

Stake your claim in the green revolution

by MARK BRESLIN
Special Contributor

THERE IS REALLY only one kind of “green” construction that everyone in our industry is interested in these days: the kind that generates green. The green of cash. The green of net return. The happy-CPA kind of green.

The problem with the green revolution is the hype and hope versus the reality. The problem is the promise versus the delivery. The problem is the cost to you versus the current market and economy. The answer is meeting the rate of change strategically and proactively.

A prime example our industry is facing now is the supposed green jobs revolution. Construction has been identified as one of the promised lands for green jobs. How many times have you heard the phrase “millions of NEW green jobs” in conjunction with the stimulus package, energy policy or employment social justice? The green job revolution as a part of construction has been over-promised to many constituent groups by local, state and federal legislators who barely understand the concept. I am concerned that the union construction industry may get unfairly blamed. The truth is that most green jobs are likely to be filled by current union craftsmen and women (more than 25 percent of whom are currently out of work).

Construction today truly is a potent mix of economics and politics. If you are not paying attention to politics, you do so at the risk of your business. The stimulus package was emergency safety net legislation. The construction needs of the nation and industry were not taken care of as millions of Americans mistakenly believe. It will be our efforts

to secure our markets that will determine our success at obtaining the “green.” We are up against every other interest group in America loudly shouting their messages of financial priority and need. A smart businessperson, therefore, must quickly dispense with the idea that there will be a reduction or stabilization in the rate of change and the economic challenges that come with it; even when the market gets better.

Regardless of your politics, it is clear America is in a phase in which government’s definition of “doing the right thing” will be at the expense of those with the means to pay; including most of the contractor readers of this magazine. The independent businessperson will be expected to shoulder a disproportionate amount of economic and regulatory burden. Playing passive defense under these circumstances is just bad strategy.

The next five to ten years are going to be pivotal in the evolution and shake-out of the green economic revolution. It may be good for your organization and union construction market share. It may be bad. It is probably up to us to determine which.

I am certain that 20 years from now our country will be transformed and some people in union construction will grow market share and make fortunes on green innovations. But, it is in the



intervening period of economic and regulatory chaos, challenge and transformation that the union contractor business model is at risk. It is both labor and management’s job to focus on long-term opportunity while promoting and protecting our interests today.

In summary, the simple concept is that profitable green construction is a product of you making your own markets. You cannot be idle or reactive and expect things to just work out. You need to be keenly aware of the rate of change in the regulatory and economic environment and find ways to meet it while aching the competition. And, finally, it means accepting change for a greener future; for the environment and your wallet. ■



Mark Breslin is a strategist and author who focuses on improving organizational performance, leadership and work ethic. Known for his blunt and uncompromising style, he has addressed more than 500 audiences and well over 100,000 leaders, managers and craft workers. He is the author of Survival of the Fittest, Organize or Die, Million Dollar Blue Collar and Alpha Dogs: Leading Yourself and Others.

Pennsylvania Powers Union Construction draws record crowd for TAUC

IN THE SINGLE largest meeting of TAUC's history, more than 250 union contractors, labor representatives and industrial business owners from around the country convened at Pennsylvania Powers Union Construction on Sept. 9.

Despite limited travel budgets, industry leaders came from around the country to address critical safety and labor relations issues in industrial maintenance and construction.

The meeting included representatives from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio, Massachusetts, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Georgia, Alabama, Missouri, Oklahoma and California, according to TAUC Chief Executive Officer Stephen R. Lindauer.

"I believe this packed room is a testament to the fact that TAUC has very quickly established itself as an industry-leading association that is here to create lasting, positive change," TAUC President Robert W. Santillo said. "When other groups and associations are seeing a decline in attendance, interest, and support . . . The Association of Union Constructors is seeing a dramatic increase!"



PHOTO BY JIM POLI

In his opening remarks, Santillo told the crowd that union construction's classic business models are no longer adequate.

"Our industry is now demanding bold, innovative approaches; approaches that may not feel completely comfortable at first," Santillo said. "However, if we can rise to this challenge and demonstrate the flexibility that these times require, union construction will see bright days again."

Pennsylvania Powers Union Construction was generously sponsored by: Aramark Uniform Services, Blue Mountain Equipment Rental Corporation, Boilermakers Local 154, the Ironworker Employers Association of Western Pennsylvania, Manning & Napier, the Mechanical Contractors Association of Western Pennsylvania, Mobile Medical Corporation and the National Maintenance Agreements Policy Committee, Inc.

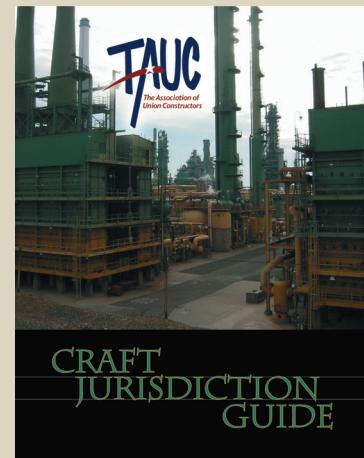
INDUSTRY NEWS

Craft Jurisdiction Guide on best-seller list

TAUC'S CRAFT JURISDICTION

Guide remains a best-seller, reflecting the increasing need for contractors to have a reference to help them properly assign work and avoid jurisdictional disputes.

To purchase your copy of the guide, please visit www.TAUC.org and select the tab "Shop," located at the right side of the page.



'We want to make steel, and we want you to help us,' U.S. Steel exec tells TAUC contractors



PHOTO BY JIM POLI

U.S. STEEL CHAIRMAN and Chief Executive Officer John Surma told Pennsylvania Powers Union Construction attendees on Sept. 9 that the road forward for the domestic steel industry and its union contractors will be difficult.

However, he reaffirmed his commitment to a partnership with TAUC contractors.

"Let me be clear: I look forward to the day when many more of you are working in our facilities than are today," Surma told the crowd.

He said the mission of TAUC contractors and the mission of U.S. Steel are complimentary in many ways.

"Just as it is your goal to demonstrate union construction is the best option because it is safer and more productive, it is our goal to be the most efficient, effective and safe steel producer," Surma said.

He went on to describe continually dire circumstances for the steel industry and his company, saying most steel companies in the world have been in survival mode since last year. U.S. Steel dropped from a 90 percent capacity utilization rate in January 2008 to a 33.5 percent rate in January 2009, according to Surma. His presentation indicated the rate has bounced back to about 50 percent as of August 2009.

He went on to describe ways TAUC contractors can improve their chances of securing future work with U.S. Steel:

- Take an active role in project planning;
- Thoroughly understand and commit to U.S. Steel's requirements for safety and quality; and,
- Ensure that all projects are quickly staffed with sufficiently trained, qualified and committed people.

Surma said his forecasters cannot see very far out, and they will not commit to significant spending beyond a few months. But, he assured the crowd of mutual goals.

"We want the same things you want. We want to make steel, and we want you to help us do it," Surma said.