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SMAC NEWS

The Infrastructure Work Pipeline

How transportation policy can become real work for HVAC and sheet metal contractors.

SMACNA®

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CEO UPDATE Frank Wall

Strengthening Labor Harmony and Industry Bonds

I'm honored to serve as CEO of SMACNA, stepping forward at a pivotal time for our 3,500 member firms and the sheet metal, HVAC and fabrication sectors we represent. This isn't about starting a new chapter; it's about building on the solid foundation of strong leadership, proven advocacy and a commitment to collaboration that has guided this organization for decades.

In my years with MCAA, I've stressed that labor relations aren't a side issue; they're the bedrock of our success. When labor and management view each other as opponents, we all lose time, money and opportunities. But when we sit on the same side of the table tackling shared challenges, we foster safer jobsites, skilled careers and thriving contractors. The strongest agreements shine on a project's toughest day, when both sides affirm, "We prepared for this together." That principle guides my leadership at SMACNA.

SMACNA's history is a testament to this philosophy. Our organization has long championed labor-management cooperation through joint apprenticeships, safety initiatives, productivity innovations and the adoption of advanced technology. Contractors benefit from stable, highly trained workforces, while unions succeed by partnering with organizations that invest in people and bid responsibly. These shared goals remain our north star as we confront ongoing labor shortages and drive innovation across the industry.

One of the most powerful ways we bring these principles to life is by connecting in person. Our upcoming events are designed not just for learning, but for shaping the future of SMACNA's advocacy, education and support.

On April 12 to 14 at the 2026 SMACNA Fab Forum, presented by Milwaukee Tool, in Rosemont, Illinois, you can get a tour of The Hill Group's 26-acre, full-service mechanical contracting organization, including the 104,000-square-foot prefabrication shop and 80,000-square-foot modular construction space. This is in addition to shop fabrication-focused educational breakout sessions.

On May 6 to 8, join us for SMACNA's Washington, D.C. Leadership Conference. This inaugural event serves as the successor to the CEA National Issues Conference, featuring a trade show, networking and legislative advocacy.

Then, on June 1 to 3, join SMACNA and NEMI at AIHA Connect 2026 (Booth 1104) in New Orleans, Louisiana, and on Aug. 2 to 5 at the 2026 Health Care Facilities Innovation Conference (Booth 101) at the Minneapolis Convention Center to learn the latest in Testing, Adjusting and Balancing (TAB), including NEMI's training and certification programs and SMACNA's latest work that supports improved Indoor Air Quality.

These gatherings are more than dates on a calendar. They are opportunities to turn principles into action, strengthen partnerships and shape the future of our industry. As CEO, I am committed to advancing SMACNA's legacy through deeper labor harmony, smarter collaborations and meaningful experiences that prepare us for the challenges ahead. I look forward to meeting you, hearing your insights and working together to build a stronger, more resilient industry.

Frank Wall
CEO, SMACNA

The Connector

How Frank Wall's collaborative vision is shaping SMACNA's next era.

When Frank Wall steps into a room, he carries more than four decades of industry experience. He brings the confidence of someone who's spent a lifetime building bridges between people who don't always see eye to eye.

On Jan. 20, that steady hand officially took the helm of the Sheet Metal and Air Conditioning Contractors' National Association (SMACNA), marking a new chapter.

For an association whose members sit at the intersection of technology, skill and labor, Wall's appointment is a continuation of progress. "We're pleased to be led by a professional with the leadership and industry skills necessary to navigate the challenges ahead," explains Todd Hill, SMACNA President. "He is the right person to take the helm in achieving our objectives."

FROM PORTLAND ROOTS TO NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Born and raised in Northeast Portland, Wall's story begins far from Washington, D.C. boardrooms and industry summits. "Growing up, I was surrounded by people who built things," he says.

> **"I learned the value of hard work, but also of community and how much more we can accomplish when we work together."**

After earning a degree in journalism from the University of Oregon, Wall gravitated toward the world of associations, spaces where communication, negotiation and alignment mean as much as technical skill. His career took shape in Oregon's mechanical contracting community, where he led the Plumbing and Mechanical Contractors Association of Oregon (PMCA). There, he developed a reputation for diplomacy and results, fostering partnerships between labor and management that centered on shared goals: professionalism, safety, productivity and expanding union market share.

During that period, Wall didn't just talk about collaboration, he institutionalized it. PMCA helped create a model of cooperation that gained national attention. His leadership earned him roles on several statewide boards, including the Oregon Workforce Development and Talent Board and the State Prevailing Wage Committee, where he influenced workforce policy and training standards.

In 2018, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown recognized his contributions with the Driving Force Award, honoring his exceptional work in expanding workforce development opportunities across the state. It was a milestone that validated Wall's belief that progress in the skilled trades comes from listening as much as leading.

BUILDING A NATIONAL PROFILE

Wall's success in Oregon paved the way for a broader platform. At the Mechanical Contractors Association of America (MCAA), he served as Executive Director of Operations, overseeing the John R. Gentile Foundation and managing day-to-day operations at the association's national headquarters.

Those who've worked with him describe a leader who blends strategic thinking with a teacher's patience. "He will bring the same dedication and steady leadership to SMACNA that he has demonstrated throughout his tenure with MCAA," the association says. "His contributions have helped ensure MCAA remains strong, focused and well-positioned for the future."

Beyond administration, Wall engaged directly in workforce training and leadership education. As a faculty member with C. Richard Barnes & Associates, he facilitated programs for the unionized electrical industry, drawing on his communication background to translate complex labor dynamics into actionable leadership lessons.

A VISION FOR SMACNA'S FUTURE

Now, as CEO of SMACNA, Wall inherits both opportunity and challenge. The sheet metal and HVAC industries face sweeping technological change, evolving labor markets and increasing demands for energy-efficient solutions. Wall's approach, grounded in consensus-building, could prove decisive.

SMACNA, representing thousands of firms that design, fabricate and install ductwork, HVAC systems and architectural metal, has long prized technical excellence. Wall's task is to ensure that excellence continues to equal influence. Early indications suggest that workforce development, contractor-labor collaboration and diversity in skilled trades will be key elements of his agenda.

"He's uniquely equipped to navigate a rapidly changing industry," Hill says. "Frank understands that innovation and labor relations aren't opposing forces; they're partners in progress."

LEADERSHIP THROUGH SERVICE

Away from the office, Wall's life has been grounded by service. A longtime volunteer with the March of Dimes, he has held positions on its National Board of Trustees and National Volunteer Leadership Council, traveling the country to coach nonprofit boards on governance and strategic growth.

His motivation, friends say, always loops back to the same idea: people first. Married to his wife Colleen for 45 years, with two sons and three granddaughters, Wall sees continuity — not change — as the heartbeat of leadership. As he says, "Whether it's in a family, a team or an industry, you build from trust." ▼

How Automation is Reshaping Metalcraft

As robotic welders take their place beside skilled craftsmen, Poynter shows how automation is not erasing the human touch. Instead, it's amplifying it, redefining what's possible in modern architectural metalwork.

When Poynter adds new tech, it has to satisfy three goals first: speed, quality and safety.

Robotic welding is quietly remaking the architectural metals shop floor, turning once-manual, high-skill bottlenecks into predictable, data-driven production lines that can keep pace with the boldest designs.

At Poynter, Director of Specialty Metals Luke Bland has become one of the loudest voices arguing that automation is no longer a futuristic luxury. In fact, it's important for any fabricator who wants to stay in the game.

A SHOP AT A CROSSROADS

On a typical day, Bland walks through Poynter's architectural metals operation with a checklist running in his head: labor gaps, tight schedules, demanding architects and the constant pressure to make every weld look as good as it performs. "We're dealing with labor shortages, rising production demands and higher quality expectations than ever — something has to give," he says.

The "something," in his view, is no longer craftsmanship but the way that craftsmanship is delivered. Poynter has invested in handheld laser welders, laser projection systems and advanced cutting equipment as a bridge into a more automated future. Each purchase is a step toward a shop where humans guide the work rather than shoulder every repetitive task.

"Our job now is to stay competitive, protect our workforce and still exceed what our customers think is possible," Bland says.

WHY WELDING BECAME THE BOTTLENECK

Architectural metals have always lived at the intersection of beauty and structural performance, but that balance is getting harder to maintain with traditional methods alone. Jobs keep getting more intricate — from sweeping façades to sculptural stair systems — while the pool of qualified welders shrinks and the cost of repair work climbs. "I can't find enough people with the right skills, and when I do I can't afford to waste them on rework," Bland says.

He describes welding as the choke point that everything else in the project squeezes through. Delays at the weld cell cascade into blown schedules in the field, rushed installs and expensive fixes when inconsistent quality shows up on site. "Customers expect a consistent aesthetic now; they notice when one panel reads differently from the next," he says.

ROBOTS THAT CAN READ THE BLUEPRINT

The new generation of welding automation that Poynter is exploring looks very different from the fenced-off, single-purpose cells that once defined robotic work. Mechanized, fully-robotic and emerging collaborative systems can now handle complex paths, tight tolerances and thin architectural materials that used to belong firmly in the realm of human finesse.

Instead of asking a programmer to write code line by line, modern systems lean on path generation software, point and click tools, simplified pendants and offline programming that lets teams "teach" the robot in a far more intuitive way.

"We used to think you needed a dedicated engineer and weeks of training; now the tech is catching up with how people actually work," Bland explains.

One of the biggest hurdles in architectural work is simply getting unique, often oversized parts into position for a robot to reach. In some cases, that means building smart, modular tooling: tables, fixtures and adjustable nests that can be rearranged and fine-tuned quickly for different projects.

In other situations, the answer is the opposite: the automation comes to the parts. Modular robotic platforms, adjustable mounts and magnetic bases now allow welding systems to travel along large façades, frames or trusses, turning what used to be a field welding nightmare into a controlled, repeatable process.

"We have to be flexible; the work we do doesn't fit in a neat box or on a single fixture," Bland says.

For Bland, the most radical change may not be the robotic arm itself, but the invisible layer of data that surrounds it. Camera monitoring, live dashboards and weld data capture are beginning to turn each pass of the torch into a measurable, traceable event rather than a black box. "If we can see what's happening in real time, we can stop treating quality as something we 'inspect in' at the end," he says.

Automated testing and integrated monitoring allow teams to catch variations early, tune parameters on the fly and build a history of how successful welds behave on different materials and joints. In an industry where a flawed weld can mean both aesthetic failure and long-term structural questions, that level of transparency is quietly revolutionary.

COMBINING THE BEST OF MAN AND MACHINE

Bland likes to frame Poynter's automation journey as a layered ecosystem, not a single machine. Five handheld laser welders now give crews the speed and low distortion benefits of laser in a flexible format, while three laser projectors guide layouts and assembly, so parts reach the weld cell lined up correctly the first time. "Every piece of tech we add has to hit the same goals: speed, quality and safety," he says.

The shop has also added a laser tube cutting machine, which turns out precisely cut, repeatable components that make robotic welding far more predictable. Bland and his team are actively evaluating collaborative welding robots — cobots that can be wheeled up to a table or even to large assemblies — to handle repetitive joints while human welders focus on the trickiest details.

"We're not trying to replace welders; we're trying to give them the best tools we can," he says.

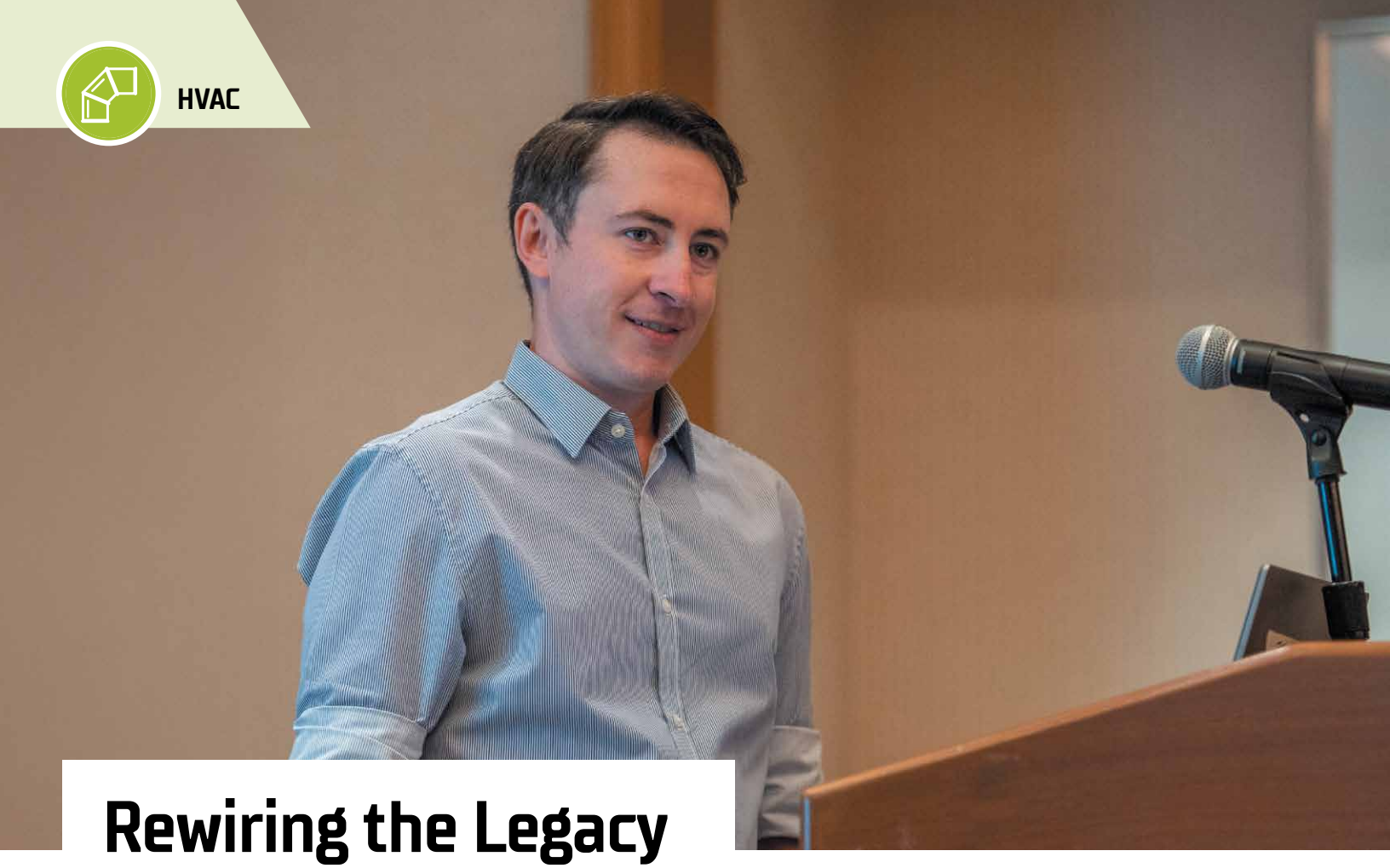
Automation does not erase the human factor; it changes who is needed and what they do. Bland is candid about the cultural and educational lift required to make advanced systems work. "You still need people who understand welding fundamentals; now you're asking them to think like process owners, not just operators," he says.

Traditional robotic programming often demanded computer skills, engineering support and weeks of offsite classes, a barrier for smaller shops and mid-career welders. Newer interfaces, more intuitive software and collaborative modes are lowering that bar, but Bland argues that intentional training — time, mentorship and a clear path from hood down welding to supervising automated cells — is what will really move the needle.

BEYOND THE WELD: WHAT COMES NEXT

Looking ahead, Bland sees a convergence of trends that will only accelerate this transformation: cheaper hardware, faster communication, more computing power and a tide of AI-driven tools that promise to make welding systems more adaptive and self-correcting. "You hear it everywhere — AI, AI, AI — but for us it's about using that intelligence to make better decisions on the floor, not chasing buzzwords," he says.

For architects, that could mean bolder geometries and tighter tolerances without blowing budgets or timelines. For fabricators, it could mean a future where a leaner crew oversees a fleet of intelligent systems, turning out consistent, high-performance work while staying safer and more sustainable. "If we do this right, automation doesn't shrink what we can build," Bland says. "It expands it." ▼



Rewiring the Legacy

How a third-generation contractor is blending craftsmanship and code to keep Western Sheet Metal competitive in an industry racing toward automation.

Western Sheet Metal's evolving technologies now include CAD/CAM estimating, fiber laser machine integration, project management solutions and centralized communication through the Microsoft 365 ecosystem.

In the rapidly evolving world of HVAC and sheet metal contracting, one family-owned business stands at the crossroads of tradition and technology.

Western Sheet Metal Inc., founded in 1968 in Salt Lake City, Utah, has built its legacy on precision fabrication and reliable service over more than five decades. Yet, the company is not resting on its laurels. Instead, it is boldly embracing a digital transformation journey to meet the profound workforce and technological challenges reshaping the industry.

FACING THE WORKFORCE CRISIS AND DIGITAL DEMANDS

For Garrett Montrone, Project Manager and third-generation leader at Western Sheet Metal, the company's "why" for change is clear and deeply personal. "We encountered a workforce crisis with 90% of SMACNA contractors facing labor shortages and half of our HVAC workforce over the age of 45," he says. "New workers demand modern digital tools to thrive."

Montrone emphasizes the urgency. "By 2030, 70% of workers will require advanced tech skills," he says. "The cost of waiting is catastrophic."

Montrone's perspective comes from both heart and firsthand experience. He recalls joining the family company after working at Goldman Sachs. "I went from Wall Street to running a plasma table," he says. "And, one day, the machine cut right through all the fittings it had just made. The foreman shrugged and said, 'Yeah, sometimes that happens.' We opened this dusty, old binder for troubleshooting that hadn't been touched in 20 years. The number to call for support? That company had been out of business for a decade."

That moment of inefficiency and obsolescence stuck with him. "There was no troubleshooting, no plan, no support. That was the wake-up call; it was the perfect example of why modernization wasn't optional."

Western Sheet Metal's response became a comprehensive software adoption strategy based on empowerment more than technology. "My background as a sheet metal journeyman combined with IT experience helped us implement software rollouts that future-proof our business," Montrone says. "But it's not just about buying software. It's about embedding long-term philosophy and showing your workers that you're investing in the future."

A STRATEGIC SOFTWARE ROLLOUT WITH HEART

The company's approach was structured but human-centered: a 10-step game plan with a 90-day rollout timeline designed to modernize operations without

overwhelming its workforce. The roadmap began with defining clear outcomes, mapping current processes and selecting software solutions that aligned with real goals.

"Software adoption is about winning hearts, not just licenses," Montrone says. "We built champions among respected team members to lead change and started small so we could adjust workloads without disruption."

That measured rollout has paid off. Western Sheet Metal's evolving tech stack now includes CAD/CAM estimating, fiber laser machine integration, project management solutions and centralized communication through the Microsoft 365 ecosystem. Backup systems protect operations by maintaining both paper and digital redundancy.

The key to success, Montrone emphasizes, is trust. "In our industry, you can't force adoption; the moment you do, you lose buy-in," he says. "But when people see the data working for them — fewer errors, faster turnaround — they become advocates themselves."

He also stresses the importance of preserving knowledge from veteran employees. "There are people who've worked here for 20 or 30 years whose skills can't be replaced," he says. "You have to capture that institutional knowledge before it walks out the door. Create a wiki, record how things get done and turn that into living training material for the next generation."

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE AND LOOKING AHEAD

Change, however necessary, often meets emotional resistance, especially in multigenerational businesses. Montrone describes that dynamic candidly: "My grandpa started the company in a chicken coop after getting fired for doing side jobs. My dad led it through a technical revolution with a conservative mindset — by the book, steady. And then I come in from the tech world saying, 'This is where the world's headed.' There were inevitable clashes, but also mutual respect. My dad's been great: critical when things go wrong, but supportive enough to let me try."

Western Sheet Metal's core reasons for technology adoption reach beyond efficiency: improving employee work-life balance, reducing single points of failure, strengthening cross-training and centralizing communication to prevent major disruptions.

Today, the company logs all shop and field hours digitally, tracks projects through live dashboards monitoring cost and schedule adherence and integrates bid management and estimating workflows. "Data drives every decision now," Montrone says. "It gives us clarity instead of chasing paper trails or relying on one person's memory."

For Montrone, the transformation is less about machines than mindset. "Technology has taken over our lives. You looked at your phone 30 times today without realizing it. So why not use that same familiarity to your advantage in business?" he asks. "I just want to raise the alarm: the future's here. In five years, if you haven't started adapting, it might be too late."

Looking forward, Montrone is optimistic but pragmatic. "We're exploring AI analytics, prefabrication automation, IoT integration and data security while balancing openness and collaboration. The key is continuity; how do you pass on legacy while evolving it?"

In the end, he returns to the value of legacy — the same family story that began in a Utah farmhouse in 1968. "For me, it's not about the money," Montrone says. "It's about carrying on what my grandpa started: an honest trade, an American dream built from nothing. Now it's our turn to make sure that dream survives the digital era."

Western Sheet Metal's story embodies how tradition and technology can coexist — not as competing forces, but as partners in progress. Montrone sums it up simply: "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time."

Certifying Medical-Grade HVAC Performance in a New Hospital Tower

SMACNA TAB contractor Northstar Environmental is ensuring that the HVAC system at a soon-to-open Pittsburgh hospital expansion meets the facility's stringent expectations.

First-year Apprentice Chris Burgman (left), second-year Apprentice Eh Ta Mwe Paw, TABB Supervisor Journeyperson John Kukonik, Journeyperson Troy Saracco and Northstar Environmental Company Foreperson Harry Bolette return to the jobsite after a safety meeting.

Before it can open to the public in early 2027, the HVAC systems in the $1.3 billion UPMC Presbyterian hospital tower have to meet stringent performance specifications.

Validating the airflow, pressure and hydronics equipment throughout its 900,000 square feet is the job of testing, adjusting and balancing contractor Northstar Environmental Ltd. The hospital-grade HVAC system is designed to meet ventilation and pressurization standards that support infection-control protocols for patients and staff.

Northstar Environmental, based in Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania, is a member of SMACNA of Western PA and the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC). The company has been involved in TAB work for more than three decades. Its portfolio includes major universities, hospitals and office buildings.

Company Vice President Donald Leishman is a Testing, Adjusting and Balancing Bureau (TABB)-certified professional and the Co-owner of Northstar with his wife, Angela. The tower's HVAC installation is being supervised by the MARS joint venture involving officials from two area mechanical contractors: McKamish and Ruthrauff-Sauer, both SMACNA members.

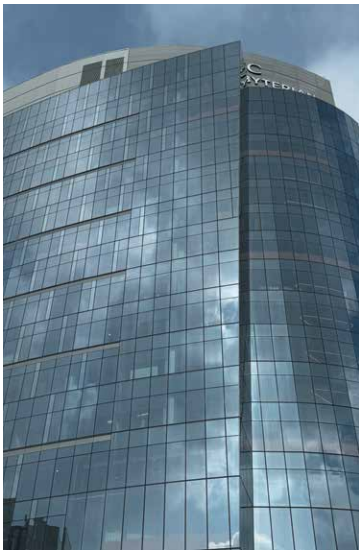
CERTIFIED PERFORMANCE

Leishman says preparing to work on the hospital tower project was a multiyear process that started before the company won the work in a competitive bid.

"We were working hand-in-hand with (the general contractors) to really solidify what was going to be needed from the TAB aspect of it," Leishman says. "For a good two years, we did monthly meetings where we were trying to break down and make sure that we had discussed the specifications for this project."

Northstar Environmental was awarded the project in January 2024. UPMC facilities are regular clients, Leishman says.

"We do a lot of the work in the existing Presbyterian hospital," he says, "including their yearly air changes. So, we're very familiar with the hospital itself and their crew. And I think that played a big part in why we were awarded this project."



TABB Supervisor John Kukonik calculates design pressure drops for Nexus Venturi valves while second-year Apprentice Eh Ta Mwe Paw connects the balancing valve (left).

Chris Burgman, a first-year Apprentice, makes adjustments to the Nexus Venturi balancing valves that are installed in the UPMC tower expansion (middle).

The 17-story, $1.3 billion UPMC Presbyterian hospital tower expansion in Pittsburgh is scheduled to open in early 2027. SMACNA members involved in the project include mechanical contractors McKamish and Ruthrauff-Sauer and Northstar Environmental Ltd., a testing, adjusting and balancing company (right).

As with most hospital HVAC projects, Northstar's contract called for the company to ensure every room had the correct number of air changes per hour and was within 10% of design specifications on air and hydronic (water) flow. Northstar workers are setting up air handling units (AHUs) and pumps, checking all of the hydronic system's Venturi values, variable-air-volume (VAV) boxes and that diffusers and grilles are within tolerances.

"When we get to the ORs (operating rooms) and pharmacy areas, we have to make sure that we're within design tolerances and pressurization requirements," he adds. "And we're doing the stairwell pressurization and fire-life safety work as well. And we have to make sure doors are operating properly — stuff like that. We are also a TABB-certified fire life safety contractor and will be responsible for work such as stairwell pressurization testing."

ON SCHEDULE

As the hospital gets close to opening, a commissioning agent who works for the hospital system will inspect and certify Northstar's work. Leishman expects his company's work to be finished by the end of year, in time for the scheduled opening Jan. 24, 2027.

"It's a very large project and a lot of people have to finish their work before we get into our work. It's been a team effort from everybody involved trying to get it ready to go," he says.

Leishman also credits Harold "Harry" Bolette, Northstar's on-site supervisor, for the project's success. Bolette brought over 40 years of testing, adjusting and balancing experience to the project.

More than two years since starting work, the project has been smooth — "Knock on wood," he says — with few hiccups or problems. Although he acknowledges that no matter how well an HVAC system is designed or installed, there are always tweaks that need to be made to differential set points, static pressure set points and other systems.

But Leishman adds that he really enjoys his work.

"It's something new every day, something challenging," he says of TAB work. "It's not just installation. It's problem solving. We do a lot with engineers and it's nice to be able to work through the problem from the standpoint of drawings to installation to finalization and make sure that everything's working properly — from the drawing table to the final product."

UPMC Presbyterian Tower Project At a Glance

Square feet: **900,000**
Length (in feet): **540**
Stories: **17**
Square feet of glass: **270,000**
Tons of steel: **9,200**
Patient rooms (private): **636**
Parking spaces: **450**
Operating rooms: **12**

Source: University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

Rethinking Project Management

How to know when it's time to upgrade from a patchwork of manual tracking tools to a disciplined, digital backbone.

When does manual job tracking become a liability? When costs and quality problems escalate, meetings expose problems, and claims and change orders rise.

Project management systems are becoming mission-critical infrastructure for industrial sheet metal and HVAC contractors because the complexity, risk and speed of today's work have outgrown spreadsheets and paper.

Unfortunately, construction has historically lagged other industries in digital adoption, with a significant share of contractors still relying on spreadsheets, whiteboards and paper-based workflows for planning and tracking. But adoption is accelerating under pressure from tighter margins, more complex projects and workforce shortages.

Graham Corsar, who was previously a Project Manager but now works with contractors as an Account Executive at Trimble Inc., a construction technology company, argues that the real question isn't whether you "need a project management tool," but whether your existing system can survive as industrial work continues advancing.

ONE MISTAKE COULD ELIMINATE YOUR PROFIT MARGIN

On a multi-million-dollar industrial job, an HVAC or sheet metal contractor is often living on a 5% to 10% margin, where $50,000 to $100,000 can vanish with one mistake: one missed change order, one shop error, a misread spec, late material or a crew installing from the wrong drawing.

Industrial work magnifies that risk. Large air handlers, extensive duct runs, specialty metals and complex supports mean material is a major cost driver, and much of it is ordered early, long before the last RFI is resolved. Add in aggressive schedules, tightly sequenced trades and code inspections that can shut down a floor, and a contractor's financial outcome is inseparable from how projects are planned, tracked and documented day to day.

For many industrial shops, the system is a patchwork: estimating software feeding into Excel, hand-marked shop tickets, email chains and shared drives. "Your company already is the project management system," Corsar argues.

Corsar breaks that system into three elements — people, processes and tools — and insists that software sits firmly in last place.

- **People:** project managers, coordinators, detailers, foremen, fabricators and their experience, judgment and willingness to communicate bad news early.
- **Processes:** how change orders are captured, how RFIs are logged and answered, how drawings are issued and superseded, how labor is tracked and compared against budget.
- **Tools:** the actual platforms that hold drawings, budgets, time sheets, RFIs, submittals and photos.

"A new platform that just recreates the same bad habits in the cloud will not save a single dollar of margin," he insists.

WHEN MANUAL TRACKING BECOMES A LIABILITY

The contractors who most urgently need a structured project management system often have the most reason to believe they can get by without one. The crews are seasoned, the estimator knows the market and the shop has its own rhythm. But Corsar asks them to look for three warning signs that show they can no longer operate without a better system:

1. **Too many surprises.** Costs, quality problems, schedule slips or scope gaps keep blindsiding the project team. This equates to project managers being surprised more than once a week, executives more than once a month and ownership more than once a quarter, Corsar says, signaling that the system isn't surfacing risk early enough.

2. **Progress reports that require a meeting.** In many sheet metal shops, job status still comes together in a monthly ritual: someone gathers timecards, pulls the latest PO log, requests updated fabrication status, hunts through email for change approvals and then walks it all into a conference room. If there are no automated reports or dashboards, you are using meetings "to find out about problems, not to solve them," Corsar says.
3. **Claims and change orders that leak value.** If the value of missed or incomplete claims is more than 25% of your margin or if no one can say how much is missing, the contractor is effectively donating profit to the general contractor or owner. In industrial HVAC work, where scope creep often hides in "small" extra runs or rework tied to other trades, that leakage can define an entire year's results.

When all three indicators show up on the same jobs, Corsar says the problem is not "bad luck;" it is the project management system itself, and spreadsheets are part of the problem.

WHO ACTUALLY NEEDS PROJECT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE?

Corsar doesn't pretend every contractor needs a heavyweight project management platform tomorrow. Instead, he challenges firms to ask what they are really trying to fix and to focus first on process.

An integrated project management system can force changes through one documented path: an RFI or change request is logged, the model or drawing is updated, the shop status is changed, new assemblies are tagged and the cost and schedule impact are attached to that specific event. That is how a contractor turns what used to be unbilled chaos into a billable, defensible change.

For very small shops — fewer than 10 people — the question is stability. If jobs are small, scopes simple and changes rare, a modest digital backbone paired with disciplined processes may be enough. But if even one or two industrial scale jobs a year can push the company to the edge with complex coordination, multiple vendors and long lead times, that is a sign that more structured project management is no longer optional; it is insurance.

For mid-sized contractors — those with multiple foremen, a dedicated project manager or two and a real backlog — the tipping points are usually:

- Repeated disputes over extra work, especially when documentation lives in texts and unsaved photos.
- Chronic re entry of data from field to office — time sheets, quantities, change logs — that burns out staff and still produces inconsistent numbers.
- Difficulty answering basic questions in real time: Where is this job versus budget? Which change orders are approved? How much labor have we really spent on this level?

For larger firms, Corsar argues, the question is not, "Do we need a project management system?" but "Is the one we have working like it should?" Overhead (office salaries, software, infrastructure and the unplanned costs of rework and missed claims) is already functioning as project management spend; the only choice is whether that spend produces visibility and control or just more noise.

HOW TO DECIDE ON PROJECT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM SOFTWARE

When a contractor decides that "something has to change," Corsar's advice is to focus on four areas to keep the project management software decision grounded.

1. **Budget.** This means understanding not just license fees, but what you already spend on people who are doing manual project management: tracking hours, copying data, chasing signatures, reentering quantities and fixing billing errors. That cost often dwarfs the software line item.
2. **Authority.** Who really decides what project management tool can work best for the company? For a sheet metal contractor, that may mean bringing in the shop superintendent and the most skeptical field foreman before any contract is signed.
3. **Need.** Are you shopping for cost control, productivity, decision speed or risk management? If the "need cannot be explained in a single sentence that makes sense to the ultimate decision maker," he warns, "you probably aren't clear on what you're buying."
4. **Timing.** "System change takes 12 to 24 months," Corsar says, and contractors should not let anyone convince them it can be done faster. For industrial HVAC and sheet metal shops juggling live jobs, that means planning a rollout that respects bid seasons, shutdown windows and critical project milestones.

PROCESSES FIRST, TOOLS SECOND

Corsar's most practical advice to industrial contractors is also the least glamorous: fix your processes before you pick your platform. He stresses that "good process can make up for shortcomings in tools & people," and warns, "if you don't have good processes, stop" before you sign any software contract.

That might mean standardizing how markups become formal change orders with a clear path from foreman sketch to priced, approved scope. It might also mean defining a single source of truth for drawings and models, so no crew is ever building off an obsolete PDF taped to a gang box. And it could even mean setting a consistent way to tie labor and material codes back to estimating templates, so job cost feedback improves future bids.

Only once those processes are clear does the choice of tool become meaningful. Industrial HVAC and sheet metal contractors do not need "another project management tool" so much as they need a system that lets their people see risk early, defend their work and protect the thin slice of margin that keeps the shop lights on. As Corsar says, "The software is only the part you can install; the rest is the company you are willing to change." ▼

Boost Your Residential HVAC Business with Social Media

Unlock the power of social media with practical strategies designed to grow your business, deepen customer relationships and stand out in a competitive market.

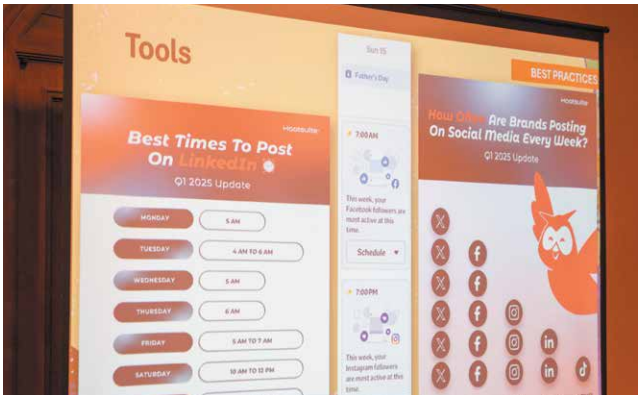
Know your platform. TikTok is ideal for short, engaging videos; Instagram showcases visuals and LinkedIn helps build authority.

In today's digital age, residential HVAC contractors face a new imperative: mastering social media. Cody Shook, Director of Social Media for SMACNA National, shared insightful strategies at the 2025 SMACNA Annual Convention in Maui to help HVAC businesses harness this powerful tool.

"Social media isn't just a trend. It's a catalyst for real business growth," Shook says. "When done right, it builds brand trust, generates leads and keeps your company top of mind in clients' communities."

Shook offered these seven tips for social media success.

1. **Know Your Starting Point.** Shook outlined three typical social media stages for HVAC companies: those without any presence, those struggling to launch effectively and those already seeing success who want to maintain momentum. "It's critical to identify where your company falls, so you can tailor your approach," he advises.
2. **Prioritize the Right Platforms.** For residential HVAC contractors, Shook highlighted the importance of focusing on priority platforms like TikTok, Instagram and LinkedIn. "Each platform has a unique audience and vibe," he says. "TikTok is great for short, engaging videos that show your work and personality. Instagram helps showcase visuals and stories. LinkedIn is ideal for professional partnerships and building authority."
3. **Consistency Is Key.** When asked about posting frequency, Shook shared data-backed best times and recommended cadence. "Aim for nine to 18 posts a week distributed across platforms," he says. "Post when your audience is most active. For example, Instagram followers peak on weekends from 10 a.m. to noon."
4. **Use Smart Tools.** To manage content efficiently, Shook recommends tools like Hootsuite for scheduling and analytics, CapCut for captioned videos and Canva to create eye-catching graphics. "You don't have to do everything manually," he explains. "Automating posts and tracking results makes a huge difference for busy contractors."
5. **Content That Connects.** Residential HVAC customers relate to authentic stories and helpful information. Shook encourages showing behind-the-scenes work, spotlighting team members, promoting safety practices and celebrating milestones. For instance, sharing a quick video of an apprentice mastering a welding station not only humanizes your brand but also celebrates your commitment to craftsmanship.
6. **Engage Positively, Always.** "How you react publicly to posts can define your company's reputation,"



Shook explains. Use upbeat, community-focused comments when engaging with partners or clients. Avoid negative interactions, even when tempted. Turning customer feedback into a positive story is a win-win.

7. **Own Your Story Beyond the Post.** Shook reminds contractors that "your story doesn't end when you hit 'post.'" Follow up on engagement, reshare collaborator content and leverage SMACNA's PR resources for larger media pushes. "Social media success is about sustained conversation and genuine connection," he stresses.

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA IS WORTH YOUR TIME

Citing studies, Shook shared compelling reasons to invest in digital presence. "Over 70% of consumers who experience a brand positively on social media are likely to recommend it," he says. "Nearly two-thirds of homeowners search online before hiring a contractor, and many trust online reviews as much as personal referrals."

And when it comes to your time and resources, Shook sums it up, plainly. "Don't think you're too busy for social media. People spend almost five hours a day on their phones; your next customer could be just a post away."

For residential HVAC contractors ready to grow their businesses, leveraging smart social media strategies is essential. As Shook explains, taking the first step with authentic content, consistent engagement and smart tools lays the foundation for long-term success in an increasingly digital marketplace.

Practical Social Media Tips for HVAC Contractors

- **Start Small.** If overwhelmed, begin by scheduling two posts a week using free versions of Hootsuite or Canva.
- **Show Safety First.** Always include photos of PPE in action to build trust.
- **Get Visual.** Short videos of projects in progress are highly engaging.
- **Celebrate Your Team.** Highlight individual achievements and milestones.
- **Monitor Feedback.** Use customer comments to improve and demonstrate your commitment to service.
- **Tag and Connect.** Tag partnering businesses and local places to increase reach.
- **Avoid Copyright Issues.** Use royalty-free music for videos to prevent legal trouble.

COVER STORY

The Infrastructure Work Pipeline

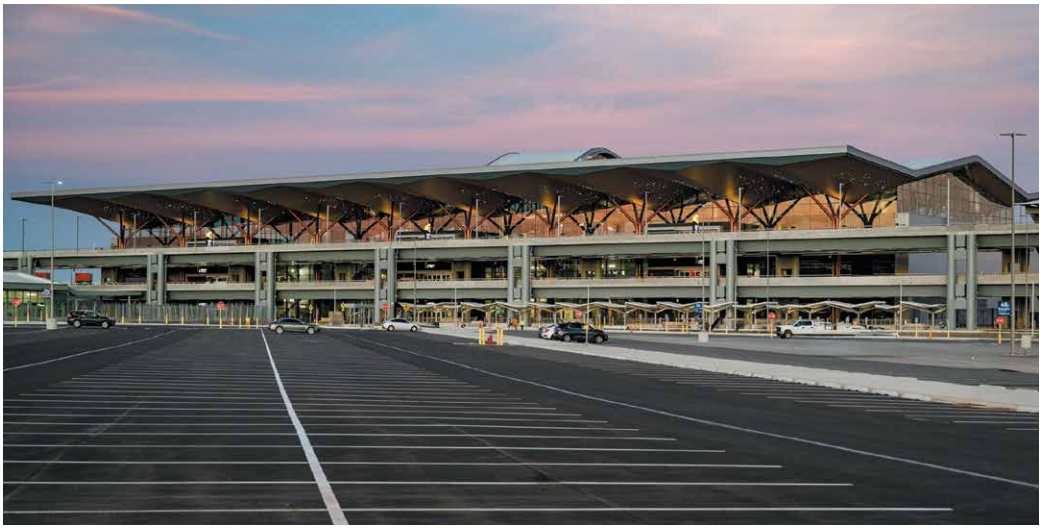
How transportation policy can become real work for HVAC and sheet metal contractors.

When Sabrina Sussman talks about transportation, she does not start with lanes, bridges or budgets. She starts with people trying to get to school, work or a doctor's appointment and what happens when they can't. In a SMACNA webinar with Seth Lennon, SMACNA's Director of Content Development and Media Relations Policy, Sussman explains that she "fell in love with transportation" only after stumbling into a job at the U.S. Department of Transportation and realizing "it doesn't matter what you've built if people can't get there."

Now, as Chief Program Officer for Nashville's "Choose How You Move" initiative, Sussman oversees a $3.1 billion, 15-year, voter-approved program to overhaul sidewalks, bus service, corridors and traffic signals across one of the fastest growing metros in the country. The work is infrastructure on paper, but in practice, it is a massive pipeline of projects that will require the skills of sheet metal and HVAC contractors in transit facilities, control centers and dense urban corridors for years to come.

FROM ACCIDENTAL TRANSPORT NERD TO NASHVILLE CPO

Sussman never planned a career in transportation. She moved to Washington, D.C., wanting to work in government on health or education policy and took a position at USDOT, telling herself, "government's government, you can always pivot." Instead, she stayed — twice. Early roles at USDOT, a stint in New York City Hall and time at Zipcar gave her a front row seat to how cities and the private



The Pittsburgh International Airport's new completed terminal (left).

Sabrina Sussman (right).

sector share responsibility for how people move.

Most recently, she served as chief of staff and deputy to U.S. Deputy Transportation Secretary Polly Trottenberg, and as a senior adviser to then Secretary Pete Buttigieg, working on the rollout of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and a wave of federal investments in roads, bridges, airports and transit. "You go where the money is when it comes to infrastructure," she says, noting that the law marked a "generational investment" after decades of underfunding. For contractors, that shift at the federal level is now being echoed — and in some ways amplified — by cities and regions that are self-taxing to build their own projects.

INSIDE "CHOOSE HOW YOU MOVE"

Nashville's turning point came in 2024, when 66% of voters approved a half-penny sales tax dedicated solely to transportation. Under Tennessee law, localities that want big infrastructure must largely "self fund," so the city put a detailed Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) on the ballot, promising specific projects in exchange for that tax.

"It was a $3.1-billion program over 15 years," Sussman says. "It includes 86 miles of sidewalk, nearly 600 traffic intersection signals and 10 all access corridors" — the heaviest, most congested corridors in the region — with safety improvements woven throughout. Every block and intersection is identified on a public map, giving contractors an atypical level of certainty about where work will be and what will be built.

One year after the referendum passed, Sussman cut the first ribbon, marking the completion of an early "quick win" project: a transit signal upgrade called a queue jump that lets buses enter the intersection a few seconds before cars, so routes move faster. At the same time, her team is launching short-, medium- and long-term work: signal replacements and fiber in the near term, and full corridor redesigns and large sidewalk packages in later phases. For mechanical and sheet metal firms, those "all access corridors" and transit enhancements mean future work tied to stations, shelters, operations centers and high performance systems in buildings along those routes.

POTHOLES ARE NONPARTISAN, AND SO IS THE WORK

If there is a theme to Sussman's message, it is that transportation is fundamentally local and fundamentally bipartisan. She jokes that one of her favorite conference ribbons reads "potholes are nonpartisan," because "when people drive down the street or are at the airport, it doesn't matter who's in power; what matters is that their infrastructure needs help and support."

She believes that local leaders are now wrestling with the same questions Washington faced during the infrastructure law debate: "How do we fund infrastructure investments?" and "Have those networks that supported our prosperity kept up with the growth?" Cities like Nashville, Charlotte, Columbus and Austin are answering by asking voters directly to approve transportation referendums, and they're often succeeding. For SMACNA contractors, that means the next boom in work may not just follow federal megaprojects; it will track these local "self-subscribed" programs where the money and project lists are set for a decade or more.

Where contractors come in is to fill the capacity gap. "Nashville and Middle Tennessee don't have all the people that we need to pull this off," Sussman says. She calls "Choose How You Move" not just a transportation program but "also a workforce devel-

opment program," adding that the city needs contractors to "be welcoming and inventive and encourage new folks to come to town" to help deliver the work.

Her tips for SMACNA members are direct:

- Track which localities are pushing big infrastructure packages; that is where the work and funding will be.
- Be "good, trusting partners" who help cities deliver projects faster, not just cheaper.
- Offer ideas that cut red tape and timelines without sacrificing quality because "the best way to ensure that public investment continues is to deliver."

She describes one example from Nashville where a contractor pointed out that restrictive city rules allowed only six working hours a day on certain sites, dramatically slowing completion. "If we're only allowed to work on a job site for six hours a day, it's going to take a really long time," the contractor told her, prompting a rethink about longer hours and trade-offs between short term disruption and faster delivery. For mechanical contractors used to carefully phased shutdowns and tight commissioning windows, that kind of honest feedback is exactly where they can add value.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR HVAC AND SHEET METAL PROS

While much of Sussman's story centers on sidewalks and signals, she stresses that transportation projects are not one-and-done; they are systems that must be built, operated, maintained and continuously upgraded. "Transportation and infrastructure are not about build it once and move on," she says. "You have to build it, operate it and maintain it. Those investments take work over many years."

That long tail of work touches SMACNA contractors at multiple points:

- **Airports and terminals.** Aging terminals designed for a pre-9/11 world are being rebuilt to handle new security, passenger flows and energy performance standards — from Kansas City's complete terminal replacement to expansions at Nashville's BNA. Those projects require complex HVAC, high-end architectural sheet metal and advanced controls.
- **Transit and corridor facilities.** Bus rapid transit lanes, stations, depots and signal houses are all mechanically intensive spaces where reliable, efficient systems are critical to uptime and safety.
- **Operations centers and data infrastructure.** As Sussman notes, many of Nashville's traffic signals are 50 to 60 years old and untouched; upgrading them means new equipment, new rooms to house that equipment and reliable cooling and ventilation for electronics and staff.

She underscores that much of this work is now technology driven, whether in signal systems, data collection or facilities that must support continuous operations. "It's weird to think about roads as tech projects, but they are in a lot of ways," she says, noting that while people replace phones every 15 months, many cities are still running traffic control hardware from the 1960s. For contractors comfortable integrating building systems with digital infrastructure, that shift plays to their strengths.

WHERE CONTRACTORS CAN SHAPE THE PIPELINE

Sussman repeatedly returns to the role of labor and contractors in getting "Choose How You Move" across the finish line. An outside campaign backed by advocates and unions helped make the case to voters that Nashville's congestion, which Forbes labeled "the worst commute in the country," wasn't inevitable and could be fixed with a dedicated investment.

She encourages SMACNA members to replicate that model elsewhere:

- If your city is even "pondering" a transportation referendum, "jump in, offer to help and ask them how you can really help make that case," she says.
- Be honest that these programs provide both desperately needed infrastructure and "jobs for your members," and explain that clearly to the public.
- Engage at every level — federal, state and local — because "it's not just one flavor of advocacy that gets those jobs done."

Her advice to a contractor eyeing opportunities in places like Boston's MBTA repairs or airport expansions is practical: monitor FAA passenger data to see which airports are growing fastest, watch for big capital announcements (such as BNA's recent $4-billion expansion plan) and proactively meet with owners to understand schedules and procurement paths.

Looking ahead, Sussman sees a future where "all of the above" is the only realistic answer: more capital investment, more maintenance, more retrofits and more experimentation with new modes and technology. Cities that have expanded transit networks once like Seattle are now passing subsequent measures to operate, maintain and improve what they already built.

Her deputy in Nashville talks about "continuous improvement" or going back to corridors as technology and use patterns change instead of treating them as finished forever. That mindset mirrors where many leading HVAC and sheet metal firms already are as long-term partners across a facility's life cycle, not just low-bid installers.

For HVAC and sheet metal companies, Sussman's message is both a challenge and an invitation. Transportation is becoming more local, more voter driven, more tech heavy and more dependent on contractors who can deliver complex work quickly while protecting public trust.

"Cities are doing some tough work," she says. "Go to them and ask them if you can help be a part of that."

Congress Funds Transit, Slashes New Rail in Bipartisan THUD Bill

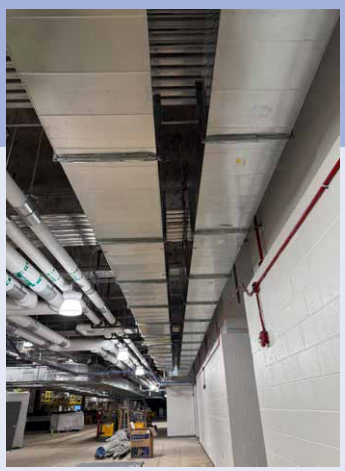
Congressional appropriators struck a bipartisan deal in January on the FY2026 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) bill, locking in robust public transit and passenger rail funding while carving deep cuts to intercity rail expansion.

The legislation delivers $21.1 billion for public transportation, a $168 million bump over FY2025 when paired with Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) advance funds, per the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). APTA's Paul Skoutelas hailed it as "a really good-news story for our industry."

Yet, rail advocates see red flags. Amtrak takes a $115-million hit from last year's levels, and the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program — once $1.5 billion — plummets to $65 million. That program fueled projects like Chicago Union Station upgrades, Raleigh-Richmond routes and Brightline West high-speed rail. "There are some wins and some losses," notes Rail Passengers Association's Jim Mathews, warning that "many more programs won't get funded at all."

Cuts also nibble $500 million from Capital Investment Grants for subways, light rail and bus rapid transit, potentially stalling urban projects like New York's Second Avenue Subway. The bill reasserts congressional oversight, mandating DOT notifications on terminated grants and barring abrupt award cancellations.

Looking ahead, APTA's Ward McCarragher says the package sets up surface transportation reauthorization talks as the current five-year law nears its September 2026 sunset. Over 100 organizations, from transit agencies to contractors, urge swift passage of H.R. 7148 to keep 100,000-plus projects rolling.



W.G. Tomko delivered more than one million pounds of custom ductwork on the Pittsburgh International Airport job.

Renaissance in the Steel City: PIT's HVAC Revival

Imagine stepping into Pittsburgh International Airport's (PIT) reborn terminal, where the ghost of its 1990s "airport of the future" glory hums anew, minus the unused gates and empty shops but brimming with streamlined efficiency. Once hobbled by post-9/11 shifts and airline busts, PIT's $1.7-billion modernization slashed gates from 75 to 58, axed the outdated tram and carved $25 million in annual savings from a leaner blueprint. SMACNA member W.G. Tomko Inc. fueled the mechanical heart, delivering $65 million in HVAC, piping, and over one million pounds of custom ductwork.

From its 1954 start as a Hazelwood kitchen-table plumbing outfit, Tomko evolved into a full-service

mechanical force, adding duct fabrication 18 years ago, then exploding its sheet metal shop by 20,000 square feet in 2010. That capacity proved clutch for PIT, where crews churned out 20-gauge rectangular and spiral duct (up to 170x60 inches, handling 50,000 CFM at ±4-inch water column), plus 23 air handlers, 40 fan-coils, 29 fans and 94 VAVs. “This is probably the largest contract I’ve ever worked on,” says Sheet Metal Field Foreman David Hughes, a 26-year veteran. “It’s a big deal in Pittsburgh.”

BIM mastery and CAD-to-CAM precision kept fabrication flawless, per Sheet Metal Fabrication Manager David Porupski. “Our sheet metal department uses full BIM on almost every project, making our fabrication top-notch.” But the live-airport grind tested everyone. Civil overhauls, new highways and material crunches demanded ninja-level scheduling. “One of the biggest challenges was just trying to schedule things appropriately,” Hughes notes. “Material handling was a big one.”

Project Executive Patrick Barrett recalls the relentless pace: dual shifts, six-day weeks and mandatory Saturdays. More than 140 Tomko hands rotated through, including juggling a massive Form Energy solar battery plant nearby, and they delivered. “The guys did a fantastic job,” Hughes beams. “Senior mechanics plus younger apprentices got a good education out here.”

PIT spotlights resurrection over relic: rightsizing aviation hubs with BIM-driven HVAC, multi-shift grit and sheet metal scale that turns turbulence into takeoff, proving SMACNA contractors rebuild the bones of America’s flight paths.

LAX’s 150,000-square-foot expansion boasts eight new airport gates.

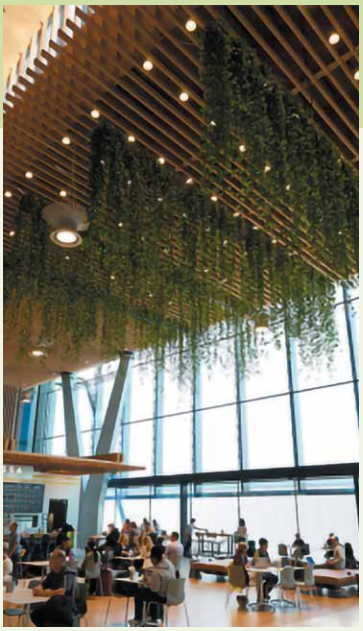
LAX’s Modular Marvel Takes Flight

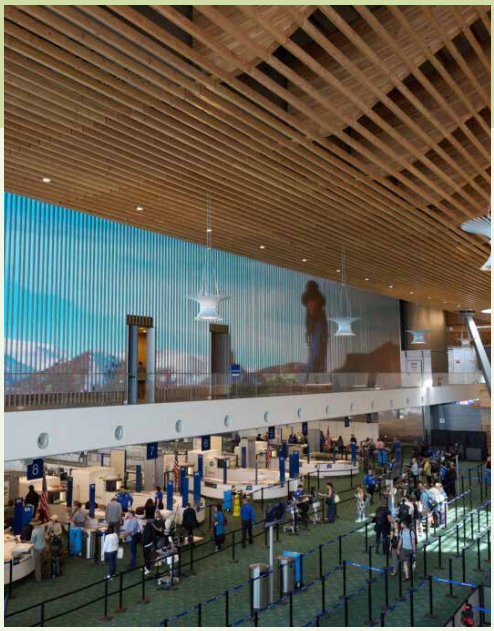
Imagine nine massive concourse modules, each the size of a football field, creeping across Los Angeles International Airport’s tarmac at dawn, like gigantic puzzle pieces sliding into place. This is no sci-fi scene. It’s the Midfield Satellite Concourse (MSC) South expansion, where SMACNA member Xcel Mechanical Systems is installing $18 million in HVAC and sheet metal work to ready LAX for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and 2028 Olympics.

The 150,000-square-foot, two-story addition brings eight new gates and passenger-friendly upgrades, including more shops, dining and breathing room, without ever shutting down the nation’s second-busiest airfield. Pioneering off-site construction and relocation, crews built the segments a mile north, then convoyed them across active runways in a first for LAX (only the second such feat at any U.S. airport). “Moving a building across an airport runway is just the coolest job anyone will see,” marvels Xcel Project Executive Chris Balch, a former sheet metal worker.

Xcel kicked off the project in January 2024, finishing all remote-site rough-ins, including ductwork threading through future retail zones and roof levels, before the modules touched down. Spiral and rectangular ducts came from fellow SMACNA member Superior Duct. On the airfield is where the real ballet began: every truck and crew of 20 to 25 tradespeople passed through “Post 23” security and was escorted across the tarmac. “All delivery trucks got inspected,” says Sheet Metal General Foreman Eric Mutter. He planned two weeks ahead to dodge delays, targeting 25,000 man-hours with possible 12-hour shifts and dual crews.

Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) Chief Development Officer Michael Christensen praises the method’s efficiency: it saves time, cuts costs and creates local jobs while delivering “incredible facilities.” Xcel, no LAX rookie after dozens of terminal upgrades (plus Boeing, UCLA and Cedars-Sinai gigs), thrives amid the security shuffle. Balch shrugs: “You plan for it and execute.”





The PDX terminal expansion is the biggest project ever in the Port of Portland.

PDX Terminal Expansion Brings Forest Canopy Over Concourses

Picture walking through Portland International Airport's (PDX) expanded main terminal, dappled light filtering through a 9-acre mass timber roof onto a grove of live trees below just like a Pacific Northwest forest sprouting right over security checkpoints.

This is no mere facelift. The $1.5-billion PDX main terminal core (TCore) expansion, led by ZGF Architects, adds 175,000 square feet while slashing energy use per square foot in half, redefining aviation gateways with biophilic calm and adaptability.

Column-free, 100x150-foot spans create flexible floorplates for shifting TSA lines and check-in islands. It is crowned by an 18-million-pound glulam roof that is undulating to channel light and air and propped by Y-columns of grout-filled steel plate. Built over seven years while keeping PDX humming (Phase 1 opened August 2024; full completion early 2026), it's the Port of Portland's biggest project ever.

SMACNA Oregon & SW Washington firms delivered the metal magic:

- Arctic entered via 2019 design-assist, balancing ZGF's vision with robust HVAC. They installed temporary systems to condition live areas, then 700,000 pounds of duct, 34 air handlers, 24 CRAC/CRAH units and 1,000-plus diffusers. Seismic flex connectors bridged old/new structure quirks, says COO Aaron Vanrheen.
- McKinstry tackled $30 million in cladding and decorative metal, including 127,000 square feet of sunshades, panels, louvers, flashings and even tree grates, as well as coordinating prefab roof modules the size of football fields, per Director James Slater.
- DeaMor Skylights supplied 49 custom units (32,000 square feet of glass), knocked down for assembly on a 2.5-acre slab, then jacked 50 feet high and rolled over the existing terminal. "Ingenuity and sheer will," says President Jody Moore.
- Just Right Heating & Cooling, the Local 16 homegrown upstart, fabricated nearly 500,000 pounds of duct and tricky architectural panels/blinds on breathing mass timber. This included "thousands of non-square pieces, laser-cut one by one," notes President Daniel Miranda.
- Harder and JH Kelly rounded out plumbing, piping and electrical.

PDX exemplifies energy-efficient growth, prefab innovation and multi-firm coordination on a live airport site, proving sheet metal's pivotal role in resilient public infrastructure.

FEATURE STORY

Meet SMACNA's New President Todd Hill

Ventcon's innovator leads SMACNA in 2026.

SMACNA President Todd Hill and his family at the 2025 SMACNA Annual Convention.

In the humming workshops of Troy, Michigan, where sheet metal bends to the will of skilled hands, Todd Hill has forged an impressive career.

As the newly installed president of SMACNA for 2026, Hill brings a lifetime of grit, from a post-Christmas apprenticeship dare to steering Ventcon Inc. through multimillion-dollar expansions and a pivotal acquisition.

His story resonates with SMACNA members, a blueprint for turning challenges into opportunities in a trade demanding both muscle and vision.

FROM BOYHOOD SPARK TO VENTCON'S BOLD EVOLUTION

Picture a young Hill, mesmerized by his father's creations: a diamond-plate snowboard gleaming under workshop lights, crafted from scraps of sheet metal.

"My dad was in the trade for 43 years," Hill recalls, his voice reflecting the warmth of those memories. "I remember as a kid my dad would bring home different things that he would make or I would need, and it would come back as a piece of sheet metal.

"But I never really understood what my dad did until after high school," he adds. Hill was eyeing computer-aided design (CAD) or engineering when his father challenged him to take the apprenticeship test, and that changed everything. After acing it, he reported to Ventcon on Dec. 26, 1990.

"I've been there from day one of my apprenticeship. Dec. 26th [2025] was 35 years," he says. "It's been a great ride." While working at Ventcon, he earned his associate's degree in applied science in CAD and mechanical design from Schoolcraft College in Livonia, Michigan. Hill climbed from apprentice to CAD operator and advanced through several management positions, becoming president in 2005.

Then in 2010, Hill and partners, Scott M. Smith and Dennis T. Monaghan, bought out the previous owners of Ventcon Inc., turbocharging growth amid retiring leaders and booming demand.

SMART General President Mike Coleman with SMACNA President Todd Hill and their wives at the 2025 SMACNA Annual Convention (left). Hill and his wife, Tammy (right).

Facing equipment obsolescence in 2019, the company invested $1.5 million into Mestek Machinery, including lasers, coil lines and waterjet tables to help advance the business, Hill notes. It took about three months from start to finish to settle the new equipment into Ventcon's shop workflow. Since then, operations have flowed and the company continued growth.

Serving clients like Ford, GM, Stellantis, the University of Michigan and Pfizer, the firm logs top union hours in Wayne County with 140 workers.

A Jackson, Tennessee, facility followed in 2022 for Ford's megaprojects, and in 2023, Gallagher-Kaiser acquired a majority stake in the company, eyeing battery plants and data centers.

CLIMBING SMACNA'S RANKS

Hill's ascent at SMACNA mirrors Ventcon's growth. He started serving on local SMACNA Detroit boards involving pensions and apprenticeships and then moved on to national roles on HVAC councils, research institutes and green building task forces. Elected to the Executive Committee and crowned President in November 2025, he views the network as profound.

"You end up meeting people in the industry, and before you know it, they become your best friends," he shares, eyes alight. "My wife, Tammy, and I have met so many people in the industry from coast to coast."

Energized at the podium, Hill outlines 2026 priorities echoing his life's pivot points. He is optimistic for explosive growth, not just for Ventcon but industrywide.

"My company has seen a lot of expansion. I want to continue the path and continue to find the best talent we can — from the office staff through the union — and just make sure we have the best talent for the next generation and to promote our industry," he says, targeting apprentices for generations ahead. "Our main challenge has been a shortage of jobsite leadership. Numerous leadership retirements and company growth have both contributed to this. The good news is we have had great success with the newer apprentices we have employed, and things look promising for the future."

Dismissing construction's old stigmas, he champions future career paths. "There are so many opportunities right now for people who want to work with their hands," he says. "It's unlimited, and we've got to just continue to promote that."

Collaboration with SMART's Mike Coleman amplifies this. "They're on the same page as we are," Hill says. "We don't agree on everything 100%, but I think we have the same goals as far as finding talent. It's all for the good of our union, our industry and sheet metal workers."

New committee voices will spark innovation, much like Hill's machinery bets fueled Ventcon.

Hill's path — from his dad's workshop to SMACNA president — equips him uniquely for SMACNA's crossroads. His triumphs over labor gaps via apprenticeships, tech infusions and bold partnerships offer a roadmap for members navigating retirements, megaprojects and talent wars. As he reflects, "It's been an amazing ride."

"I WANT TO CONTINUE THE PATH AND FIND THE BEST TALENT WE CAN — FROM THE OFFICE STAFF THROUGH THE UNION — AND MAKE SURE WE'RE BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION."

FEATURE STORY

Where Craft Meets Character

B.J. Giri never chased the spotlight. Instead, the 2025 SMACNA Contractor of the Year built a career and a company by listening first, mentoring deeply and proving that leadership in the trades is as much about people as it is about precision.

B.J. Giri's office staff of Holaday-Parks honoring him on video when he received SMACNA's 2025 Contractor of the Year award.

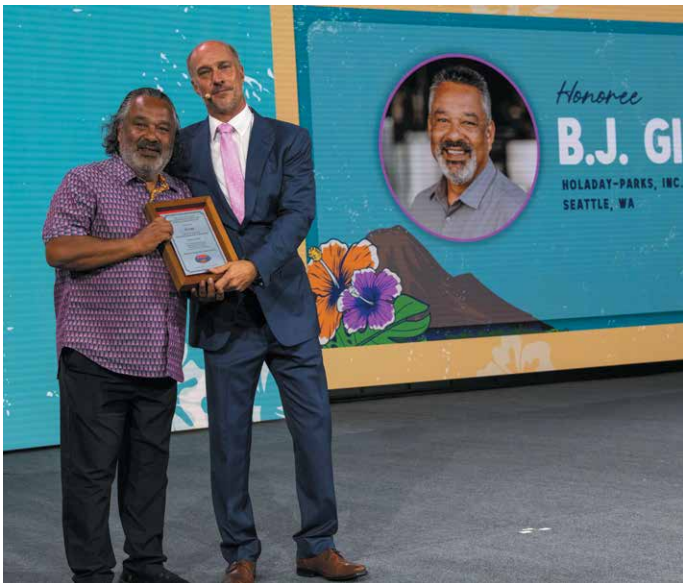
In the shadow of Seattle's rainy skyline, where the hum of construction cranes blends with the Puget Sound's tides, B.J. Giri stands as a quiet colossus of the trades.

Picture him on a jobsite at dawn, eyes sharp, exchanging a nod and a blueprint with a young apprentice. He's not the type to bellow orders or chase headlines. Instead, he listens first, then builds systems that breathe life into buildings and forges careers that anchor families.

As the 2025 SMACNA Contractor of the Year, Giri, managing principal of Holaday-Parks Inc., embodies the grit and grace that have kept sheet metal and HVAC thriving since his unexpected entry into the industry more than 35 years ago.

MORE THAN A TRADE

Holaday-Parks, founded in 1889, traces its roots to an era when Seattle was transitioning from logging camp to booming port city. What began as a modest sheet metal shop has grown into a mechanical contracting powerhouse, employing over 400 across its Seattle/Tukwila hub and expansions into Alaska, Indiana, Virginia and Ohio. Giri didn't inherit the firm; he earned his place rising through its ranks, transform-



SMACNA's 2025 Contractor of the Year B.J. Giri with SMACNA Past President Tom Martin (top left). Giri shaking SMACNA President Todd Hill's hand on the way to the podium to accept his award (top right).

ing legacy craftsmanship into modern innovation.

His ascent mirrors the company's: from hands-on fabricator to leader steering prefabrication breakthroughs, NIST cybersecurity certifications and energy-efficient HVAC systems that slash carbon footprints without skimping on performance. Colleagues call him a "bridge-builder," blending kindness with a relentless drive.

Giri's origin story in sheet metal wasn't scripted. He entered the industry by accident during a random meeting while parking Owner Jerry Parks' car when he was working in a downtown Seattle parking garage. Giri was at school earning his mechanical engineering degree. "He offered me a job in the engineering department," he says, explaining that he worked in various capacities throughout his tenure there before he and his partners purchased the company prior to 2020. What hooked him? "How tangible the work was. Sheet metal and HVAC are trades where you can point to a finished job and say, 'That works because I built it.'"

Early days brought the allure of variety. "It's a mix of hands-on skill, problem-solving and teamwork. You're never just doing one thing, and every jobsite teaches you something new," he says, adding that pride in the work and mentoring people kept him motivated. "There were long days, tough conditions and times when it felt like nothing went right, but seeing a system come together and knowing a building would be comfortable and safe because of our work made it worth it. Over time, mentoring younger workers and passing on what I'd learned gave the job even more meaning. It stopped being just a trade and became a career I could stand behind."

A pivotal moment crystallized his leadership. Early on, a project lagged amid trade tensions. Thrust into coordination, Giri saw chaos yield to clarity. "What stood out wasn't the technical challenge, it was realizing how much communication and trust mattered," he says. "When people felt heard and had clear direction, the job moved forward. When they didn't, everything stalled."

That forged his ethos. "A good leader doesn't just know the work, they support the people doing it, stay calm under pressure and take responsibility when things get tough. Leadership is less about position and more about consistency, accountability and respect."

Mentorship flows from deep roots. Giri credits his late father, who worked in a different field, for modeling integrity. "He was someone who led by example, showing the value of hard work and integrity. Doing the job right, even when no one is watching, is what builds trust and a lasting reputation. He also taught me the importance of patience and teaching others, taking the time to explain not just how to do something, but why it matters."

Giri mirrors this with apprentices. "I try to pass on not only technical skills but also the values my father modeled: pride in skill, accountability and the understanding that leadership is about lifting others up, not just managing tasks," he explains.

THE WEIGHT OF THE CROWN

Winning SMACNA's 2025 Contractor of the Year hit deep for Giri. "It's incredibly meaningful, both personally and for everyone at Holaday-Parks," he reflects. "On a personal level, it's humbling. I've spent my career with people who take real pride in their craft,

and this recognition reflects the lessons, mentorship and teamwork that shaped me along the way."

For the firm? "This award belongs to the entire company. It represents decades of hard work, commitment to safety and quality, and a culture where people look out for one another and do the job the right way. It validates what we've always believed: that investing in our people and our relationships with customers and partners leads to lasting success."

SMACNA lauds his "innovative, collaborative and principled approach," with SMACNA leadership noting, "B.J. brings remarkable energy to the industry, and his impact advancing our trade is clear. He has fostered a culture where employees thrive and clients feel valued."

His service exceeds the jobsite: mentoring newcomers, backing apprenticeships and championing safety and collaboration. "I've always believed that serving the industry means giving more than what's required on the jobsite," he says. "Over the years, I've tried to promote our trade by mentoring those starting out, supporting apprenticeship and training programs, and encouraging people to take pride in doing quality work the right way, even when it's not the easiest path."

PEOPLE-FIRST LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Colleagues peg Giri as kind and innovative for being "people-first" and grounded in respect. "Early in my career, I was very focused on the technical side, getting the work done and solving problems quickly," he shares. "Over time, I learned that the best results come when you invest just as much in the people as you do in the process. Listening, being approachable and treating everyone with dignity goes a long way."

Evolution meant blending that with progress. "We pair that practice with innovation by being open to new ideas, better technology and different ways of doing things, while still respecting the fundamentals of the trade," he says. "Today, my focus is on empowering others and creating an environment where people feel supported and challenged."

Mentorship shines in stories like his protégé, now VP of Service. "Early on, he was eager and capable but didn't have the experience in taking ownership of larger projects," Giri says. "I worked with him closely, giving guidance, setting clear expectations and letting him make decisions while providing support when needed. Over time, I watched him grow into a leader who can manage complex teams and high-pressure situations with skill and confidence."

The takeaway? "Leadership isn't about telling people what to do; it's about creating an environment where they feel empowered to rise to the challenge. Seeing someone you've mentored succeed at that level is one of the most rewarding parts of the job."

In a modern firm, Giri says effective mentorship balances "teaching and trust … sharing real-world experience, setting clear expectations and being honest about mistakes (your own included), while also encouraging curiosity, innovation and new ideas, as well as creating pathways for advancement and making sure the next generation sees a future in the industry."

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE LEGACY

Diversity isn't rhetoric at Holaday-Parks; it's action. It's about "broadening how and where we recruit — partnering with schools, apprenticeship programs and community organizations to reach people who may not have traditionally seen the trades as an option," Giri says. It's "focusing on skills, work ethic and potential, not just background."

Internally, it's about "building a culture where everyone feels respected and supported," he shares. "That includes having expectations around professionalism, safety and training programs, mentorship opportunities and making sure people have a voice. We also invest in leadership development so opportunities for advancement are accessible, and we hold ourselves accountable to this."

His experience as a member of SMACNA Western Washington sharpened this. "It's given me the opportunity to learn from peers, share challenges and see how decisions at the industry level impact contractors, labor and clients," Giri says. "Discussions around safety, workforce development, technology and market trends have directly influenced how we plan, invest and adapt, reinforcing the importance of collaboration. When contractors work together to raise standards, everyone benefits."

Labor partnerships fuel his edge. "A strong partnership with labor starts with mutual respect and open communication," Giri says. "In practice, that means involving labor early, listening to field input

B.J. Giri when his name was called as winner of SMACNA's 2025 Contractor of the Year.

and recognizing that the people doing the work often have the best insights into how to do it safely, efficiently and with quality. When labor is treated as a true partner — not just a resource — the entire project benefits.

"In our shop and on our projects, that partnership shows up through consistent training, a shared commitment to safety and clear expectations on both sides," he continues. "We work closely on workforce planning, scheduling and problem-solving so issues are quickly addressed before they become setbacks. Most importantly, we build trust by being fair and communicative. That kind of relationship creates stability, improves performance and gives us a competitive edge in the market.

EMBRACING INNOVATION

Innovation honors Holaday-Parks' 1889 legacy. The company has focused on innovation in technology, prefabrication, sustainability and project delivery, but "the biggest impact has come from integrating these areas together rather than in isolation," Giri says.

In technology, the company has invested in digital modeling, as well as BAS controls. "We have project management tools that improve coordination and reduce errors on the jobsite." Giri adds. "In addition, we are well down the path of CMMC and NIST certifications. Prefabrication in our shop has allowed us to assemble components with greater precision, cutting field labor time and improving safety.

"On the sustainability side, we've collaborated with clients to design energy-efficient systems that meet strict environmental standards and re-doubled our commitment to lowering carbon emissions within our own company," he adds. "In project delivery, we've refined processes that keep projects on schedule and under budget while still maintaining quality."

The results? They speak for themselves, Giri explains, pointing to "faster project timelines, fewer costly mistakes, safer worksites and a reputation for reliability that strengthens both client trust and employee engagement.

"It's proof that innovation isn't just about new tools," Giri says. "It's about smarter ways of doing work."

COMMUNITY AND THE HORIZON

Being an active and positive part of the Seattle area is important for Holaday-Parks, which does this by supporting local organizations, schools and workforce programs that strengthen the trade and broaden the community. "Holaday-Parks shows up by investing in apprenticeship programs, sponsoring educational initiatives and volunteering time and expertise where it can have an influence," Giri says. "We also prioritize local hiring and partnerships, helping build long-term relationships that benefit both the company and the community. To me, being present in the community is about creating opportunities, giving back and showing that we care about Seattle not just as a place to work, but as a place to invest in and support."

Giri's 10- to 15-year vision? A trifecta legacy: Holaday-Parks leading "with integrity, innovation and quality;" mentees carrying forward a "commitment to professionalism, continuous learning and respect for the trade;" and for the SMACNA community to get stronger through collaboration, shared knowledge, higher standards and expanding opportunities.

"If I've contributed to raising standards, expanding opportunities and helping the industry attract and retain skilled people," he points out, "then I'll feel like I've made a lasting and important difference beyond just my own company." ▼

CAPITOL HILL UPDATE

Government and Public Affairs Issues Update

Last year, the Government Affairs Department quietly but effectively worked diligently to produce significant legislative victories on behalf of SMACNA members.

This report will spotlight the hard-fought battles in Washington and across the states from the 119th Congress, as well as how members can engage in crucial legislative advocacy during this election year. While the ever-changing and historic level steel, aluminum and copper tariff rates were predicted in our 2025 and 2026 outlooks, and the political environment remains ever challenging, there have been many significant advances for industry policy goals to date, with many more challenges ahead until the November elections.

We are now at the halfway point in the 119th Congress, and our top goal remains unchanged: protect what matters most to the majority of our members in the now-enacted tax package, such as bonus depreciation, equipment expensing, estate tax permanence, SALT cap increases and the R&D tax credits. To do so, we have also joined countless coalition allies to score a number of real victories to extend important tax incentives for efficiency, CHIPS and energy grid enhancement enabling the fast-growing wave of data center projects.

Often success is measured in the number of laws and programs you preserve, not the new laws you help pass each session. Joining with our coalition allies, we helped to push back efforts to eliminate tax preferences for municipal bonds, preserved state and local tax deductions for businesses and stopped the efforts to tax employee fringe benefit plans. All these defensive efforts preserved construction markets and sustained the integrity of employee benefit plans, no minor achievement.

SMALL BUSINESS PAYMENT FOR PERFORMANCE ACT

SMACNA has been active on Capitol Hill in recent years consistently advocating for the Small Business Payment for Performance Act. Changes to federal construction contracts, commonly referred to as change orders, are inevitable on complex projects. Federal agencies frequently issue unilateral change orders without timely formalization or compensation, forcing contractors to finance government-directed work for extended periods.

The legislation would allow small businesses to request an equitable adjustment when a contracting officer issues a change order without the contractor's agreement and would require the federal government to pay no less than fifty percent of the estimated cost of the change order upon receipt of the equitable adjustment request.

SMACNA has met with dozens and dozens of Members of Congress and staff in congressional offices to build bipartisan support and advance the bill through the House and Senate Small Business Committees, emphasizing the impacts on cash flow, workforce stability, and project delivery.

TAX AND ENERGY LEGISLATION

SMACNA is supporting and urging co-sponsorship of legislation introduced by Representatives Mike Thompson (D-CA) and Richard Neal (D-MA) to restore renewable energy and energy efficiency tax incentives originally enacted under the Inflation Reduction Act. The legislation would reinstate investment and production tax credits for renewable power generation, extend incentives for energy efficient buildings and homes, support domestic manufacturing of clean energy components, and restore clean vehicle and clean hydrogen production credits.

SMACNA is educating Members of Congress on the implications of this legislation sure to impact and lower energy costs, boost construction demand, domestic manufacturing, and support efforts to address critical workforce needs.

BUILDING CODES, APPLIANCE STANDARDS AND AFFORDABILITY

SMACNA submitted a formal statement to the House Energy and Commerce Committee for the Energy Subcommittee hearing titled "Building the American Dream Examining Affordability, Choice, and Security in Appliance and Buildings Policies."

SMACNA reaffirmed support for modern, consensus-based building energy codes and federal appliance efficiency standards, emphasizing cost savings, safety, disaster resilience and national energy security.

WORKER CLASSIFICATION LEGISLATION

SMACNA submitted a written hearing statement to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce opposing the Modern Worker Empowerment Act and the Modern Worker Security Act. SMACNA expressed support for the Department of Labor's 2024 final rule reaffirming the multifactor economic reality test for employee classification

and raised concerns that the proposed legislation would undermine long-standing judicial precedent and competitive fairness in construction.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND APPRENTICESHIP POLICY

SMACNA continues to engage Members of Congress, especially the Senators on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee to advocate for the value of registered apprenticeship programs and debt-free workforce pipelines delivered in partnership with SMART.

NEW LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENT: H.R. 5862

The American Energy Independence and Affordability Act (H.R. 5862) was introduced by SMACNA champion Rep. Thompson (D-CA) and is cosponsored by 117 House members.

What H.R. 5862 does:

- Restores the full clean electricity production and investment tax credits for wind, solar and other zero-emission power sources.
- Extends incentives for energy efficient homes and commercial buildings, helping families and businesses cut utility bills through modern, efficient technologies.
- Reinstates clean-vehicle tax credits for consumers and businesses to accelerate America's transition to electric and zero-emission vehicles.
- Supports domestic manufacturing of clean energy components and strengthens the U.S. technology supply chains.
- Extends the clean hydrogen production credit, advancing next-generation clean fuel production.

Businesses are already feeling the pain from higher energy costs and supply-chain shocks caused by uncertain but record tariffs.

This legislation would deliver real relief by restoring incentives that make homes more efficient, help lower energy bills, support clean and renewable power, and expand access to affordable clean vehicles.

We believe restoring these incentives will strengthen our energy independence, lower utility bills, boost domestic production and create thousands of good-paying, high-skill jobs in the United States. ▼

DUCT & DATA

Travis Voss

Ins and Outs of Automation

As we kick off 2026, AI and automation continue to be hot topics across many industries, and construction is no exception. This article focuses on automation, but AI can easily be substituted in as well. While concerns often resurface during election cycles, the reality is that automation has been part of our industry for decades. Rather than embracing it blindly or resisting it outright, it's worth looking at how these tools may actually affect our workforce and our work.

The most common concern is job loss. This fear is valid and deserves to be addressed thoughtfully. Some roles do disappear when automation is introduced, but that does not automatically translate to net job loss. A frequently cited example is the introduction of ATMs in the 1970s. While many expected bank tellers to be replaced, banks ultimately hired more employees as automation reduced routine tasks and enabled expansion. The work ended up changing, often becoming more customer focused and meaningful.

A similar dynamic exists in construction. Equipment such as coil lines, plasma and laser tables, and multi-axis cutters can reduce labor on repetitive cutting tasks. But when viewed across the full workflow, one or two operators can feed multiple downstream workstations. Automation removes bottlenecks and allows more people to stay productive in higher-skill assembly, welding, and installation work.

Another concern is the loss of craft. In practice, the craft doesn't disappear, it just shifts. Tradespeople still rely on deep knowledge to ensure machines produce accurate, high-quality parts. The most demanding skill often shows up later in the process, where workers assemble complex systems, adapt to changing jobsite conditions, and ensure components fit into a constantly evolving building.

Automation also enables contractors to take on more work. While labor hours may be reduced on individual assemblies or projects, improved speed and accuracy allow firms to bid competitively and increase overall capacity. With strong backlogs across much of the industry, efficiency gains often translate into more total work, not less.

One of construction's strengths is how these tools are developed and adopted. Many automation solutions are created in collaboration with contractors, unions, and shop workers, with a focus on improving safety and efficiency rather than replacing people. That collaboration has also created new roles in engineering, installation, and maintenance.

Automation isn't going away. What matters is how we continue to adopt it thoughtfully, collaboratively, and with respect for the workforce that makes this industry run. ▼

Travis Voss is the Director of Innovative Technology and Fabrication at SMACNA. He leverages his background in the tech field to explore, adapt and potentially develop technologies and workflows for the construction industry, particularly as it undergoes its digital transformation.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

Ronald J. Eagar

How Contractors Can Avoid Three Common Mistakes During Periods of Growth

Periods of growth are exciting for any contractor, indicating strong demand and the opportunity to expand into new markets, larger projects or project types. However, given the cyclical nature of construction, assumptions that hold true during slower periods may not hold when project demand accelerates. Project-by-project budgeting, fluctuating material prices and labor availability challenges make it difficult to predict and allocate resources accurately and effectively.

As contractors navigate the "peaks and valleys" of the construction cycle, avoiding three common mistakes can help maintain growth momentum and prevent avoidable strain:

1. CASH FLOW BLIND SPOTS WHEN WORKLOAD INCREASES

Cash flow may be more challenging to manage when project volume increases quickly. During slower periods, some contractors rely on borrowing between jobs to cover labor, equipment or overhead. Larger jobs often require significant upfront mobilization costs, and without disciplined forecasting and timely billing, a shortfall may be more challenging to identify. Regularly monitoring cash flow by contract size, timing and billing structure keeps working capital aligned with the contractor's goals and provides a stronger foundation for larger opportunities. In certain situations, it actually may require infusion of additional capital or possible a request to the company's bank for a temporary or permanent increase in available line of credit.

2. RELYING ON OUTDATED OR INCOMPLETE COST DATA ON NEW BIDS

Every bid is built on assumptions about labor, materials and subcontractor pricing. In busy cycles, those inputs can shift quickly, which means the costs or productivity expectations from the last project may not apply to the next one. When those changes aren't communicated or updated, estimators may base bids on outdated assumptions, creating a gap between what the job was priced to deliver and what is required in the field. Keeping cost data current and sharing field updates regularly helps contractors price work accurately during growth.

3. NOT REVIEWING THE WIP SCHEDULE FREQUENTLY ENOUGH

With more jobs running at once, underbilling, fading margins, or shifting timelines can surface quickly. If the WIP is not reviewed regularly, these issues may go unnoticed until the financial impact becomes more difficult to control or correct. Consistent WIP reviews help contractors communicate real-time job performance with lenders and protect profitability as project volume rises. Keeping these schedules up to date provides an early warning system and helps ensure that financial decisions reflect the true status of each job. It is recommended that WIP schedules be prepared and analyzed at least monthly.

Periods of high demand allow contractors to reinforce the systems and best practices that will support them in slower months. Using growth periods to sharpen forecasting, improve job visibility, and update cost data helps contractors sustain momentum, not only through the current workload but also as market conditions shift. ▼

For more information, contact Ronald J. Eagar, CPA, CCIFP Partner at Grassi, at reagar@grassiadvisors.com, through www.grassiadvisors.com or at 516-336-2460.

"Periods of high demand allow contractors to reinforce the systems and best practices that will support them in slower months."

LEGAL

Grant Collins

Ninth Circuit Clarifies the Scope of the "Building and Construction Industry" Exemption for Withdrawal Liability

On Jan. 5, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit issued a decision relevant to union contractors. In Walker Specialty Construction Inc. v. Board of Trustees of the Construction Industry and Laborers Joint Pension Trust for Southern Nevada, the court held that asbestos abatement work qualifies as "building and construction industry" work under the Multiemployer Pension Plan Amendments Act of 1980 ("MPPAA").

The decision clarifies what constitutes "building and construction industry" work for purposes of the MPPAA's special withdrawal liability rules. In doing so, the court rejected the idea that only new construction qualifies. Instead, the court adopted a well-established definition of construction that includes work necessary to make a building usable, including "maintenance, repair and alterations that are essential to a building or structure's usability."

"BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION" EXEMPTION

Under the MPPAA, an employer that withdraws from a multiemployer pension plan is generally required to pay its share of the plan's unfunded vested benefits. This can result in substantial withdrawal liability.

Congress, however, created a special rule for employers in the "building and construction industry." If certain conditions are met, construction employers are not automatically treated as having withdrawn merely because they stop operating in a particular geographic area.

The Ninth Circuit explained the policy rationale for this exception: "Congress created this exception because of 'the transitory nature of contracts and employment in the building and construction industry.'"

As the court explained, when a contractor leaves a market, that does not necessarily mean the pension plan is harmed:

> The construction industry as a whole does not necessarily shrink when a contributing contractor leaves the industry; employees are often dispatched to another … contractor in the area that contributes to the multiemployer pension plan on their behalf. Thus, as long as the base of construction projects in the area covered by the plan is funding the plan's obligations, the plan is not threatened when an individual employer withdraws.

This reflects the real-world nature of construction: projects are temporary, contractors move in and out of jurisdictions, and workers often continue covered employment with other signatory employers.

Because the term "building and construction industry" had a settled meaning prior to the MPPAA's enactment, we infer that Congress was aware of and intended to incorporate this definition when it enacted the "building and construction industry" exception in the MPPAA.

In other words, Congress did not intend to invent a new definition. It intended to use the same one that already existed under federal labor law.

The NLRB's definition of the "building and construction industry" is not limited to new buildings. The Ninth Circuit quoted prior NLRB decisions describing construction as: "the erection, maintenance and repair . . . of immobile structures and utilities . . . which become integral parts of structures and are essential to their use for any general purpose." The court also noted that the NLRB had previously concluded that "construction" includes "new work, additions, alterations and repairs."

The pension fund attempted to characterize asbestos abatement as superficial or cosmetic. The Ninth Circuit rejected that view.

Because the work involved structural alteration and repair of core building components, the court concluded that the work fell squarely within the NLRB's settled definition of "building and construction industry" work.

Rather than adopting a narrow definition limited to the erection of new buildings or structures, the court held that the phrase incorporates the settled meaning developed under federal labor law. ▼

Disclaimer: This article is for informational purposes only. If you have questions or need guidance, consult your local labor attorney or labor relations department.

Grant Collins is a specialist in labor and employment law at Felhaber Larson. Reach him at gcollins@felhaber.com.

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SMACNA CALENDAR

2026

MARCH

March 2-4
Supervisor Training Academy
Orlando, Florida

March 23-24
New Chapter Executive Orientation
Chantilly, Virginia

March 23-26
Business Management University
Phoenix, Arizona

March 25
Strategic Planning Facilitator Training for Chapter Executives
Chantilly, Virginia

APRIL

April 12-14
2026 SMACNA Fab Forum
Chicago, Illinois

April 26-29
Senior Project Leadership Institute
Rosemont, Illinois

MAY

May 31 – June 2
Council of Chapter Representatives Meeting
Quebec City

JUNE

June 7-10
Project Managers Institute
Boston, Massachusetts

OCTOBER

October 25-28
2026 SMACNA Annual Convention
Orlando, Florida

Welcome New SMACNA Members

Bluegrass Metal Works Inc.	Louisville, Kentucky
Carlson Mechanical Services Ltd.	Markham, Ontario
EvolutionBIM LLC	Riverside, California
Harty Mechanical	Austin, Minnesota
JMA Mechanical	Lompoc, California
Matic International Factory	Saudi Arabia
QuickTin	Tacoma, Washington
Tadmit Hadasha	Israel
Watson Metal Co.	Hiawatha, Iowa
Yuhang Technology Development Co. Ltd.	China
Zenith Solutions Inc.	Ottawa, Ontario

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