 2017 issue on page 10

From her desk in Calgary, AB, Canada, Deb Smith writes for trade and business publications across North America, specializing in profiles and stories within the hospitality, food service, mining, recreation, and construction industries.
High-performance Teams

The airspace where anything is possible

By / Jessica Kirby

John Foley is a retired lead solo pilot with the Blue Angels—a United States Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron whose mission is to inspire a culture of excellence and service to country through flight demonstrations and community outreach. Foley's vision to become a Blue Angel was born when he attended a demonstration as a child and was immediately fascinated. Hard work, dedication, and resilience helped him realize his dream and now, as an acclaimed speaker and educator, he brings the message of what he's learned about high-performance teams to audiences across the United States, including delegates at the 2018 Partners in Progress Conference.

Foley describes high-performance as a mindset, a process, and a state of being that accelerates everyday achievement. “Individuals and teams that embrace high-performance begin a journey toward excellence and elevated execution that has the power to carry them beyond their dreams,” Foley says, hoping his experience will trigger others to take action and rethink what they believe is possible.

His key message to labor and management at the conference was all about the elements needed to create high-performance teams and organizations in all capacities. “There are certain qualities and characteristics that work no matter what organization you are talking about,” Foley says. “There is a framework and vehicle I like to call the combination Diamond Performance Framework and Glad to be Here® mind set, which starts with the old strategic management theory—vision, plan, execute, feedback loop—but includes a stronger, more powerful tool for individuals and teams that work in any situation, whether on opposing or the same side.”

The theory begins with the concept that progress and collaboration aren't singularly about vision, but about commitment and buy-in to a vision. Thinking about the collaboration of management and labor, it's about whether the parties have a coherent, single vision or two separate ideas about the way things ought to be.

“You have to come to some clarity about what you are trying to do,” Foley says. “Start with things both sides are similar on, like having a great product or giving a great experience for the customer or owner, or making a difference in people's lives. Then you need to build commitment and buy-in to that belief from both sides.”

Once a mutual starting point is established, it is time to do the actual work of progress and change, something Foley calls the cadence of operational excellence. He uses the brief and debrief strategy used in the Blue Angels to demonstrate.

“Brief in Blue Angels is not about planning; it is about preparation and focus. It is about getting people together and making sure they are on the same page and making sure they have standards of performance and are held accountable to those standards of performance,” Foley says.

Briefing involves a quick and efficient talk about what is happening in the immediate future, whether there are any pressing issues to discuss, and an overview of the general state of things. “You are constantly doing this and adapting,” he says.

The second piece, which is the most powerful, yet not
typically done, is the debrief. “You want to do that all the time, and not just when there is a mistake or problem,” Foley says. “That is when most people do it and that is why it seems like a bad thing. It is about celebrating victories, talking about what went well and positive, and identifying what we could have done better.”

Foley lists five elements critical to the Glad to Be Here® debrief. First, the debrief must occur in a safe environment with respect established on both sides. Next, everyone must check their egos at the door; this is about being successful together. Third, all parties must lay things on the table—this is the time for openness and honesty. Next is accountability and ownership. Yes, if there is a mistake you fix it, but what you really want is personal responsibility. Finally, and most importantly, is the Glad to Be Here® ethos, which is about connecting to each other and to a higher purpose—it is not just about what people do, but about why they do what they do.

“This is usually something wrapped around a powerful center point that encompasses certain values like making a difference to the customer,” Foley says. “You can also use the center point to be tactical, like what do we need to do today, and then work off of that. It can be individualized and also a group message.”

The framework is the catalyst for a circular process of brief, trust, and debrief that creates the necessary mind set. With commitment, focus, execution, and the Glad to Be Here® mindset it’s possible to address situations and issues and celebrate victories.

“By laying it all out and giving people a framework and vehicle it really becomes a foundation people can work off of,” Foley says. “If they happen to be on opposing sides, you start with what you agree to in the heart and not just in the head.”

Foley suggests people use these ideas consistently—not only for one-time negotiating techniques, but every day in business and personal life. “I tried to give [conference delegates] something that transcends labor and management and is about life,” he says.

Embracing high-performance and making it part of an individual's or group's personal or business culture takes hard work and commitment. It takes focus and perseverance and, most importantly, a willingness to change. A starting point to developing long-lasting teamwork and trust involves demonstrable work on what Foley calls the four Cs: competency, commitment, character, and consistency.

“Competency means you have to be good at what you do. Character means you it right, no matter what. You must also have a deep commitment to go beyond what the job requires and what it takes to create excellence. Finally, consistency means you have to show up with your ‘A’ game every, single day.”

Teamwork is wrapped in all of that, beginning with respecting one another and the roles individuals play and acknowledging everyone must come together to have a high-performance team. Foley talks about his maintenance teams as an example of the way trust contributes to high-performance.

“Success with the Blue Angels isn’t all about the pilots. It’s also about the support teams including technicians, hydraulics, maintenance, electrical—those were the guys we depended on,” he says. “I wouldn’t do a preflight check, although it is required of a pilot. We trained and delegated that requirement to the crew chief. So I would walk out to the jet and they would salute and I would salute them and I would just climb in the seat.

“I believed in them and trusted with my life that they did what they said they were going to do. I trusted that the 126 switches were in their correct positions, that they had adjusted every element of the flight, started the engines, tested the hydraulics. They went above and beyond what they needed to do. That allowed me to focus and that is the deep trust that leads to high-performance teams.”

View a sample of John Foley's talk at vimeo.com/132041351 or learn more about Foley and the Glad to Be Here® concept at johnfoleyinc.com/john-foley. Find other materials from the Partners in Progress Conference at www.pinp.org/2018-partners-in-progress-conference/ •

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“Glad to be here isn’t something you simply say. It’s something that defines who you are and your impact in the world.”
—John Foley, former lead solo pilot, Blue Angels

Glad To Be Here® is a mindset that enables higher performance. Research shows that teams and individuals that embrace a positive mindset as a core belief improve communication and inspire commitment and buy-in to group objectives. This fosters gratitude and new perspectives to recognize opportunities versus simply focusing on challenges.

Glad To Be Here® offers a purpose greater than self, which galvanizes people and focuses individuals and teams on why they do what they do. Why am I doing something, and why does it matter? The Glad To Be Here® mindset helps answer these critical questions.

The Diamond Performance Framework builds on the strategic management theory that teaches vision, planning, execution, and feedback by incorporating belief levels, extreme levels of buy-in and commitment from both leadership and team members. Based on Foley’s experiences as a Navy fighter pilot and three years with the Blue Angels, he applied these experiences to the business theory he learned at Stanford University as a Sloan Fellow.

We believe that transcendent potential for performance lives within every individual and organization. The inspiration our keynote speaking and consulting provides, supported by experience and a proven process, enables people to close the performance gap and transform energy into focused action. Foley lives the ethos of this message by donating 10% of all speaking engagement proceeds to charity. In six years, he has donated $1,598,355 to 335 charities.
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