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## ACE design, construction mentorship program grows in Milwaukee

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A national training program aiming to attract high school students to construction and design careers more than doubled its enrollment during a second year in Milwaukee, and will start awarding scholarships.

The ACE Mentor Program is an industry-led nonprofit intended to grow a future workforce for architects, engineers and construction contractors. The national model has affiliates in 37 states and about 9,700 students, but it only launched recently in Milwaukee, completing its first class about a year ago.

The ACE Greater Milwaukee chapter started with a class of 12 in that first year, but currently has about 30 students enrolled, with prospects for more growth in the future, said Adam Jelen, senior vice president of Gilbane Building Co. in Milwaukee and chairman of the ACE Mentor Greater Milwaukee board. Jelen was a driving force bringing the program to Milwaukee.

After gaining additional board members and participants, the program this year can offer more internships to students and scholarships for college or trade schools.

"It's engaging folks in our industry at a very young age, in a dynamic way to create the future of our business," Jelen said.

Currently, students are enrolling in ACE from three Milwaukee schools: Bay View High School, St. Anthony School's High School campus, and Carmen School of Science & Technology's southeastern campus. About six students in this year's class also participated last year, Jelen said. Last year's students helped spread the word to their classmates, increasing interest, he said.

"We had some great success because of the students who came back (to school) and were still wearing their helmets and telling their fellow students about the program," Jelen said.

The second semester-long course started in fall 2018. Students toured construction sites, including the Potawatomi Hotel & Casino's second tower under construction in Milwaukee. Sessions are held in the offices of the businesses, where the students consult directly with designers and builders from local firms, including Gilbane and HGA Architects & Engineers, for example. The students also team up behind a major project to design an academic



ACE MENTOR PROGRAM OF GREATER MILWAUKEE  
Students in the most recent class visited the construction site of a new hotel tower at the Potawatomi Hotel & Casino in Milwaukee.

building on Marquette University's campus. The teams will publicly present their projects March 19 at Marquette's Tony and Lucille Weasler Auditorium.

Jelen said the program is now on a strong foundation, and he aims to expand it further as time goes on.

"To start to see our firms work together in collaboration to build this program is really what it is all about," he said.

**Sean Ryan**

Reporter

*Milwaukee Business Journal*

