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**BUILDING OUR FUTURE.
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**LOCAL CONSTRUCTION LEADERS HELP
STUDENTS BUILD REWARDING CAREERS**



Local Commercial Construction Leaders Help Middle and High School Students Build Rewarding Careers

BY LAUREN HANAN, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS | GBCA

Walk or drive by the dozens of active construction worksites in the region and you'll see a range of professionals on the job. What you don't see are the countless experts working in offices behind the scenes to help transform renderings into reality. Career opportunities throughout the commercial construction industry are hiding in plain sight.

While construction fundamentally shapes our city and suburbs, careers in the industry often fly under the radar. The General Building Contractors Association (GBCA) – one of America's oldest trade associations – is on a mission to change that with workforce development efforts and an array of partnerships designed to raise awareness among middle and high school students about the real, rewarding career opportunities in construction.

BUILDING AWARENESS AMONG TEENAGERS

"It's our duty to focus on the generations behind us and educate them about the significant opportunities the construction industry offers," says Michael Armento, Vice President at Torcon, Inc. and GBCA's Board Chairman.

Angela Hendrix, Director of Training & Workforce Development at GBCA, echoes this.

"There are a lot of kids who don't know about the opportunities that are available to them in the world of construction," says Hendrix, who presents regularly at schools throughout the region. "Kids are usually familiar with carpenters, electricians and plumbers, but they don't realize there are almost 20 union building trades in Philadelphia. These are diverse, high paying, family sustaining careers – but they have to know these opportunities are both available and attainable."

With an aging workforce, much of which will retire in the next five to 10 years, there's even more opportunity for emerging professionals to set up and get involved.

"Beyond working with tools in the field, these jobs can also lead to positions as a foreperson, superintendent or project manager. Additionally, there's the office side of the business with roles in engineering, estimating, logistics, recruiting, management and more," Armento adds, stressing that middle and high schoolers need to be exposed to these career tracks as they start making decisions about their own paths after graduation.

While he first joined the industry by chance nearly 40 years ago, Armento's personal story is a testament to the upward mobility the industry offers. He started in the field out of high school when a friend running a sitework contracting business asked if he would be interested in a job running heavy equipment. With nothing else lined up at the time, he decided to give it a try.

That first job turned into an offer from a local general contractor in South Jersey to work as a clerk, assisting a site superintendent. When the clerk assignment finished, he was invited to join into the office to learn estimating.

"These first few experiences exposed me to so many different facets of building construction," Armento says. "Every day I saw something new, and every day I was more and more intrigued."

While working during the day, Armento went on to earn his degree in Construction Management from Drexel University at night. He continued to move up the ladder and today helps to lead one of the largest, most active builders in the mid-Atlantic states.

"My life-changing career all started with taking a one-off job because I had nothing better to do at the time. It's not good enough to leave these chances up to luck," he notes. "The opportunities are there. We just need more young people to know about them."



FUELING THE SPARK

Raising the profile of careers in construction has long been a priority for GBCA and its members, as is providing the tools and resources to support those who are interested in exploring the field. At the middle and high school level, this entails a collaborative and multi-faceted approach with partner organizations to support up-and-comers – bright young minds like Gabby Carruth.

Carruth, 19, knew since elementary school that she wanted to be in construction. Attending Russell Byers Charter School in Center City Philadelphia, she watched the construction of the Comcast Tower and a large condo building across the street from her school nearly every day, which sparked her interest.

“I would look out the window all day and watch the different trades working onsite,” Carruth says. “From that point forward, I knew I wanted to be in there. I wasn’t exactly sure what I wanted to do, but I knew I wanted to be part of the industry.”

Her interest stuck and in high school, her learning coach recommended she check out the National Association of Women in Construction’s MyWIC camp. Short for Mentoring Young Women in Construction, MyWIC is a free camp that educates girls in 7th through 12th grade about the fun and financially rewarding careers in the industry. It provides real hands-on experience with the building trades, including the cement masons, carpenters, insulators, drywall finishers, sprinkler fitters, pipefitters, electricians, and others.

Carruth participated in MyWIC the summer after she finished 11th grade, which she says solidified her decision to go into construction, specifically carpentry.

“The girls who participate in MyWIC get to learn firsthand about so many different parts of the industry. Through partnerships with the local trade unions and general contractors, MyWIC educates girls about what different careers look and feel like in real life so they can better understand the opportunities that are out there and which path they might want to pursue,” says Angelina Perryman, Vice President of Administration at Perryman Building and Construction Services, Inc. and MyWIC’s 2020 camp co-chair.

“MyWIC not only provides young women a vision,” continues Perryman, “the experience is transformative, enabling girls to build confidence and life skills that serve them well, regardless of what they ultimately decide to do.”

MyWIC and GBCA also help open the door to opportunities that can help them kick-start their careers.

Such was the case for Carruth, who passed her Carpenters Union entrance exam in March 2020 and needed to find a sponsor just as COVID-19 took hold. Perryman connected her with Hendrix at GBCA, who then put Carruth into contact with Mary Kate Radomski, Operations Manager at Frank V. Radomski & Sons. The next day, Carruth was hired.

“I’m so appreciative,” Carruth says. “This wouldn’t have been possible without MyWIC and GBCA.”





MAKING MENTORSHIP COUNT

When it comes to education and career planning, mentorship is a critical piece of the puzzle. That's why GBCA is a longstanding partner of ACE Mentor Program of Greater Philadelphia, a program that has been enabling local high school students to learn more about careers in architecture, construction and engineering through mentorship with industry professionals for the past 20 years.

"A big part of our program is working with kids who are interested in design and construction and helping them understand what it's actually like to work in the industry," says Melissa Raffel, Affiliate Director of ACE Mentor Program of Greater Philadelphia.

ACE Mentor organizations include INTECH Construction, Turner Construction, Gilbane Building Company, O'Donnell & Naccarato, Inc., Skanska USA Building, Torcon, Inc. and many others.

"By reaching these students in high school, we can work with them to plan ahead with a realistic view of what education and training is needed for various professions in the field. We also help them understand what these careers entail day to day so they're not surprised later down the line," Raffel adds. "There are so many great opportunities, and we want to ensure each student we work with has the best insight available to make a well-educated decision about what's best for them."

While ACE Mentor Program traditionally pairs students with mentors in a professional environment, the organization has brought its program online with ACE360 to continue serving students and deliver key programming.

CREATING PATHS FOR EVERYONE

Fundamental to helping the rising generations of talent build rewarding careers in construction is also acknowledging there's not just one path into the industry. To support aspiring professionals coming from all walks of life, GBCA and many of its individual members partner with educational institutions that share a common mission to open the doors of opportunity in the industry.

Among them are:

- **Mercy Career & Technical High School**, whose Building Trades CTE program is designed to meet the job needs of the Philadelphia area by providing skills needed for the building trades, property maintenance and construction;
- **YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School**, which gives high school dropouts a second chance. This includes the opportunity to earn a high school diploma, develop valuable job skills and transform abandoned properties into comfortable, affordable homes for first-time, low-income home buyers;
- **Williamson College of the Trades**, a junior college that provides young men education in the trades, including carpentry, masonry and more.

"The bottom line is this: Forget the tired old stereotypes about working in construction," says Hendrix. "The industry is rich with opportunities for anyone who is interested, regardless of gender, race or ethnicity – and we're on a mission to empower students to pursue them."

If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about careers in construction, visit <https://gbca.com/services/workforce-development/>.