



Throughout the year, mentors take students on jobsite tours so they can see a building come to life.

CAPITOL COLLABORATION

Mentoring the Next Generation of Industry Professionals

by Vicki Speed

“No other non-profit combines civic service, workforce development and networking so well.”

- Paul Choquette III, President, ACE DC and Senior Vice President, Mid Atlantic, Gilbane Building Company

With millions of dollars in new construction and renovations in the works and planned, Washington D.C., and the surrounding metropolitan area is a hotspot for the building industry. Competition to win projects of all scopes and scales is fierce, as is the scramble for the best architects, engineers, contractors, craftworkers, and construction managers to handle all the work.

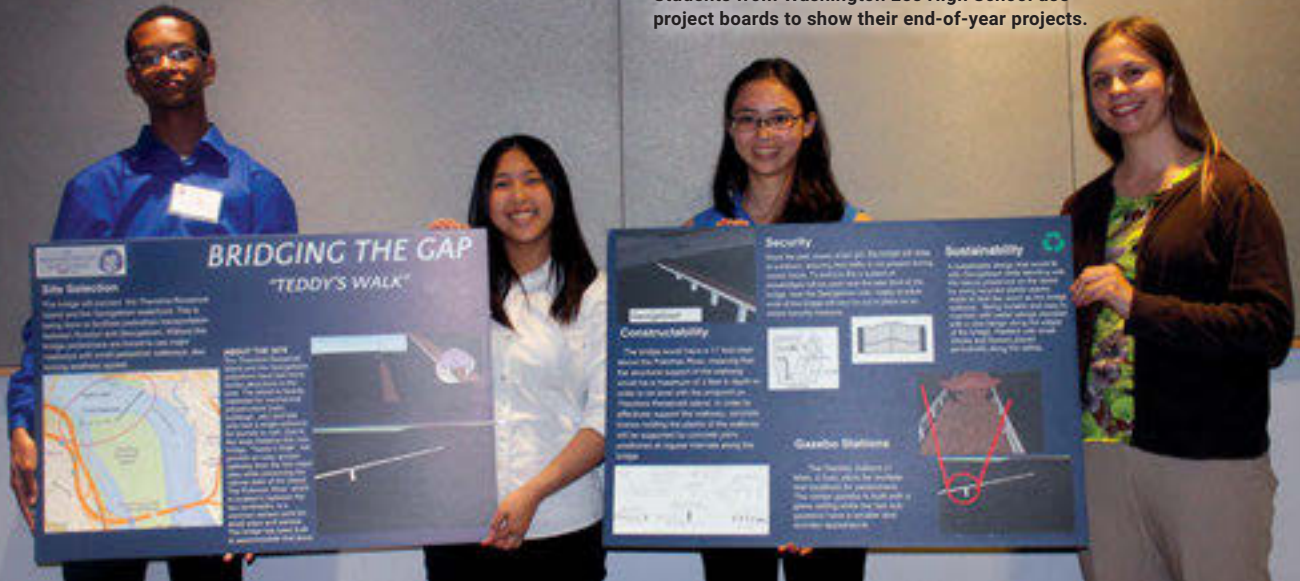
Yet, there's one organization where all these competitors unite with a common objective for the benefit of their

companies, the industry and the community—that's the ACE Mentor Program.

The ACE Mentor Program of the Greater Washington Area (ACE DC) is one of 65 affiliates located in 33 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. These semi-independent, volunteer-based affiliates operate with the assistance and guidance from the national umbrella organization, the ACE Mentor Program of America (ACE), founded in 1994 and headquartered in Rockville, Maryland. All affiliates share the program's mission “to engage, excite

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Students from Washington Lee High School use project boards to show their end-of-year projects.



and enlighten high school students to pursue careers in architecture, engineering and construction through mentoring and to support their continued advancement in the industry.”

Paul Choquette III, President of ACE DC and Senior Vice President, Mid Atlantic at Gilbane Building Company, believes ACE provides a 360-degree value. He says, “ACE directly influences at-risk youth, develops a much needed, energized workforce and creates powerful networking opportunities for industry professionals. No other non-profit combines civic service, workforce development and networking so well.”

Here’s how they do it.

INSIDE THE ACE DC AFFILIATE

First organized in 2000, the ACE DC affiliate has grown considerably in the last 16 years. It began with very little formalized structure, instead relying on the commitment of a small dedicated group of volunteers working with a few students at two high schools in the D.C. public school system.

Today, the non-profit organization is one of the region’s leading after-school workforce development programs. In 2015-2016, ACE DC mentors worked with around 150 students from 14 high schools in D.C. and the surrounding Maryland and Virginia counties. The organization awarded 14 scholarships totaling \$56,000 to college-bound high school seniors planning industry-related careers.

In fact, the affiliate has awarded more than \$530,000 in scholarships since inception. Its sponsors include a virtual who’s who of the D.C. metropolitan building and construction industry, including Gilbane Building Company, Saul Ewing LLP, Turner Construction, Clark Construction, Holder Construction, Hensel Phelps, The JBG Companies and many more.

The result of this one affiliate’s grass roots workforce development efforts is a steady stream of talented young people into the industry.

Jessica Baralt is one such student who joined ACE as a freshman in high school in 2007 and was a recipient of

the ACE Scholarship. She graduated in 2015 from the University of Virginia (UVA) with a Bachelor of Science in Architecture, and is completing her Master of Architecture at the Virginia Tech Washington-Alexandria Architecture Center.

After working at Page Southerland Page architectural firm between semesters, she was hired as a designer upon graduation from UVA. This fall, she begins her first year as a volunteer mentor for ACE DC.

When asked why she’s returning to ACE as a mentor, Jessica says, “I hope to reciprocate the encouragement and guidance that mentors offered me as a student in the program. The experience of developing interdisciplinary capstones project prepared me for the studio environment in my studies as well as for my work at Page.”

Jessica says she values the collaboration among students and professionals from across the industry to engage in real-world opportunities that capture how design and construction make our lives better.



Students use string and other project-based learning activities to see how various trades coordinate activities on a jobsite.

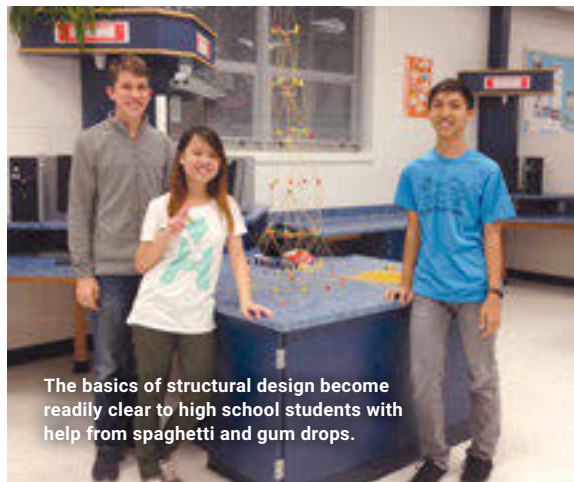
While most ACE DC’s mentors are not ACE alums—many share Jessica’s passion and desire to make a visible difference in the future of today’s youth. These individuals who devote their time to educate and engage teenagers for ACE vary in age, discipline, ethnicity and gender. At last check, over one-third of ACE mentors are women, much higher than the national average for women in the building and construction industry. ACE mentors also come from a range of professions—architects, landscape architects or interior designers, engineers, construction managers, contractors, educators, lawyers and skilled trades people—and range in professional experience from less than one year to 10-15 years, even 20+ years. They freely give from an hour a month to several hours a week to make the program successful.

Stephanie Stein, an architect with Gauthier, Alvarado & Associates, a long-time ACE DC sponsor, has mentored since 2009. She was drawn to the architecture firm because it valued education and community service in directly actionable ways like ACE.

When asked why she mentors, Stein says, “Our profession requires considerable training, study and schooling. We accumulate so much knowledge, so to me it just makes sense to share that knowledge.” She also believes that mentoring high school students reinforces the fundamentals so vital to complex professions, such as architecture, engineering or construction.

While she knows that not all of the students she mentors will choose careers in the industry, Stein believes ACE provides value to all. She explains, “The students are excited to learn how buildings are constructed and operate. Even if they don’t choose to study one of our professions, we’ve provided them a foundation to appreciate and become better stewards of the built environment.”

Like all mentors, Stein says the most gratifying is to see the young people she’s mentored further their education and join the industry. Gauthier, Alvarado & Associates currently employs an ACE alum from the DC Affiliate (ACE class of 2009) and had another working as an intern this past summer.



The basics of structural design become readily clear to high school students with help from spaghetti and gum drops.



In 2016, ACE DC awarded 14 scholarships totaling \$56,000 to college-bound high school seniors planning industry-related careers.

BUILDING STRENGTH

ACE DC continues to grow its reach in the D.C. metro area.

This year, the affiliate is working with several new schools, including two all-girl schools: Elizabeth Seton High School in Bladensburg Md. and Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School, a private college-preparatory school for girls in the D.C. neighborhood of Georgetown.

Mary Bradford, Affiliate Director of ACE DC, says, “Visitation’s interest in ACE came about like many of our new schools—word of mouth. The school is building a new addition to its campus, and the project architect encouraged the principal to reach out to ACE. The architect realized the new building would be a great opportunity to stimulate more young women to pursue design or construction careers.”

The Annual ACE DC Scholarship Awards Breakfast spotlights the affiliate’s influence throughout the metropolitan area. The fundraising event spotlights the students selected to receive scholarships.

Habiba Ahmed, an ACE student at Hayfield High School, speaking at the 2016 Breakfast, noted, “I’ve learned that what’s most important is that we try hard to succeed in whatever we do and to keep our minds open for change and for

new opportunities. For me, ACE was that opportunity that put me on the right track. It was that one opportunity that opened my mind and helped me identify [a career path] that suits me best.”

Choquette concludes, “It’s a truly special and gratifying moment to hear students like Habiba speak; to hear them talk about unexpected opportunities and their excitement for our industry all because a mentor took the time to help. That’s why we participate in ACE, raise money and continue to beat the drum. Join us—we have a place for anyone who cares about community and the future of their industry.”

Author Bio: Colorado-based Vicki Speed is a contributing writer with over 25 years of experience, specializing in the AEC industry.

ACE at a Glance

ACE teams, typically composed of 15-25 students, usually meet for 15 two-hour sessions after school between October and April. The first sessions introduce the key components of any construction project, beginning with conceptual design and owner requirements and moving through scheduling, estimating and construction management. The mentors also conduct multi-team field trips to jobsites and mentor offices and host activities such as College Night to provide awareness about curriculums, scholarships and much more.

After the initial introduction to the many professions in the industry, students are organized into mock project teams to develop a project, typically a new development or renovation of a site in the students' neighborhood.

For instance, past ACE DC team projects have included a Tree House Hotel, a recreation center

complete with a basketball floor that converts footsteps to energy, and the design for a new Herndon Town Center.

At the end of the year, all teams in an affiliate gather for a final presentation night where they present their designs to other teams, their families, teachers, mentors and sponsors, and the affiliate administrators so all can share in the students' accomplishments.

In 2015-2016, ACE affiliates introduced over 8,000 young people to the industry. Almost 70% of these young people are minority, and about 25% of the students are from families where either or both parents have not attended college. More impressively, more than two-thirds of ACE students enter college planning to major in an AEC.

To get involved with the ACE Mentor Program of the Greater Washington Area, contact:

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Several other ACE affiliates operate near Washington in Maryland including Frederick, Annapolis, Baltimore and the Eastern Shore. More about these affiliates and the national ACE program can be found at www.acementor.org.