

Paula Verboomen supports new ACE mentorship program Pay it Forward

by [Lauren Anderson](#) | April 29, 2019, 4:11 AM

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Paula Verboomen, office director of Milwaukee-based architecture and engineering firm HGA, has always been drawn to helping students.

When she was fresh out of college, she served as an instructor with an architecture summer camp program. Later, she volunteered with University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's College for Kids & Teens program and Wisconsin Lutheran College's Pre-College Academy program for first-generation college students.

"Throughout your career, you get many opportunities to do different things, and I've always said yes to opportunities that have helped students become better students and more informed about my career path," Verboomen said.

When Adam Jelen, senior vice president of Gilbane Building Co., spearheaded the effort to bring the ACE Mentor Program – a national initiative that introduces youth to careers in architecture, construction, management and engineering – to the Milwaukee area, Verboomen jumped at the opportunity to become a founding board member.

The weekly after-school program launched in 2018 at Bay View High School, St. Anthony High School and Carmen Schools of Science & Technology's southeast campus. In its second year, participation among the three schools has tripled.

ACE exposes students to the foundations of architecture, construction and engineering, and challenges them to take on real-life design and construction projects. It culminates in a formal presentation of their solutions to their parents and program supporters.

As a board member, Verboomen has recruited mentors to work with the students.

"It's a multiplying effect," Verboomen said. "I'm just one person, but I found three mentors and they have been doing a spectacular job. Through the ACE mentoring program, I've been able to take my passion for mentoring people and spread it out so it's got tentacles deeper into the community."

The organization, still in its startup stage, is now planning to launch a formal fundraising effort to support transportation, insurance costs and scholarships.

Verboomen sees her role as helping larger regional efforts to develop and retain local talent.

"We're all going to have crises of recruitment and this certainly helps the pipeline for each of our design professions," she said. "And I

think we're also realizing that we can't continue to do the status quo with how people enter school. We need to have more diversity or we'll die. We need people and we want our workforce to look like the world at large."



Verboomen
Credit: Lila Aryan

Paula Verboomen

Office director

HGA

Nonprofit served: ACE Mentor Program

Service: Founding board member