

Mar/Apr 2010

## Training Day

Industry workforce-development and outreach efforts continue despite the current recession

By Debra Wood

Even in the weak economy, many AGC members are moving forward on internal and external workforce development. “Difficult times are a time of opportunity,” says Doug Pruitt, chairman and CEO of Sundt Construction of Tempe, Ariz., and 2009 president of AGC of America. “It’s a time to reduce costs and work smarter, but it’s also a time to invest in our future by investing in people. By doing so, we’ll have better organizations at the end of the recession than going into it.”

Sundt provides craft, supervisor and leadership development training free to employees. The company received the 2009 AGC Education Excellence Project & Executive Management Award for its “Leadership Excellence Accelerates Performance” program for middle managers.

Pruitt says he believes that, as an industry, construction is not doing enough to improve employees’ skills. “We are an industry that has not seen growth in productivity in 40 years,” he says. “We still need to get a workforce that can put work in place with better quality and safely.”

### Developing Skills

Many AGC firms are committed to workforce training and development. Turner Construction Co. of New York, a member of multiple AGC chapters, received the association’s Education Excellence Grand Award at the end of 2009. The firm earned the award for demonstrating the highest level of excellence for construction training and development programs at all levels of the organization.

“It gets to our core values,” says Rosemarie Demonte, Turner’s vice president and director of recruiting. “Employees are our core asset, and investing in them positions us for future growth.”

**“We cannot become stagnant. We have to continue to have a funnel of potential employees. The economy is not going to stay this way.”**

— Osmay Rodriguez, Regional  
Diversity Coordinator, Gilbane Construction

Employees can take online classes through the Turner Knowledge Network to address specific needs at their convenience. Instructor-led sessions in the Turner University corporate training program are designed to meet each staff member’s individual needs.

“All of our employees have learning plans tied to their role and level of responsibility,” Demonte says. “It’s a multilevel approach to helping the employee develop on a professional and personal level.”

New Turner employees fresh out of college take the company’s four-day Leadership Education Alignment and Development course to start them off right.



An engineer in Turner Construction’s Indianapolis office works with students in the ACE Mentor Program. (Photo courtesy of Turner Construction Co.)

Turner provided nearly 250,000 hours of training in 2009 to employees, subcontractors, relevant associations, minority- and women-owned businesses, and colleges and universities with construction programs. None of the training has been cut back because of the economy.

Shelley Grice, training and development manager for Flatiron Construction Corp., Longmont, Colo., says her firm, a member of multiple AGC chapters, recently started Flatiron Construction University to help employees stay current with safety, technical, management and leadership skills. "We believe in developing employees no matter what the economy," Grice says. "Research shows it leads to a more engaged, happy and loyal employee."

Gilbane Building Co., Providence, R.I., also a member of multiple AGC chapters, offers online and instructor-led courses that are open to employees and subcontractors through its Gilbane University.

### Attracting New Professionals

Workforce development also includes attracting more people to the profession.

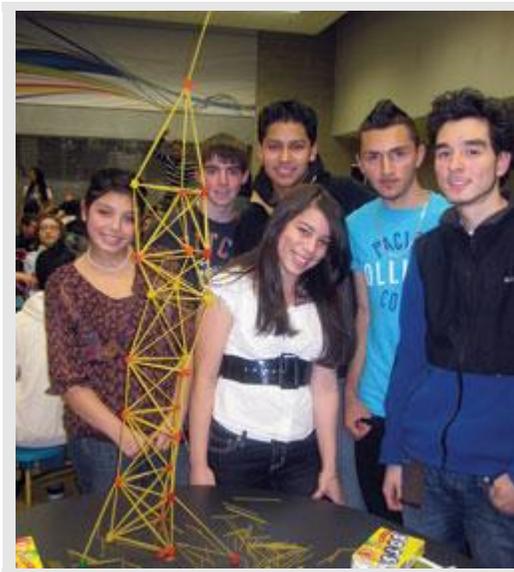
"We are not training enough people to meet the demand of the industry even in a poor economy," Pruitt says. He adds that as the economy recovers, many people who had been employed in construction during the boom years might not return because they have found something steadier.

Developing an interest in construction begins at an early age. Flatiron purchases AGC's "Build Up!" kits, designed for fifth-graders, and offers to send an engineer to the classroom to help teach the modules. It also invites the students to a jobsite.

Flatiron offers high-school students a 17-week scholarship program. Company engineers work with the students, helping them complete a project and teaching them about estimating, engineering basics and other construction skills. Students submit essays and compete for a scholarship of up to \$10,000 toward a civil-engineering or construction-management degree.



High-school students from the ACE Mentor Program build tabletop structures at Gilbane Building Co. (Photos courtesy of Gilbane Building Co.)



High-school students from the ACE Mentor Program build tabletop structures at Gilbane Building Co. (Photos courtesy of Gilbane Building Co.)

"A lot of kids are not aware of the career choice, and this helps encourage them through different exposures to the industry," says Cindy Edgar, recruiting program coordinator for Flatiron.

Gilbane has established the "Learn, Apply, Build" scholarship work-study program for high-school graduates. The process begins in high school by piquing student interest in engineering or construction. Once the students are attending college, they work at Gilbane as engineering clerks and are paired with mentors.

"We cannot become stagnant," says Osmary Rodriguez, Gilbane's regional diversity coordinator. "We have to continue to have a funnel of potential employees. The economy is not going to stay this way."

Gilbane, a national sponsor of the ACE Mentor Program, keeps its local offices active in the program. Employees meet with students once a week for about 15 weeks and work with them on a special project.

AGC of America and Turner also are national sponsors of the ACE Mentor Program of America. In addition, Turner has launched YouthForce 2020 in K-12 schools. Employees talk with students about the construction industry and its various career paths. It also offers internships and co-ops, so students can get a feel for working in the industry.