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BEST IN CLASS

Build Your Future Arizona
programs help generate
interest in construction
careers at an early age



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CLASS ACT

Valley high schools bring back construction courses

By REBECCA L. RHOADES

Starting in the 1970s, America's educational system began steering students toward one of two options: college or military service. At the time, many schools offered a variety of vocational classes, such as wood and metal shop, drafting, automotive repair and even culinary arts. But as educational budgets shrank during the 1980s and into the 2000s, those elective courses were the first to be cut.

Now, decades later, trades industries are feeling the results.

Across the country, the need for

construction workers has been growing rapidly. But the supply of skilled labor continues to dwindle. According to the 2022 Construction Industry Forecast by Wells Fargo, the ability to hire qualified workers is a top concern of contractors and industry executives. So while there are more college-educated Americans than ever before, there's a limited number of people who can build their offices or dream homes.

Arizona, in particular, has been especially hard hit. Demand for residential and commercial buildings remains at all-time highs, but the state's

construction industry is suffering a dearth of skilled tradespeople.

"We've been experiencing massive job growth in the sector over the past few years," says Tom Jarvis, partner at Willmeng. "Pair that with the baby boomer generation of skilled tradesmen exiting the market and the fact that it's getting harder and harder to find experienced people. There's a real need."

FIELD OF STUDY

To answer that need, Valley schools are bringing back hands-on courses



Mark Adams



Tom Jarvis



Blake Marshall



Stephanie Streeter

“

Getting to take coursework that will help you gain internships, connect with employers and even find paid opportunities will keep you engaged in your learning, provide a more personalized education and make your high school experience more relevant to a future interest. – Stephanie Streeter

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community that is high-minority and high-poverty, the school has more than 3,000 students.

For a more focused educational experience, Trevor G. Browne offers a College and Career Academy, which breaks down the school into smaller learning communities. Various academies offer 14 career pathways, ranging from global media to health services. Students in the Academy of Fine Arts and Industry can follow a career pathway in construction that will take them from their freshman year to graduation.

“Getting to take coursework that will help you gain internships, connect with employers and even find paid opportunities will keep you engaged in your learning, provide a more personalized education and make your high school experience more relevant to a future interest,” says Stephanie Streeter, principal at Trevor G. Browne.

While the high school has always offered some career and technical education (CTE) courses, the academies are more akin to a college major. During their freshman year, students pick a pathway, which will guide their coursework during their sophomore,

junior and senior years. If they complete all the requirements, which are set by the state, the student will qualify for certificates and, depending on the specific classes they took, dual-enrollment college credits.

During their senior year, students will be required to complete an internship. “Our goal is for them to have some type of internship, whether it’s during the school day, after school or during the summer,” Streeter explains. “When you hear the word ‘construction,’ you sometimes think, ‘Oh, it’s building houses.’ But there’s so much more to construction than that. So it’s important that students understand that by interacting with industry professionals.

“All of our pathways are designed to be high-wage, high-demand, high-skilled jobs for students, and that will directly impact Arizona employers,” Streeter continues. “The sooner they can get exposed to those industries and get passionate about working in them, the more opportunities they’ll have for internships that will benefit not only the city or areas surrounding the high school, but also the entire state.

BUILDING HER FUTURE: Leona Charley gains experience as an apprentice for Canyon State Electric, working on the Hilton North Scottsdale at Cavasson. She graduated as a journeyman electrician on Dec. 9, 2022.

designed to expose students to the trades and provide them with career path opportunities that lead directly to the construction industry.

Trevor G. Browne High School is part of the Phoenix Union High School District. Located in an underserved

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BUILDING EXPERIENCE

At Estrella High School in Avondale, Mark Adams has been teaching carpentry for the past two years. The program, which launched during the pandemic, is a two-year project-based practicum that gives students a glimpse into residential construction.

The curriculum was written by the Southwest Mountain States Regional Council of Carpenters, and at the end of the program, students can a state assessment test and become certified in the field.

“Our goal is to prepare these kids for the future, because it’s not always about going to college. There are jobs out there that they can move into immediately after graduation,” Adams remarks. “And with the baby boomers retiring, we’re going to need to fill those positions.”

Blake Marshall, construction technology instructor at Youngker High School in Buckeye, teaches a similar carpentry program. First-year courses emphasize the basics: safety, accuracy, proper tool usage. Students build small projects, ranging

from toolboxes to Adirondack chairs. “Year two steps into the realm of construction carpentry,” Marshall says. “We talk more about the elements that go into building a house or structure.” According to Adams, his students at the end of the program “should be able to build a house frame. They will know how to make joists, trusses, headers — anything that goes along with the framing itself.”

Although the programs at both schools are relatively new, Adams and Marshall are quick to point out that growing interest in them by students, especially female students. “I have more young ladies in my class than ever before,” Marshall says. About 15% of the students in his level one and two classes are female.

Adams points out that attendance in his classes this year has increased by 50% over last year. Of the 30 or so students in each class, 20% to 30% are female.

All these programs, whether they’re specialized courses of study or individual elective classes, are designed to expose students to skills

and career opportunities about which they otherwise may not have known. And while their impact on Arizona’s construction industry won’t be felt for a few more years, the interest in them from students and businesses continues to grow.

“We just started this journey, but we already have so many industries that are excited to partner with us and our students,” Streeter says. “I think that programs like our career academies can be a powerful model for schools in the future, and we’re hopeful that our students will not only lead the way for the next generation, but that the coursework will be meaningful for them.”

Jarvis adds, “There are so many opportunities out there and not just with the physical side of construction. At Willmeng, we have people who have careers in safety, in marketing, in business. It all starts with awareness, and if we could just increase these programs by a couple schools each year, eventually we will be able to get the message out there about all the wonderful lives people can have in the construction industry.” ■■■





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CONSTRUCTION IN THE CLASSROOM

Trades professionals share their real-life experiences with high school students as part of Build Your Future Arizona's new ambassador program

By REBECCA L. RHOADES



As a high school student in California, Janette Almanza had no idea what she wanted to do for a career. Because she prefers hands-on experience to classroom learning, college wasn't an option. She bounced from job to job trying to find a place where she fit in. Then five years ago, she landed at SSC Underground, a Phoenix-based construction firm that specializes in below-ground services, such as excavating, tunneling and boring for utilities, pipes and cables.

"When I came to Arizona, I witnessed how fast the state was growing in such a short amount of time, and I knew that it was something

I had to get in on," recalls Almanza, now a project coordination assistant at SSC. "I just fell in love with construction." She wishes she had known earlier about opportunities in the industry.

"In California, there aren't any requirements for students to take vocational classes, such as welding or woodshop," Almanza continues. "In fact, I didn't know anyone who took those types of classes. And nobody ever came in to talk to us about careers in the trades.

That's why, when asked to join Build Your Future Arizona's ambassador program, she jumped at the chance

to help spread the word about trades to students throughout the Valley of the Sun.

REAL-WORLD REPRESENTATION

Launched in spring 2022, the ambassador program builds upon the organization's awareness campaign, enlisting construction professionals to speak with students in Valley schools and at industry career fairs. Thirty-two people with jobs that span all aspects of the construction sector have signed up to serve as ambassadors — including Almanza. Most are young and in the early stages of their careers, making them more relatable

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Matt Apodaca



Janette Almanza



Blue Coble



Jared Hutchinson



Paul Sanders

to teenagers than, say, an executive or senior employee.

"We have everyone from people who are on the finance side of construction to electricians, heavy equipment operators, project managers and BIM (building information modeling) designers who are sharing their own experiences and what its really like to work in the construction field," says Paul Sanders, workforce development manager for the Greater Phoenix Chamber Foundation (GPCF).

Sanders' goal for the 2022-23 school years is to have 40 ambassadors who will attend 60 high school events.

The ambassador program has partnered with ElevateEdAZ. Like BYFAZ, ElevateEdAZ is an initiative of the GPCF. It supports career and technical education (CTE) programs in 13 high schools across Phoenix Union, Mesa Public, Paradise Valley Unified and Glendale Union school districts.

Since September, ambassadors have done 21 classroom presentations in front of 511 students, and attended two construction-specific career fairs

attended by 4,200 students and nine general career fairs attended by 3,800 students. Of the 8,000 students at the career fairs, ambassadors spoke directly with 1,100 of them about construction.

"More of those students had no idea what they wanted to do," Sanders says. "Some expressed interested in welding and electrical work."

For Blue Coble, attending career fairs as an ambassador allows her to share her experiences not only as a quality manager for McCarthy Building Companies but also as a union iron worker. "I'm very much into recruitment and retainment, especially for women and minorities," she explains. "There have been so many times where I was the only women on the job. Not only did I want other women to be able to talk to and have that mentorship, but I see how things change by introducing women and minorities into the industry. It brings a different perspective and elevates our culture overall."

Since joining the ambassador program, Coble has spoken in one

classroom and attended a couple career fairs. She has talked with students who are interested in pursuing careers in design and shared with them opportunities available in McCarthy's virtual design department. She recalls another student who was interested in getting into the demolition side of the construction industry. The young woman thought her only option was joining the military, which she wasn't particularly excited about.

"I asked her, 'Have you ever thought about doing mine work?' They use a lot of explosives in that field, and Arizona just happens to have the third-largest open pit mine in the world," Coble recalls. "She was really excited. She had no idea that was even a possibility."

SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS

Jared Hutchinson has been a construction technology instructor at Sunnyslope High School for five years. He reached out to Build Your Future AZ because he wanted someone to talk to his students about options other than college.

Build Your Future Arizona

What it is: Build Your Future Arizona's mission is to create a sustainable and skilled craft workforce by creating awareness about high paying construction careers, training opportunities and mapping career paths to employment in these high demand occupations. The organization is led by an industry steering committee made up of leading employers who have invested in Build Your Future Arizona's effort to inspire the next generation of craft professionals to construct a career. **Learn more: arizona.byf.org**



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"A lot of my students feel like college is their only option," he explains. "I wanted to expose them to other opportunities. When they hear these stories, when they see it in real life, it's so much more effective than just me telling them about it."

Matt Apodaca, director of workforce development for Corbins Electric, spoke to Hutchinson's class. "I'm very passionate about promoting the trade that has been so good to me throughout the years," he says. "I tell the students that this is a great foundation that they can build upon, and that it's a trade that will take care of you and fulfill you for many years to come."

As part of his presentation, Apodaca shares the typical career path and pay structure of an employee at Corbins. For recent high school graduates who join the company and exhibit a strong work ethic, Corbins will enroll them in

school and pay for their education, on top of their hourly rate. "In four years, when they turn out as a journeyman, they have a skill set that's good anywhere in the world — and they have zero debt. So they've built this foundation that's worth \$70,000-\$90,000 a year by the time they're 22 years old," Apodaca says.

"It opens their eyes to things that aren't always on the surface," he adds.

Coble explains further. "Not only are we telling students about the possibilities and jobs in construction, but we're also putting a person in the position where, if they have questions, they have someone they can ask, and that's really important," she says. "If you don't know who to talk to, you don't know what you need to even get the process started."

Sanders notes that 53% of high school graduates in 2021 did not enroll

in college. Many end up working in food service or warehouses — jobs that typically do not have much of an upward career path.

Student response to the ambassadors has been positive. According to Hutchinson, "It gets them excited about being able to make their own decisions and not feeling as though they have to keep going to school in order to succeed."

The companies also benefit. "We've seen an uptick in people who are talking about the trades and being vocal about wanting to be in the trades," Almanza says. "By getting someone right out of high school and teaching them the way you need them to learn, you can have a long-term employee. And if you get a kid who's 19 and he stays there for 10, 20, even 30 years, he's going to know that job inside out." ■■■



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IMPACTING AN INDUSTRY

Arizona individuals, organizations, alliances and companies are reshaping diversity, equity and inclusion in construction



By ERIN THORBURN

Lack of diversity has long plagued the construction industry. According to Build Your Future — an organization that fosters construction career insights and opportunities — in 2018, the presence of women in construction was a mere 9.9%, Black workers only 6%, and Asian construction employees 2%. But, the construction workforce diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) tides — however slowly — are turning. And, like the old Beatles song “Getting Better,” goes: “It’s getting better all the time.”

If you’re curious about how much “better” construction workforce DEI is becoming, a recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) provides some insight: The percentage of women

in construction has increased by 1.5% from 2016 — 2022 to 14%. Notably, the percentage of women in construction in Arizona grew to 15.6% from October 2020 to August 2022, according to Kent Lane, manager of supplier diversity and community outreach for McCarthy Building Companies Southwest Region.

Kent also points out that through the McCarthy Building Companies Talent Acquisition – Partnership with HR to enhance DEI recruiting strategy, “Minority headcount has grown at a faster rate than nonminority headcount since 2016 – 98% vs. 36%,” for the company.

CONSTRUCTION INCLUSION WEEK

Findings such as those identified by Kent, and many more, were highlighted during Construction Inclusion Week

this past October.

“There are many efforts moving diversity, equity and inclusion throughout the country, but Construction Inclusion Week (CIW) is the first effort to harness the collective power of general contractors, specialty contractors, subcontractors, organizations and suppliers,” Lane says.

In fact, Lane notes that participation during CIW doubled this year from its inaugural year of 2021 with 1,200 participants. “In 2022 there were 3,000 firms registered to participate,” he says, “a 150% increase.”

Adds Tracy L. Sanders, social responsibility and community development coordinator for Sundt Construction, “According to the sponsors, about 75% of registrants were majority-owned and about 25% were certified, diverse suppliers.”



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DEI ORGANIZATIONS, PROGRAMS AND AWARENESS

So what's helping this historically white male-dominated industry to shift? (According to the National Center for Construction Education & Research (NCCER) 93.8% of construction workers are male and 58.7% are white)?

"Diversity programs have been around in the highway construction arena for several years," Kent says. "With disparity studies being conducted in different cities and states, more participation has been made in the private sector — more than ever before — with diverse subcontractors and suppliers, which is reflected by the growth of participation in 2022 CIW."

Additionally, organizations like Build Your Future Arizona; Groundbreaking Women in Construction; Women Who Weld; National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) and NCCER have — and continue — to focus on identifying and improving disparities in the workforce.

"General industry associations like the Arizona Builders Alliance (ABA) and Arizona General Contractors of Arizona (AGA)," says Alisha Oliver, client advisor at Weems Asphalt and president of NAWIC Phoenix, "are creating their own employee resource groups so that they can provide support to women and underrepresented groups."

Sanders adds the Society of American Military Engineers (SAME), Asian American Architects/Engineers (AAa/e) Association, National Black Contractors Association (NBCA), Latino Built and Veterans in Business (VIB) to the list as well.

Adds Oliver, "Industry associations

that support the community of organizations have really stepped up to help employers build more diverse and inclusive workforces. It's not just about getting people in the door but also making sure they feel included and that they have a voice."

And, many local companies throughout Arizona are doing their part to promote and progress inclusion throughout the construction industry.

"In Arizona, our teams participate in programs like Construction Career Days, ACE Mentoring, SkillsUSA, Build Your Future and engage with school districts and career training programs at East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT) and West-MEC to help young people learn about careers in construction and how rewarding they can be," Kent says. "In fact, McCarthy is completing its Innovation and Craft Workforce Center where we will be hosting more programs in partnership with schools and educational organizations to further these efforts and support training programs throughout the state."

In March, Sharp Construction launched the Girls Can Build initiative in partnership with Girls Scouts Arizona Cactus-Pine Council. The program is designed to help provide mentorship and opportunities to inspire young women to explore careers (and break down barriers) in construction, design and engineering.

Gilbane Construction Company incorporates several DEI initiatives as part of its "Gilbane Cares" efforts. In addition to housing its own Inclusion and Diversity Council, the company participates in an inclusion week and regularly commits to community engagement with organizations

such as ACE Mentor Program and Rebuilding Together.

MORE WORK AHEAD

For all the progress occurring within construction workforce equity, there is still more work to be done.

"The U.S. Department of Labor, statistically and historically speaking, has shown that under-representation of women and minorities is where we see the most gaps in terms of workforce," Kent says. "But also, when looking through the supplier diversity lens, Veteran-owned small firms are also where gaps have been identified."

In addition to establishing more early-awareness education programs — Girls Can Build — as a perfect example, Oliver presents several important considerations: "How do women and people of color know that these jobs exist? Do they see people who look like them represented in the industry? Our recruiting and promotion processes must be rid of system biases," she adds. "Are we looking at requirements that aren't necessary? Can we spend more time on training to create more equality?"

Timing is also everything. Presently, for example, Sanders explains that it's an opportune moment to seize upon the silver linings of the Great Resignation to bring awareness to inequities in construction DEI. "Right now, our industry, as well as other industries are experiencing a workforce shortage which creates an excellent opportunity to embrace the power of DEI," she says. "DEI will continue to assist our industries with growth, retention, revenue and innovation. DEI is a great tool for Arizona and beyond!" ■■■

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