



CONSTRUCTION BUILDDUP ▲



By Jonathan Wales

SHIFT TO HIGHER SKILL LEVELS REQUIRED

Major Moves is supplying construction companies with more work to pursue, work that can't be completed without qualified employees.

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MAJOR MOVES EQUALS MAJOR IMPACT

Seas of orange barrels and temporary detours make it easy to see the progress being made on improving Indiana roads. Delays are inevitable but ultimately amount to minor inconveniences on the way to smoother and safer travel for commuters and commerce.

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Higher Skill Levels

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“With all the construction, it is getting harder to find the skilled workers we need,” reveals Steve Henderson, president of E & B Paving in Anderson.

J.R. Gaylor, president of the Indiana chapter of the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) agrees, referring to the challenge of finding a quality workforce as “the battle in the next 25 years.”

ABC, in operation since the early 1980s, is one of four organizations to receive Major Moves funding aimed at training minority workers. The Indiana chapter provides U.S. Department of Labor certification in 16 different construction crafts via six training centers throughout the state. The centers, located to address strategic regional needs, offer safety training as well. The certifications are awarded after four-year apprenticeship programs with the graduates, known as journeymen, in high demand.

“The real competition is for a skilled workforce; there are plenty of general laborers available now,” Gaylor explains. “Major Moves funding is focused on pre-apprenticeship. There needs to be more focus from the state on taking people from general laborers to more skilled (electrical, carpentry, plumbing and similar positions).”

Gaylor is also concerned about the age of workers that take the initiative to learn new skills. “The average age of students in our apprenticeship program is 27,” he reveals. “Having people roam around in entry-level jobs and underemployed for 10 years, assuming they started working after graduating high school, is not beneficial for our economy or them.”

Gaylor isn't the only industry insider that would like to see workers seeking advanced skills earlier in their careers. Chuck Braken, corporate sales manager for E & B Paving, comments,



J.R. Gaylor says there must be an emphasis on finding and training highly skilled construction workers.

“It's always good to see younger people seeking more education in our industry. We want to be in business for a long time, and we will need people ready to step up and fill important roles.”

Finding the workers to train

The old saying, “you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink,” holds true in the construction training realm. Providing training opportunities is insufficient without finding a large number of individuals willing to go the extra mile to improve their skills.

“The big picture answer is that training efforts now and in the future are going to have to be geared toward the minority sector,” Gaylor asserts. When asked about immigrants, he suggests, “We do need them,” and adds, “We (ABC) would like to see a

plan to make undocumented workers legal, and we don't think that burden should fall on business.”

Gaylor also feels that partnerships, similar to the one that made the Major Moves initiative possible in the first place, are key to producing the type of training construction workers need.

“There has historically been a lot of (public) training for low-skilled labor. There needs to be a more aggressive focus on moving people up the career ladder. It will take partnerships between the public and private sectors to take people to this next level,” he states.

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Steve Henderson and Chuck Braken, E & B Paving, at www.ebpaving.com

J.R. Gaylor, Associated Builders and Contractors, at (317) 596-4950 or www.abc.org

Improving worker skills is the focus in education/training sessions and on the job.

