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PUBLISHED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF THE WALL AND CEILING INDUSTRY

November/December 2025

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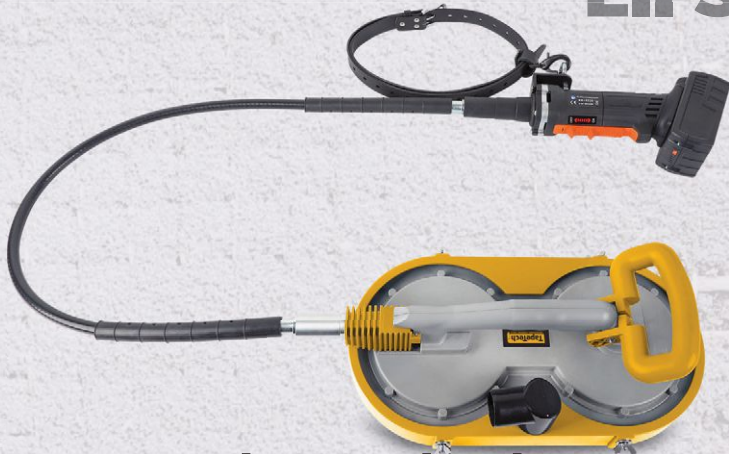
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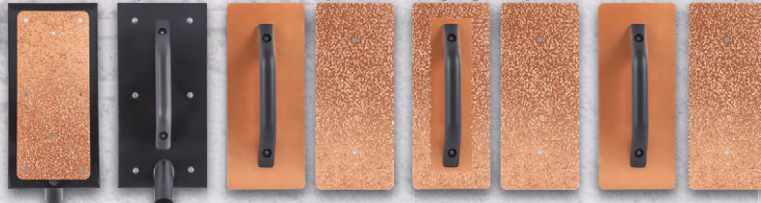


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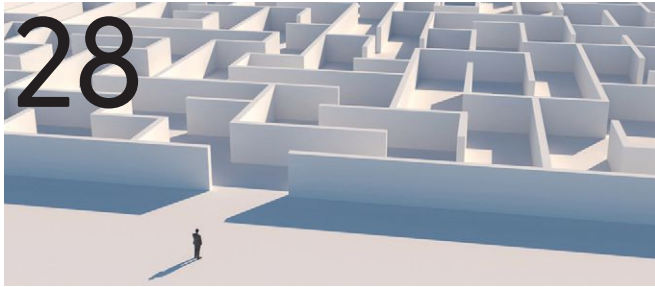
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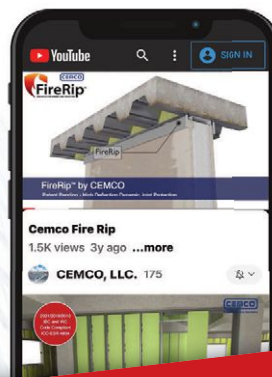
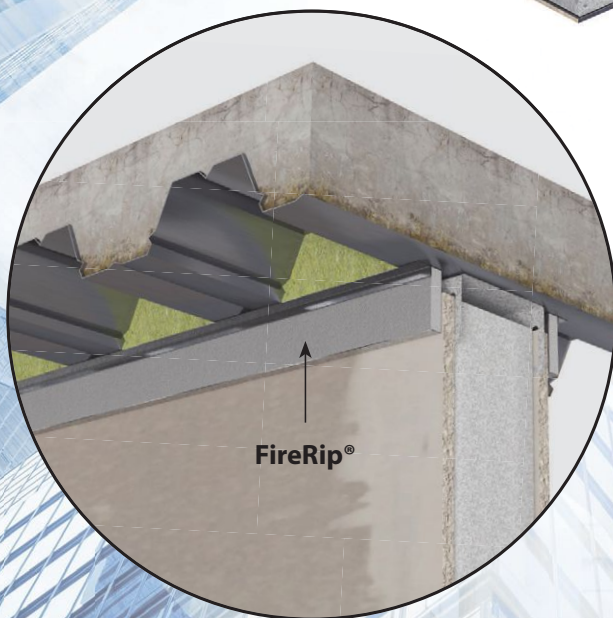
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A Visit to the AWCI Headquarters

In August, I had the pleasure of spending a few days at the AWCI headquarters in Falls Church, Virginia. My goal was simple: to get a firsthand look at our association's daily operations, meet the dedicated people who make it all happen and finally see the wall of past president portraits I've heard about for years. Seeing more than a century of volunteer leaders represented in one place was a powerful experience—a firm reminder of the responsibility we carry and the legacy we are building together.

The Day-to-Day Operation

CEO Mike Stark welcomed me, provided a comprehensive tour and set a clear agenda for the visit. He then stepped back, allowing me to sit down for productive, one-on-one sessions with each department over the course of two days. I joined the weekly staff meeting to hear what was on everyone's plate, and we wrapped up the visit with the annual staff outing to a Washington Nationals game—a perfect chance to thank the team outside of the conference room.

What I witnessed was a well-oiled machine focused intently on member value. The meetings that I attended covered the full spectrum of our association's work:

- Finance walked me through the budget and year-end outlook.
- Communications/marketing, editorial and advertising shared plans for new ways to tell our industry's story, covering advertising, subscriptions and content strategy.
- The Meetings team detailed the extensive planning and logistics required to deliver BUILD: AWCI's Convention and Expo and the Industry Leaders Conference.
- Education covered credentials, webinars and the Doing It Right® educational programs.
- Membership talked numbers and discussed ways to make the website and onboarding process clearer and more effective.
- Technical and safety laid out the direction

for Codes and Technical Council (CTC) programming, the upcoming Peer Safety Review this fall and new work underway on fire-stopping programs.

- The Foundation continues to move forward on the AWCI CARES program with awareness initiatives as well as the partnership with FMI and the 2025 Wall and Ceiling Trends Report launching this November.

A Confident Takeaway

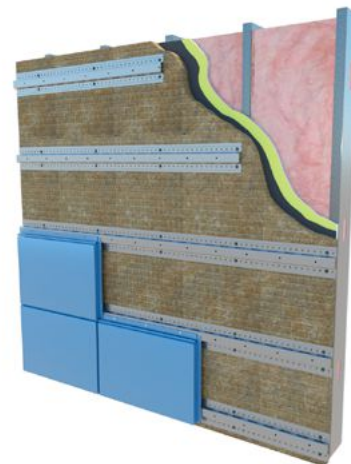
Thank you to Brianna Bernstein, Joe Fernandez, Janie Hakim, Mike Kowalski, Brittany Lord-Buchanan, Amelia Miedema, Thao Nguyen, Don Pilz, Samantha Riemer, Annemarie Selvitelli, Mike Stark and Craig Wood, for the time, candor and hospitality during my visit.

Here is my key takeaway, and it is a reassuring one: Many of us volunteer on boards or committees while managing a full-time job. We all know how easy it is for volunteer work to slide to the back burner when the day job heats up. At AWCI, your CEO and staff are doing heavy lifting every day. This essential work allows our volunteer leaders to remain focused on setting direction and priorities for the association. They are highly responsive to the Board and Executive Committee, and they are consistently moving forward on the issues our members tell us matter most.

Because of this dedication, I feel very confident about where we are headed. We are in good hands. The team at headquarters is aligned, accountable and working with genuine purpose. You will see the results of their efforts in the programs ahead, including the Industry Leaders Conference and the fantastic BUILD26 lineup they are assembling for our members.

To everyone at the AWCI headquarters, thank you for the work you do and for the pride you take in serving this industry. To our volunteers across the country, thank you for lending your experience and your time. Together, we are honoring the history captured on that wall of portraits, while keeping our eyes firmly on the future of the wall and ceiling industry.

Jeff Dreisewerd is the president of AWCI and the senior operations consultant at T.J. Wies Contracting, Inc., in St. Louis, Missouri.



MANUFACTURER'S CORNER

Continuous Insulation and Stucco: Unlocking Real Advantages for Contractors

By Chris K. Little

Continuous insulation (CI) has become one of the most talked-about evolutions in modern wall assemblies. As codes like the IECC and ASHRAE 90.1 push projects toward higher energy efficiency, CI stands out as a practical solution that not only improves building performance but also provides tangible benefits for the installing contractor.

For many contractors, the challenge of new code requirements is balancing the added complexity of compliance with the need to deliver projects on time, on budget, and with minimal callbacks. CI, particularly when integrated with stucco systems, presents hurdles that must be carefully addressed. Yet with thoughtful planning and the right accessories, it can actually make a contractor's life easier—helping streamline inspections, reduce potential callbacks, and making for a better overall client experience.

This article explores the benefits, challenges, and practical considerations of CI, helping contractors strike the right balance between efficiency and constructability.

Advantages of Continuous Insulation Thermal Barrier

The primary advantage of CI lies in its ability to create a continuous thermal barrier that reduces thermal bridges commonly found at wall studs, joints, and other structural elements. This uninterrupted insulation boosts building envelope performance by simplifying energy code compliance and reducing heating and cooling loads, which can simplify HVAC system design and sizing, potentially lowering construction costs for mechanical systems.

Flexible Material Options

CI From a contractor's perspective, flexi-

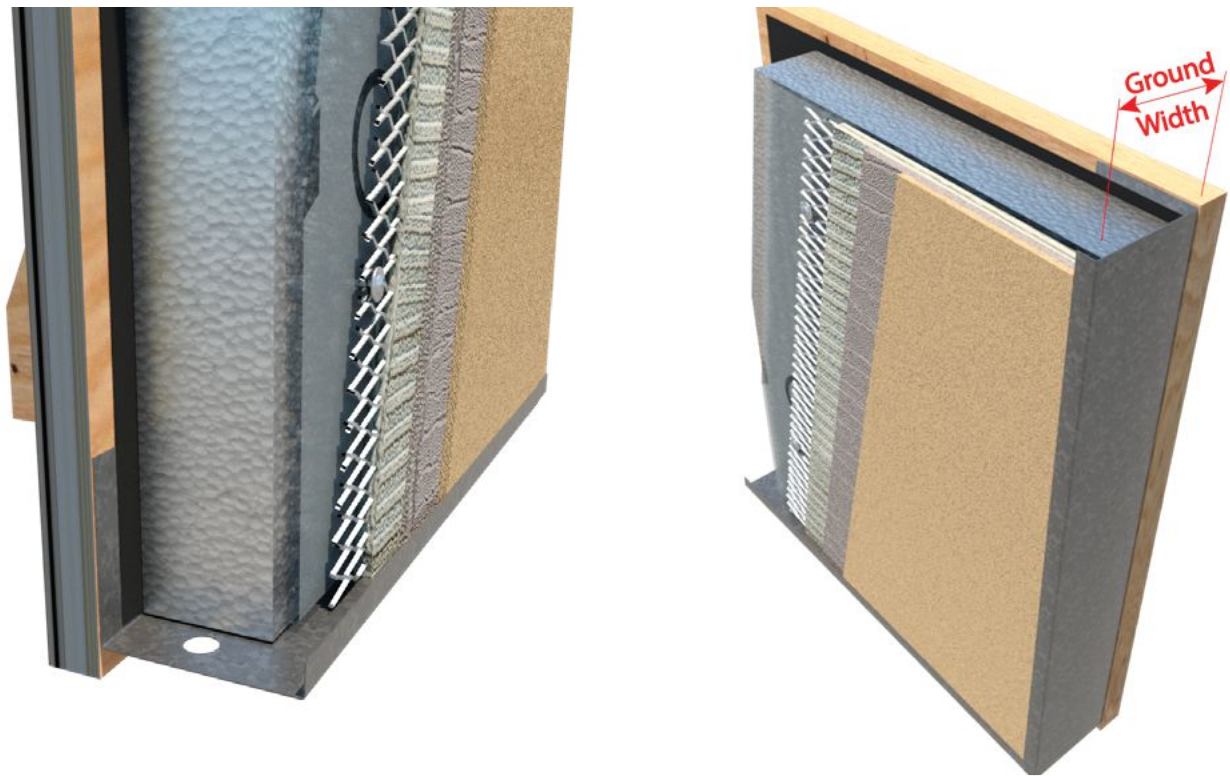
bility in material options makes CI easier to implement:

- Rigid Foam Boards like XPS, EPS, or polyiso are lightweight, easy to cut, and versatile for various wall assemblies.
- Mineral Wool offers excellent fire resistance and vapor permeability, reducing risks with inspection and long-term maintenance.
- Spray Foam combines insulation and air sealing in a single step, saving labor on certain projects.

These options give contractors the ability to match the insulation type to the project scope, budget, and local climate, which can reduce installation headaches and prevent costly redesigns.

Challenges of CI with Stucco Systems Moisture Management

When paired with stucco, CI requires pre-



Metal or vinyl accessories will need to encompass the insulation as well as the wall cladding. Shown above (left to right) are a weep screed and a casing bead for window and door openings (jamb) with components that account for increased wall thickness.

cise moisture management. Improperly designed CI-stucco systems can lead to mold, rot, or other moisture-related issues. However, intelligently designed assemblies can act as vapor barriers or drainage planes, simplifying long-term maintenance, enhancing building durability, and reducing callbacks.

However, these adjustments to cladding accessories are challenging, as current manufacturing set-ups for roll-form metal accessories aren't produced wide enough to account for the insulation and other components included when complying with the new building energy code. This forces designers and contractors to source custom plaster accessories, thereby increasing costs and complexity.

Increased Costs and Complexity

Implementing CI often requires:

- Thicker insulation boards
- Specialized cladding attachments, such as thermally broken clips
- Additional labor for installation

These elements collectively increase upfront construction costs, especially in retrofits where existing cladding may need to be removed and reinstalled.

While CI increases initial costs, long-term energy savings and durability often justify the investment, especially in regions with extreme climates.

Structural Adjustments

CI inevitably adds thickness to walls, impacting the structural design. Contractors must account for:

- **Increased Wall Thickness:** Including in foundation design, window/door detailing, and cladding systems. Drainage mats, which create a ventilated air gap for drainage and drying, must also be included into the overall thickness of the wall section for stucco.
- **Fastener Length:** Attaching cladding through thick CI layers may require longer fasteners or specialized systems like thermally broken clips, which add complexity and cost. Traditional casing

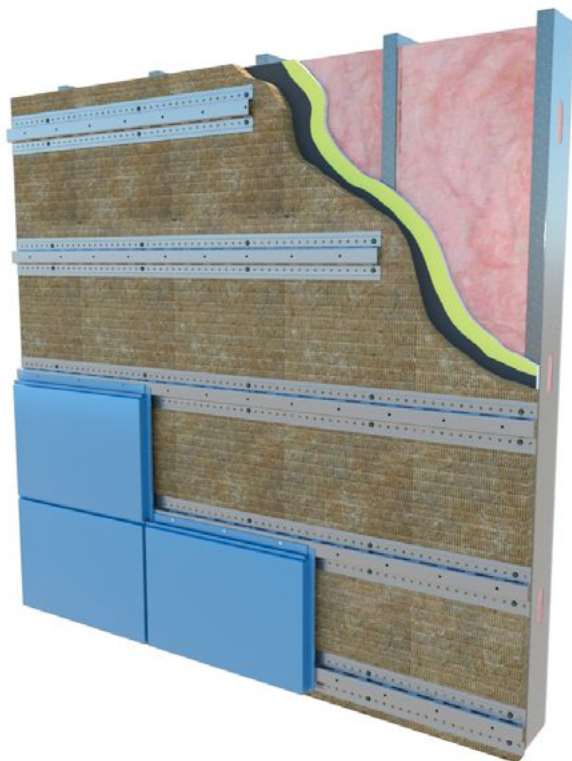
beads or weep screeds, which are produced today for traditional stucco thickness of $\frac{1}{2}$ ", $\frac{3}{4}$ " and $\frac{7}{8}$ ", would not work for the CI stucco and drainage gaps, which can take that accessory width up to $1\frac{1}{8}$ " up to $2\frac{1}{2}$ –3+ inches.

- **Weight of the Stucco System:** The weight of cement plaster, averaging 10–12 pounds per square foot, also becomes a crucial factor in multi-story structures. The weight of the system will vary based on factors including thickness, type, and application method (smooth trowel versus hand-textured). Lathing reinforcement may be worth considering, as certain styles weigh much less per square foot than others.

In retrofits, CI can be harder to implement due to existing structural constraints, requiring creative solutions like thin, high-R-value materials (e.g., aerogel-based insulation).

Code and Inspection Challenges

Modern energy codes, such as IECC



ClarkDietrich's ProChannel Ci clip/rail furring system minimizes thermal transmission and provides a nice base for loading exterior claddings. Typically runs perpendicular to the stud framing.



Z-Furring running horizontal, like ClarkDietrich's Z-Girt, is a common approach to CI systems with cladding attachment, including stucco. Long furring strips or thermally isolated fasteners needed for CI attachment can complicate installation and require skilled labor.

2021, are driving the adoption of CI by mandating higher R-value performance. However, compliance requires careful attention to local regulations and fire resistance standards like NFPA 285. Key concerns include:

- **Fire Resistance:** Key criteria for passing NFPA 285 include no flame propagation to the interior of the building, flames must not exceed specific vertical and horizontal dis-

tances, and temperature thresholds must not exceed designated values. Specific insulation materials, such as mineral wool, have a more straightforward path to meeting fire code requirements.

- **Permitting and Inspection:** Lack of familiarity among local inspectors may cause delays and errors. Providing clear documentation and working closely with inspectors can ease this process.

Practical Solutions

Existing Product Solutions

As the industry works to develop metal or vinyl accessories that encompass the insulation as well as the wall cladding, there are a number of existing solutions that alleviate common challenges with CI:

- [ProChannel Ci™ Cladding Support System with Grip-Deck TubeSeal®](#) technology is a thermally and structurally efficient exterior rainscreen

[BS] TABLE 1404.5.2.1 CLADDING MINIMUM FASTENING REQUIREMENTS FORDIRECT ATTACHMENT OVER FOAM PLASTIC SHEATHING TO SUPPORT CLADDING WEIGHT^a



CLADDING FASTENER THROUGHFOAM SHEATHING INTO:	CLADDING FASTENER TYPEAND MINIMUM SIZE ^b	CLADDING FASTENER VERTICAL SPACING (inches)	MAXIMUM THICKNESS OF FOAM SHEATHING ^c (inches)							
			16" o.c. fastenerhorizontal spacing				24" o.c. fastenerhorizontal spacing			
			Cladding weight				Cladding weight			
			3 psf	11 psf	18 psf	25 psf	3 psf	11 psf	18 psf	25 psf
Cold-formed steel framing (minimum penetration of steelthickness plus 3 threads)	#8 screw into 33 mil steel orthicker	6	3.00	2.95	2.20	1.45	3.00	2.35	1.25	DR
		8	3.00	2.55	1.60	0.60	3.00	1.80	DR	DR
		12	3.00	1.80	DR	DR	3.00	0.65	DR	DR
	#10 screw into 33 mil steel	6	4.00	3.50	2.70	1.95	4.00	2.90	1.70	0.55
		8	4.00	3.10	2.05	1.00	4.00	2.25	0.70	DR
		12	4.00	2.25	0.70	DR	3.70	1.05	DR	DR
	#10 screw into 43 mil steel orthicker	6	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.60	4.00	4.00	3.45	2.70
		8	4.00	4.00	3.70	3.00	4.00	3.85	2.80	1.80
		12	4.00	3.85	2.80	1.80	4.00	3.05	1.50	DR

Continuous insulation design criteria are already in the International Building Code (2024 IBC Chapter 14 – Exterior Wall Coverings), where fastener loading, spacing and sizing are discussed for various insulation thicknesses. Photo courtesy of IBC.



Shown is ClarkDietrich's Drip Flashing for Rainscreen (left), with interstitial space to permit termination of the cladding system above while allowing draining and ventilation. The Top Vent Track (right) creates alignment for the Drain Mat, providing a space for the mat to vent and dry via convective air flow from the DFLRS on the bottom.

wall cladding system that is intended to minimize penetrations through the insulation layer to hold an exterior rainscreen cladding in place.

- [Drip Flashing for Rainscreen \(DFLRS\)](#) and [Top Vent Track for Rainscreen \(TVTRS\)](#) provide venting and draining for entangled mesh rainscreens or other medium as defined by IBC & IRC codes on plywood and OSB sheathing for exterior. This component serves as the Foundation Weep Screed because of its 3.5" attachment flange and has drainable holes in the bottom ground to manage moisture out and allow air flow into the air space behind the cladding. When these rainscreen tracks are combined with [ClarkDietrich E-Screen](#) Drainage Mat, superior drainage and drying can take place.
- ClarkDietrich [Z-Girt](#) is used as a primary rainscreen framing component with depths matching common exterior insulation thicknesses while providing a uniform plane for cladding attachment. It can be installed in a horizontal or vertical orientation. The type of fastener and spacing will vary based on application.

Early Design Coordination

Close collaboration among architects, engineers, and contractors is critical to integrate CI effectively. For example, specifying CI thickness and attachment methods during design prevents costly field adjustments. We are likely to see ASTM take on prescriptive criteria to assist manufacturers in design development.

Prefabrication Benefits

Off-site fabrication of CI-integrated wall panels can reduce on-site labor and improve quality consistency. However, precise design details are crucial to ensure proper tie-ins for drainage and moisture management during installation.

Material Compatibility

Selecting CI materials suited to the local climate and construction practices is essential. For example, vapor-permeable insulation is better for humid regions to prevent moisture buildup. Specialty accessories in metal are being developed today to accommodate wider thicknesses.

Workforce Training

Proper installation of advanced CI systems

requires skilled labor. Training builders in techniques like attaching thermally broken clips and managing drainage layers ensures long-term performance and reduces the risk of callbacks.

Conclusion: A Smarter Way Forward

Continuous insulation represents more than just another code requirement—it's a practical tool that can improve building performance while making contractors' work more efficient and reliable. By addressing moisture, structural integration, and code compliance head-on, contractors can deliver systems that perform as designed and stand the test of time.

The key is early planning, using the right accessories, and training crews to install with confidence. When done right, CI-stucco systems don't just meet code—they protect the contractor's reputation, reduce rework, and create opportunities in a marketplace that increasingly values energy-efficient, high-performance buildings.

For today's installing contractors, that's not just a challenge. It's an opportunity.



from the ceo
by mike stark

Supporting Our Industry: The Foundation's Role

For nearly 50 years, AWCI has had a crucial “sister” organization: the Foundation of the Wall and Ceiling Industry. Operating as a 501(c)(3) non-profit, the Foundation's mission is clear: “to provide resources to grow, research to inform and philanthropy to CARE, in support of the wall and ceiling industry.”

While the Foundation is a separate entity from AWCI, complete with its own board, budget and strategic plan, its sole purpose is to support AWCI's members and the broader industry. This symbiotic relationship allows it to focus on initiatives that directly benefit our community.

Research and Industry Insight

The Foundation has a long history of funding reports on issues of importance to our industry. Building on that history, we made a key strategic decision last year to partner with FMI to conduct an annual, comprehensive study of member industry trends.

The findings from the 2024 report provided invaluable market insights, enabling member companies and AWCI alike to think strategically about the market and their own businesses. We are already looking forward to the 2025 report scheduled for release this November. Over time, these annual reports will allow us to benchmark performance, identify long-term trends and establish a reliable index for the wall and ceiling industry.

Focused Philanthropy and Giving Back

Beyond research, the Foundation has long maintained a strong charitable focus. Earlier this year, for instance, we contributed \$5,000 to the Texas Lath and Plastering Contractors Association's workforce development and scholarship efforts.

Continuing this commitment to local communities, we will provide another \$5,000 to the local Kentuckiana Build at the upcoming Industry Leaders Conference (ILC) in Louisville. We fully intend to make similar contributions in the future to local construction-related organizations in the cities hosting our major events, like BUILD: AWCI's Convention and Expo and ILC. Giving back is simply fundamental to the Foundation's mission.

The Cornerstone: AWCI CARES

Of course, the cornerstone of the Foundation's philanthropic efforts is the AWCI CARES Program. The acronym stands for Caring Action Relief in Emergency Situations. I've said it before, and it's true: one of the best parts of my job is when I sign checks awarding CARES grants. For the past 20 years, CARES has served as a critical helping hand for AWCI employees and their families during tough times, providing financial assistance when it's needed most.

The program is designed for direct impact: CARES pays bills directly instead of paying the person in need. Assistance goes toward covering crucial expenses, including: medical bills; rent and mortgages; household bills for electricity, water and phone; and car payments.

A Call to Action

While CARES has distributed nearly a half million dollars over 20 years, I know more employees across AWCI's 2,400+ member companies face hardship, and I hope we receive more grant requests.

Though the Foundation has significantly increased CARES awareness through all our channels—from *Construction Dimensions* to social media—requests haven't substantially risen. Why? People are often reluctant to ask for help, and construction companies are excellent at “taking care of their own.” However, the major challenge remains that employees most in need simply don't know CARES exist. This is where AWCI member leaders come in.

It is up to you—the individuals who receive our information—to ensure your employees know this financial safety net is available. We can send all the emails and posters we want, but it is ultimately on you to “get the word out.” If you do your part, we will blow the budget for CARES and sign assistance checks weekly, which would be a welcome development.

“Words cannot describe the gratefulness that my family and I have for you! This will surely make my treatment easier, having peace of mind that bills can get paid.” – Grant Recipient

To donate to the Foundation or for more information about the CARES program, visit www.awci.org/about/foundation.

Mike Stark, CAE, is the chief executive officer of the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industry.

Publisher's Statement

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TrueShear™ – Steel Cutting, Reframed

No two ways about it: cutting steel with chop saws, grinders and abrasive blades is loud, hazardous, inefficient work. They throw off showers of sparks, make tons of noise and sap labor for hot work compliance. There was no better way, emphasis on “was”. Introducing TrueShear™: the first-of-its-kind, portable shearing press redefining what’s possible on commercial jobsites by delivering 12 tons of force to cut 16-gauge (54 mils) to 20-gauge (33 mils) steel without any sparks or heat. Just a clean, uncompromisingly precise factory edge, every time. No hazards. No noise. No deburring necessary. And the crew you’d put on fire watch? Back to what matters most... getting the job done. Designed with real-world insights and contractor feedback, it’s a revolution in job site productivity by contractors, for contractors.



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View the Showcase

AWCI Updates

In Memoriam: Arthur “Art” Doerner

We are deeply saddened by the passing of Art Doerner, who was taken from us on August 14, 2025, at the age of 82.

After a remarkable 58-year career, Art retired in 2020 as president of Component Assembly Systems Inc., an AWCI member since the 1970s. He dedicated his life to growing the company from a small, 500-square-foot office in New Rochelle into an eight-office operation with locations across the United States.

During his 20-year tenure as president, he was instrumental in some of the company’s most notable projects, including the Freedom Tower in New York, Rowes Wharf in Boston, and the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, DC. He also oversaw the interior construction of more than five new hotels in Las Vegas, as well as many others in Atlantic City, Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

A proud Marine, Art was a strong supporter of many organizations,



“
During his 20-year
tenure as president, he
was instrumental in
some of the company’s
most notable projects,
including the Freedom
Tower in New York, Rowes
Wharf in Boston, and the
Ronald Reagan Building
in Washington, DC.

including the Boy Scouts and the Ronald McDonald House. He had many friends both here and abroad, and his favorite place to visit was Ireland, where he loved to have a pint at Oliver St. John Gogarty's Pub in Dublin.

We extend our deepest condolences to his wife, Anne Marie, her family, and his many friends. We wish them peace, joy and healing during this difficult time.



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Construction Trends



U.S. Department of Labor's Semiannual Agenda Prioritizes Workers and Businesses

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has announced its latest Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions, a semiannual report that details the Trump administration's planned regulatory changes. The agenda includes nearly 150 proposals aimed at reducing burdens on businesses and workers, aligning with the administration's

goal to prioritize American jobs and economic growth.

Key proposals from the DOL's agenda include:

- Employee and independent contractor classification: Reviewing the criteria used to determine if a worker is an employee or an independent contractor under federal wage and hour laws.
- Joint employer status: Examining the conditions under which a business

can be held liable as a joint employer.

- Overtime and minimum wage exemptions: Considering updates to the salary thresholds for certain employees to be exempt from minimum wage and overtime pay requirements.
- Retirement plan investments: Scrutinizing the role of environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors in retirement plan investment decisions by fiduciaries.

- Transparency in health-care costs: Proposing new rules to improve transparency around the fees collected by pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) and to provide consumers with clearer pricing information for medical services.

- H-2A agricultural worker program: Rescinding certain requirements for employers who use the H-2A program for temporary agricultural workers.

- Heat injury and illness prevention: Continuing to explore the development of new standards to prevent heat-related injuries and illnesses for workers in indoor and outdoor settings.

The New Way to Pay for a Trade Career: Using Your 529

Recent changes to 529 savings accounts make them a powerful tool for those pursuing a career in construction, skilled trades or other

“
Recent changes to 529 savings accounts make them a powerful tool for those pursuing a career in construction, skilled trades or other licensed professions.”

licensed professions. These accounts, traditionally used for college tuition, can now fund a variety of post-secondary and professional development programs.

Here's how you can use a 529 account for a career in the trades:

- Apprenticeship programs: You can now use 529 funds to pay for certificates from registered apprenticeship programs. These programs provide hands-on training and classroom instruction, a practical path to a gainful career.

- Professional licenses and credentials: The costs associated with obtaining or maintaining a professional license, which is often required for trades, are now eligible expenses. This also includes credentials from national organizations that set industry standards.

- Programs for veterans: The COOL (Credentialing Opportunities On-Line) program helps military personnel and veterans translate their service experience into civilian credentials, which frequently involve skilled trades.





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The Edge™ has been UL Classified for use in one-, two-, three-, and four-hour wall assemblies, and is listed in multiple UL designs including U419, V438, V489, V498, W433, and W440.

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PRODUCT RANGE AND TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION:

The Edge 25 (EDS125-15) – Design thickness 15 mil (0.0153"), a high-performance alternative to conventional 25 gauge framing.

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The Challenge of Fire Resistance in Cold-Formed Steel Structures

A new white paper from the Steel Framing Industry Association (SFIA) addresses the challenge of maintaining continuity of fire resistance in cold-formed steel (CFS) construction while ensuring structural integrity.

The paper, titled “Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Continuity of Fire Resistance in Cold-Formed Steel Structures” (SFIA F101-25), written by Robert Grupe, focuses on how to meet the requirements of the International Building Code (IBC) for fire walls, fire barriers, and fire partitions.

Key points from the paper include:

- **The Conflict:** A literal reading of fire-resistance codes might require placing a layer of gypsum wallboard between steel elements, which would compromise the necessary steel-to-steel contact for structural load transfer. In such cases, structural

requirements take precedence.

- **Three Continuity Options:** The IBC outlines three distinct conditions for continuity, each with its own structural implications for CFS framing:

- **Fire Walls:** Must run continuously from the foundation to or through the roof, creating two separate buildings. They are typically nonstructural, flanked by load-bearing walls.

- **Fire Barriers:** Extend through floor framing cavities, requiring solutions that maintain both structural load paths and fire continuity.

- **Fire Partitions:** May terminate at the underside of a floor/ceiling

assembly, but the structural load path must still be established.

- **Why It Matters:** Understanding the nuances of these code requirements is crucial for designers and contractors to avoid costly redesigns and delays. Solutions must be acceptable to the authority having jurisdiction (AHJ).

The full white paper provides detailed definitions, illustrations, and practical considerations to help the design, engineering, and inspection teams coordinate effectively.

Download the white paper here: <https://buildsteel.org/report-faq-continuity-of-fire-resistance-in-cold-formed-steel-structures>.



Download “Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Continuity of Fire Resistance in Cold-Formed Steel Structures” here: <http://bit.ly/46W5q6C>



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U.S. Department of Labor Updates Penalty Guidelines and Eliminate Workplace Hazards

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has revised its penalty guidelines for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to better support small businesses and encourage quicker resolution of workplace hazards. These changes aim to make it easier for small employers to comply with safety regulations and focus their resources on creating a safer work environment.

Key Changes to OSHA Penalty Guidelines

The updated policy, effective immediately, introduces several key adjustments to how penalties are assessed:

Increased Penalty Reductions for Small Businesses: The eligibility for

a 70% penalty reduction, previously limited to businesses with 10 or fewer employees, now extends to companies with up to 25 employees. This change is designed to reduce the financial burden on small employers, allowing them to invest more in safety compliance and hazard abatement.

Credit for Prompt Hazard Correction: Employers who immediately take action to fix or address a hazard are now eligible for an additional 15% reduction in their penalty.

Expanded Reduction for Employers

with Good Compliance Records: The policy expands penalty reductions for employers with no history of serious, willful, repeat or failure-to-abate OSHA violations.

- Employers who have never been inspected by federal OSHA or an OSHA State Plan are eligible for a 20% penalty reduction.
- Employers inspected within the last five years who had no serious, willful, or failure-to-abate violations are also eligible for this 20% reduction.



These changes aim to make it easier for small employers to comply with safety regulations and focus their resources on creating a safer work environment.



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Deputy Secretary of Labor Keith Sonderling emphasized that these adjustments ensure small businesses are not penalized as severely as larger companies with more resources, supporting entrepreneurs while still holding them accountable for worker safety.

These new guidelines apply to open investigations where penalties haven't been issued yet. However, penalties issued before July 14, 2025, will remain under the old structure. OSHA reserves the right to withhold penalty reductions if they don't align with the goals of the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Learn more at the www.osha.gov/news/newsreleases/osha-national-news-release/20250714.

Trump's Tariffs: A Guide for the Construction Industry

President Donald Trump's ever-changing tariff policies are projected to significantly impact the housing and construction markets. New tariffs on materials from Canada, Mexico, and China—including a 50% tariff on steel and copper and a 25-35% tariff on lumber—are expected to increase costs and decrease the number of new projects.

According to Calum Mair, commercial director North America for EPD, a supplier of machinery parts, businesses need to be proactive to survive this volatile market. Mair outlines several strategies for businesses to navigate these challenges:

Diversify the Supply Chain: Reduce dependence on foreign imports by sourcing materials domestically or from countries with lower tariff rates. Businesses should also consider stockpiling essential materials to prepare for potential price hikes and supply chain disruptions.

Master Cash Flow Management: With interest rates remaining uncertain, businesses should prioritize cash flow management and explore alternative funding options to reduce reliance on loans. Locking in favorable rates and staggering project timelines can also help mitigate financial risks.

Prioritize Equipment Maintenance: Proactive, preventative maintenance of machinery can help avoid costly breakdowns, project delays, and the need for expensive replacements. This practice helps control costs and keeps projects on schedule.

Mair emphasizes that by diversifying supply chains, practicing proactive financial planning, and prioritizing equipment longevity, construction businesses can combat the negative effects of these new tariffs and market uncertainties, ensuring the stability and success of future projects.

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A Positive Pivot

“May you have a strong foundation when the winds of changes shift”...
Bob Dylan

Unless you’ve been comatose for the past several months, you have probably become aware of some significant shifting in the economic winds: a breeze that bodes well for the construction industry in general, but for specific sectors.

While pursuing a number of recent articles pertaining to the building trades, I began to recognize a relevant trend in a certain direction. Of course I am alluding to the phenomenal shift in energy policy, with a serious emphasis away from renewables over to natural gas and nuclear power.

There are several contributing factors to this movement, all of which add up to additional opportunities in the construction sector. Perhaps

the most substantive of all issues lies with demand. As we have noted in previous columns, electrical generation levels (which affect the greatest percentage of demand) are currently inadequate—woefully so when compared with projected demand due to the advent of AI and its attendant impacts.

Combine this current shortfall with an alarming deterioration of the power grid’s infrastructure (recent research indicates that 30% of transmission lines and 45% of distribution equipment are near or beyond expected service life), then the demand picture becomes grim indeed. Clearly, the status quo is unsustainable.

Grid growth must match the demands of AI innovation. Planned supply falls short of need. But necessity is the mother of invention, as

they say, and nothing less critical than national security depends on the reliance of current and future energy use. Something’s got to give, and on the double.

Enter the obvious solution: build new power plants (including infrastructure) to increase supply and/or to retire and replace obsolete facilities. Now, the newly formed administration has revamped current federal energy policy, de-emphasizing (not eliminating!) renewable sectors, re-emphasizing fossil fuels (coal and oil), but especially focusing on increasing natural gas and nuclear sources.

In fact, the chair of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission recently stated that “New and expanded natural gas infrastructure is essential to help America avoid a grid reliability crisis.” Similarly, the secretary of energy has been mandated by Executive Order to quadruple U.S. nuclear power capacity by the year 2050. These policy shifts are not only the consequence of the demand urgencies but are supportive evidence of a more common-sense approach to the use and distribution of energy resources.

Emphasis on Natural Gas Expansion

Better for the environment. Compared with coal and oil, which are still the anchor resources for national energy usage, natural gas burns cleaner, emitting less carbon dioxide.

Stability. Reliability is a critical
continued on page 73

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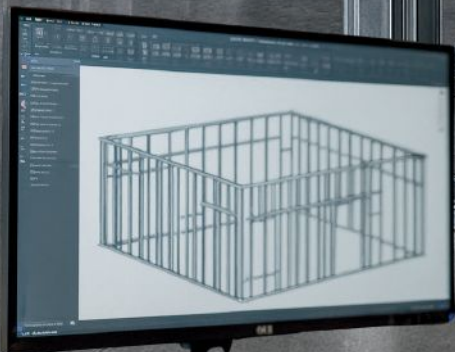
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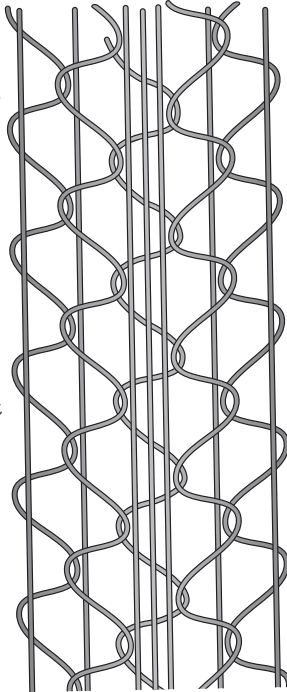
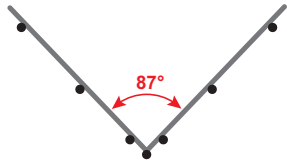
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OC: One-Coat

Patterned after CornerAid® but with a tight fit on the corner. It is to be used over an insulated foam board system for 1/4" to 3/8" EIFS and One Coat stucco. It has nominally 2 3/8" legs.

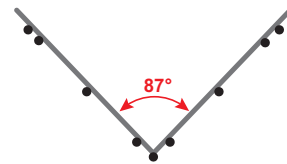


NEW

DOUBLE
WIRE
NAILING
FLANGE

OClI: One-Coat II

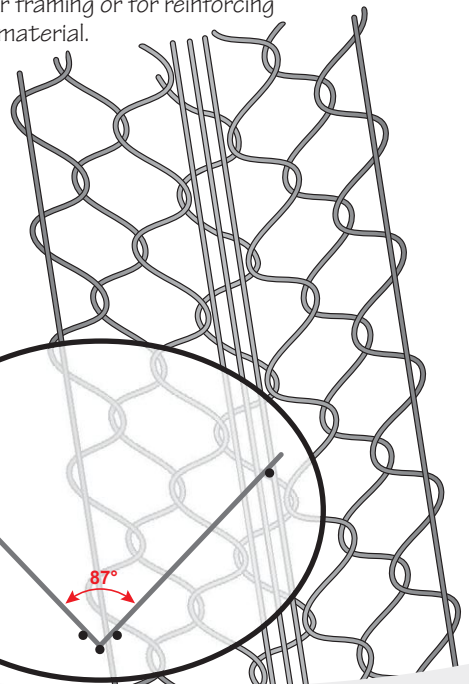
Same pattern as One-Coat, but features an additional line wire on the outside edges to provide a more accessible nailing flange.



OCLF: One-Coat Long Flang

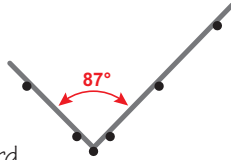
NEW

The One-Coat design for a tight fit on the corner, but now featuring generous 3" legs, giving the extra length you need with working with rain screen and other thick exterior claddings. Can be used with irregular framing or for reinforcing fireproofing material.



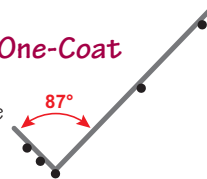
OCSF: One-Coat Short Flange

This multi-purpose piece is used for both exterior insulation "Hard Coat" and "One-Coat" systems. It is especially useful around doors, windows, and as a "Return" or "Stop". Length of flange is 1 1/4".



OCSF34: 3/4 One-Coat Short Flange

This multi-purpose piece is used for both exterior insulation "Hard Coat" and "One-Coat" systems. It is especially useful around doors, windows, and as a "Return" or "Stop". Length of flange is 3/4" flange with longer 3" back flange.





Shaking Up the Future

When a 10-story building rocks and rolls on a giant shake table—and doesn't collapse—that's news. That's also opportunity.

CFS10 Breaks New Ground

I'm talking about cold-formed steel 10 (CFS10)—this past summer's Natural Hazards Engineering Research Infrastructure (NHERI) project at the University of California San Diego. It's the largest cold-formed steel (CFS) building ever tested for seismic resilience. It's also the most ambitious. The team of researchers didn't stop with earthquake testing. They lit the structure on fire to study how CFS holds up under flames.

Why should you care? Because projects like CFS10 could shape tomorrow's standards. New standards, in

turn, could lead to less restrictive and more appropriate building codes. Better codes can mean taller structures—and more business for wall and ceiling contractors and their partners.

As a contractor, you live by codes and standards. They dictate assemblies, inspection requirements and approved materials. If CFS10 proves that CFS can do what many of us believe it can—perform in high-rise seismic zones and resist post-quake fires—then the International Building Code may one day allow structural CFS designs to go beyond today's 65-foot height restriction.

As Dr. Ben Schafer, CFS10's co-lead investigator from Johns Hopkins University, told me, "There's nothing about the engineering that limits us to that height. If you design it properly, you can build it taller—and we've done

that. This project is about pushing boundaries and collecting the data to prove it."

Why Research Matters

My take is that resilient design drives resilient business. But we can't take this for granted. Research like CFS10 depends largely on the National Science Foundation. Yet, recent federal funding cuts threaten progress. It could mean fewer large-scale tests like CFS10, fewer breakthroughs and fewer chances for our framing industry to prove what it can deliver. When government cuts support for science, construction loses.

Think about it. It's good to have proof that our assemblies work. Research in labs, on shake tables and in fire tests strengthens the case for more framing options with architects and code officials. It sets steel apart from competing materials—from wood, which lacks resilience in fire conditions, and concrete, which adds weight to a structure. Research can prove the worth of more framing options to bring more business our way.

CFS10 shows the way. As the research data rolls in, the project will only confirm what many of us already know—that CFS is safe, strong and efficient. But it takes money, time and advocacy to get that story heard.

What Contractors Can Do

Here's my call to action. Contractors don't need to write checks—the steel mills are best positioned to fund this research. But what contractors can

continued on page 73



ASTM C1861—New Lathing Accessories Standard for Stucco

The new portland cement-based plaster (stucco) industry standard is ASTM C1861—Lathing and Furring Accessories, and Fasteners for Interior and Exterior Portland Cement-Based Plaster¹. C1861 is a product standard, as distinct from stucco material and installation standards long recognized in the stucco industry. It brings the benefits of standardized products to the stucco industry, explaining the purpose, functions and minimum requirements for individual accessories and fasteners to benefit stucco as a premium wall cladding. Architects, contractors and manufacturers are already specifying compliance with C1861 requirements.

What Is ASTM C1861?

C1861 is a product standard, based on the previous requirements found in stucco standards ASTM C926², C1063³ and C1787⁴, where stucco application, lathing and furring installation requirements are specified. Improved information is added to reflect current industry practices and available products and materials.

The concepts for stucco lathing and accessories were just beginning to be understood as early as 1920 when the first stucco standard ACI No. 25 was published. ACI No. 25 described no stucco lathing accessories but had similar elements and detailing config-

urations performing basic functions such as for plaster thickness control, termination, and facilitating drainage from behind stucco.

Since then, numerous lathing accessories, furring accessories and fasteners have been under continual development to facilitate the functionality, serviceability and quality of stucco cladding systems.

C1861 summarizes its purpose:

C1861 @ 4.1.3 “Lathing and furring accessories shall facilitate lathing and furring installation, cement plaster application, and functionality of the completed stucco cladding assembly. Lathing and furring accessories shall be configured to serve one or more functions such as to assist in cement plaster thickness control, to reinforce cement plaster corners, to facilitate drainage, to reduce cracking by accommodating movement, to separate cement plaster from dissimilar materials, load bearing members and penetrating elements, and to provide an edge, end, or termination for a cement plaster panel area.”

C1861 further includes improved terminology, materials and illustrations:

- 11 new terms to define and explain the functions of the discrete elements that combine to make lathing accessories – capture flange, cement plaster panel area, drainage sur-

face, drip flange, fastener, flexible pleat, movement gap, ground/screed, and solid/key attachment flanges.

C1861 @ 3.2.6 “flexible pleat, n—the flexible element of a control joint lathing accessory that accommodates movement of the cement plaster cladding assembly caused by shrinkage and thermal variations.”

- Improved materials list—Includes steel (G60), stainless steel, zinc alloy, anodized aluminum, PVC and CPVC.
- C1861 @ 3.3: 30 new “Illustrations are intended to generically depict examples of common lathing and furring accessory shapes and fasteners, by depicting their functional elements in relationship to each other, without literally depicting specific manufactured products. Variations of lathing and furring accessory shapes and fasteners illustrated shall be acceptable when the function and performance is equivalent to or exceeds the illustrated accessory or fastener.” (See Figure 1.)
- Fastener specifications—Table 3 lists acceptable fasteners and

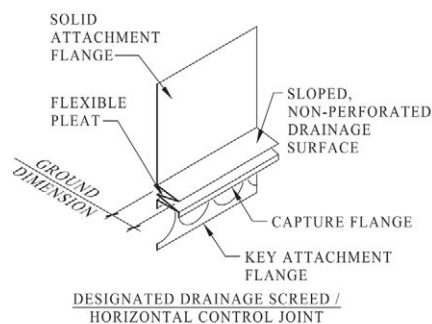


Figure 1. Example of lathing accessory illustration.



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TABLE 3 Lath and Lathing Accessory Fasteners

Fastener Type		Fastener Length, min ^a					
		Vertical Framing Members			Horizontal Framing Members		
		Wood Studs or Furring	Metal Studs or Furring	Solid Bases	Wood Joists	Metal Joists	Concrete Joists
Nails (Specification F1667)	Steel roofing nail, smooth shank, 0.120 in. shank diameter, 0.438 in. (11 mm) head diameter, min	1 in. (25 mm), which shall also penetrate not less than ¾ in. (19 mm) into framing members			1½ in. (38 mm) typical. Use 2 in. (50 mm) for ¾ in. Rib Lath, which shall also penetrate not less than 1¼ in. (44 mm) into framing members		
	Steel common nail	6d for lathing, which shall also penetrate not less than ¾ in.			12d for hangers, which shall also penetrate not less than 1¼ in.		

Figure 2.
Table 3 excerpt.

requirements in one convenient Table – including as nails, screws, staples, power-actuated fasteners, eye screws, adhesives and tie wire. Fastener requirements for placement into fire retardant-treated and preservative-treated wood are referenced to code requirements. (See Figure 2.)

Traditionally, stucco has generally been viewed as wall cladding only, not a part of a protective water management system to protect buildings, but with the exception of lathing accessories with drainage functions such as the weep screed, lathing accessories are not considered to be flashings per se.

In the last decade or so, certain lathing accessories have begun to include drainage as a functionality and with the recent development of requirements for a drainage space behind stucco in some climates, heightened emphasis will be placed on drainage as an essential function for stucco claddings in general and for lathing accessories specifically.

C1861 presents the current state of minimum requirements for lathing accessories, describing their functional elements and purposes. Combining these elements in different ways leads to innovative new accessories such as the Finish Rite accessories from Stockton Products, Water Management accessories from CEMCO and the backer bead and E-flange products from Clark Dietrich Building

Systems and others. Combining various basic C1861 elements into new innovative lathing accessories will lead to a promising future for stucco as a premium wall cladding.

Because C1861 concerns the functional requirements of lathing accessories, decorative accessories such as soffit vents, channel screeds and banding beads are not specified.

Process to Codify C1861

C1861 has been a second-tier reference standard in C1063 since the 2021 IBC and 2021 IRC and since that time its requirements have been enforceable by local Authorities Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) who have adopted those code editions. C1861 is under review by the International Code Council (ICC) this year for codification as a primary reference standard beginning with the 2027 I-code editions.

ICC's review and codification process for the new C1861 reference standard includes testimony before the ICC code development committees, reviews, and ultimately voting by ICC governmental members before receiving codification.

How Does C1861 Serve the Industry?

Codifying minimum requirements for lathing accessories, furring accessories and fastener products leads to enhancing the functionality, serviceability and quality of stucco cladding systems, to benefit stucco as a pre-

mium wall cladding.

However, the work on C1861 is not yet complete. More can be done to improve C1861 by interested people participating in the ASTM C1861 task group to contribute your knowledge. Topics that require further development include requirements for...

- Lathing accessories and furring accessories for curved substrates and archways
- Stainless steel and other corrosion-resistant fasteners
- Sealant to seal the splices, intersections and transitions of lathing accessories to prevent the entry of water per C926 A2.1.3
- Lathing accessories configured for use as drainage flashings
- Generic pre-engineered furring accessory systems
- And more....

Contact Don Pilz, AWCI director of technical services and current C1861 task group chair at pilz@awci.org for more information on participation.

⁽¹⁾ASTM Standards are available from ASTM International at www.astm.org.

⁽²⁾ASTM C926 Standard Specification for Application of Portland Cement-Based Plaster

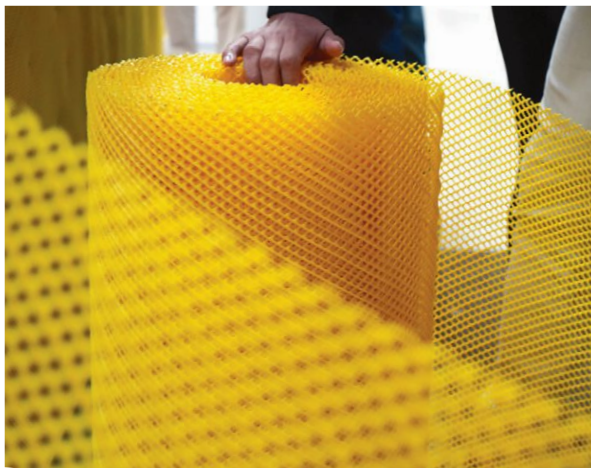
⁽³⁾ASTM C1063 Standard Specification for Installation of Lathing and Furring to Receive Interior and Exterior Portland Cement-Based Plaster

continued on page 73

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Prolift Handling, the exclusive pewag partner in Ireland, launched two advanced lifting solutions aimed at improving safety and precision for complex industrial lifts.

The first is the pewag levo Balancer, which uses hydraulic power and remote control to allow 360° tilting and rotation of heavy or awkward loads, eliminating manual positioning risks. The second is the pewag levo Compensator, which automatically balances tension across all legs in multi-leg sling operations, preventing dangerous load shifting for stable lifts, even with irregular loads.



Tools

Framing Cutting Solutions

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Grabber Construction Products announced the launch of TrueShear™, an innovative, first-of-its-kind solution for steel framing. Instead of a traditional blade, TrueShear™ uses 12 tons of shearing force to deliver precise, burr-free cuts without sparks, eliminating fire hazards, waste, and the need for fire watch or hot work permits on commercial jobsites.

The company is promoting the product with the "Steel Cutting, Reframed" campaign, positioning shearing as the safer, more efficient, and more productive alternative to conventional steel cutting.

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www.brassknuckleprotection.com

A new brochure, Distributor Advantages, from Brass Knuckle® outlines the company's commitment to its distribution partners. The brochure highlights how the company provides high-quality hand, eye and ergonomic protection products that are comfortable, stylish and built to inspire compliance.

By developing its own products and sourcing them at competitive prices, Brass Knuckle helps distributors earn better margins and stay ahead of the competition. This approach ensures distributors have access to top-tier products with great margins, which in turn helps keep customers coming back repeatedly.



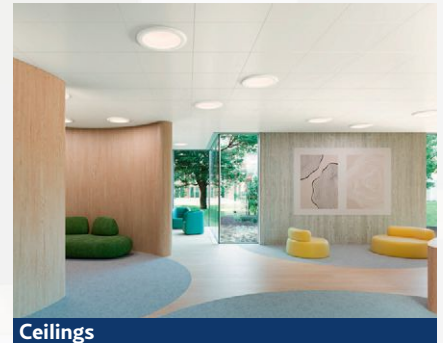
Tools

Cordless Grinders

www.dewalt.com

DEWALT, a leading name in jobsite tools, has launched its new line of ATOMIC™ 20V MAX cordless grinders. The new lineup includes a 4-inch Angle Grinder, 4.5-inch Angle Grinder, Die Grinder, and Right Angle Die Grinder, all designed for precision work in tight spaces. These tools offer impressive power, outperforming many pneumatic counterparts without the need for hoses or complex setups.

The grinders feature advanced safety and performance elements, including the PERFORM & PROTECT™ ANTI-ROTATION System to prevent kickbacks, an electronic brake for quick stops, and a variable speed trigger for optimal control.



Ceilings

Ceiling Systems

www.armstrong.com

Armstrong Ceilings introduced the MetalWorks Torsion Spring for Behavioral Health Ceiling System, a new product designed to enhance safety in mental and behavioral health facilities. The system's tamper-resistant design includes locking clips and stud bracing to prevent panel removal, reducing the risk of self-harm or hiding contraband. The 30" x 30" panels are made with 15% recycled content, have a Class A fire rating, and can improve indoor environmental quality with acoustic options.

Approved by the New York State Office of Mental Health (NYS-OMH), the ceiling system is recommended in their Patient Standards, Materials and Systems Guidelines.



MANUFACTURER'S CORNER

Firestop for Today's Construction Challenges

STI Leads Firestop Innovation

By Kate Emery

As building construction has increased in complexity, so has the proper design, usage and installation of firestopping materials. Specified Technologies Inc. understands that unique site conditions call for unique firestopping solutions, which is why

we have a fully staffed Engineering Services Team readily accessible to help with Engineering Judgments (EJs), technical inquiries, specification reviews, project plan reviews, BIM development, detail sheet generation and any other project-related

firestopping needs. Our full line of firestopping products is specifically designed and tested to be installation-friendly, provide superior performance and reduce labor costs. All of our systems are fully tested according to ANSI/UL® 2079, ASTM E1966,



ASTM E1399, ULC-S115 and other relevant standards relating to movement and fire testing of joint systems.

Specified Technologies is a company obsessed with finding solutions to customer challenges. We recognize and address the nuances of firestop-ping head-of-wall joints and other joint systems installed into or between wall systems. We offer flexible joint sealants and sprays or gasket materials that allow for dynamic movement.

Versatility of spray

Our SpecSeal® AS200 Elastomeric Spray has been the benchmark stand-

ard for top-of-wall sprays for more than 20 years. The easy-to-spray formula and high-bridging capabilities of AS200 won't soak into mineral wool, and it stays put and won't run down the wall.

Caulk and spray compatibility

Our SpecSeal® AS200 Elastomeric Spray and ES Elastomeric Sealant are formulated for compatibility. This is advantageous for situations where a sealant may be preferable to spray, and transitions occur such as finished joints or exposed areas. Additionally, touch-up work can be performed using a caulk gun.

Dynamic movement

Systems have been developed for a wide range of movement. Whether for wind-load, thermal or seismic, we have solutions that work. Our patented SpeedFlex® Joint Profile can be used to provide 100% unencumbered movement with AS200 Elastomeric Spray. The Track Top Gasket systems will allow for 100% movement without the need to caulk or spray the head-of-wall joint.

Penetrants in head-of-wall joints

Although some construction projects advocate a “no-fly zone” to avoid penetrants being routed through head-



of-wall joints, not all projects do, and occasionally, this scenario does occur. However, penetrations in joints complicate the process of firestopping or encumber the movement capabilities of the joint system and must be evaluated through testing. Accordingly, we have tested a variety of metal or plastic penetrants in the flute valleys to provide approved methods to ensure compliance.

CPVC compatibility with spray

AS200 is tested for compatibility with CPVC pipe, a common type of sprinkler pipe. Whether sprinkler pipes penetrate the head-of-wall joint or

overspray is a consideration, it is the only spray on the market as part of the Lubrizol's FBC™ System Compatible Program for CPVC pipe.

Firestop Instructional Training

Firestopping is a topic of great interest to contractors for a multitude of reasons. With proper planning and training, firestopping installation is greatly simplified, costs are reduced, and contractors can be sure construction project stakeholders are provided with code-compliant firestop systems. Ultimately, contractors who undergo firestop training are enhancing life safety and property protection in the

buildings they perform work in.

We offer comprehensive, competency-based courses to educate and train participants in the fundamentals needed to become a resident firestop specialist. The goal is to equip participants with the knowledge and tools needed to return home and serve as a resident expert in confirming whether firestop installations are code compliant. Courses are non-proprietary to specific brands and are accredited with the American Institute of Architects or 16 LU/HSW credits, 12 BICSI CECs.

People who will install, specify, train, inspect or supervise firestop



installations are encouraged to attend our in-person or virtual training. Our diverse attendees include contractors, AHJs, architects, engineers, maintenance managers, IS managers, CE managers, IT directors, infectious control managers, life-safety officers, loss reduction specialists and other interested parties. See our upcoming training events here:

<https://www.stifirestop.com/events?category=Training>.

We engineer peace of mind.

Specified Technologies Inc. is a global company focused on innovating and leading the firestopping industry. Featuring Made in America

products for penetrations, joints and perimeter fire containment, Specified Technologies is dedicated to bringing expertise and excellence to this critical field. For more than 30 years, Specified Technologies has built a team of engineers, industry standard products like SpecSeal® and a suite of digital tools to help solve complex project challenges. Specified Technologies sets the bar for firestopping products that offer peace of mind when life safety and compliance is paramount.

For more information, please visit our LinkedIn page here: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/stifirestop/>.

About the Author

Kate Emery has worked in the building materials industry for over 11 years and serves as the vice president of marketing for Specified Technologies. She can be reached at kemery@stifirestop.com.

LESSONS FROM THE BEST:

How Top Business Leaders
Are Navigating Today's
Workplace Challenges

By Gene Marks





When employees are given the right tools and are better at what they do, they take more pride in their work. This increased value to their employers can lead to a better work/life balance and improved job security. At the upcoming BUILD26 conference in New Orleans, these topics will be discussed in more detail, along with other strategies for creating a better workplace, attracting top talent, and retaining high-quality employees.

This March, at BUILD26: AWCI's Convention + Expo, March 15-18, in New Orleans, I'll be sharing insights on the major issues affecting your business and, more importantly, how top leaders and managers are navigating them to ensure their companies thrive.

My talk will cover a range of topics, from the economy to technology, with a specific focus on the workplace. To succeed in the coming years, you'll need to consider three key areas: regulations, benefits, and technology. Here's a quick preview of what we'll discuss.

Regulations

Although the labor market has softened in the past few months, busi-

nesses in this industry are still short of skilled workers. And they're sensitive to losing valuable people. Finding and keeping the best talent remains a high priority. So, what are smart business owners across the country doing to create the best work environment possible.

For starters they're keeping up with labor regulations.

The Trump administration is in the process of rolling back many regulations from its predecessor. For example, in 2024 the Department of Labor issued new rules that would have eventually raised the level of eligible overtime for certain employees earning as much as \$59,000 per year from the current level of approximately \$35,000 (ACE, 2024). This

or practices may be unlawful if they involve an employer or other covered entity taking an employment action motivated—in whole or in part—by an employee's or applicant's race, sex or another protected characteristic.”

Many employers may think that this relaxation of rules at the federal level will reduce red tape and give them the ability to hire and fire more freely and for many that is true. But all that's happened is that the federal government is pushing these types of regulations to the state levels. And the states have responded.

As of this writing, six states have higher overtime wage limits than the federal government (Oldham, 2025). Thirty states have minimum wages that exceed the national level of \$7.25 per hour (NCSL, 2025). Fifteen states are now requiring their employers to be transparent about the pay they're offering for jobs and advertising as such (Paycor, 2025).

Three states require their employers to have mandatory paid time off (Hugh, 2024) and 17 states have required sick leave requirements for employers (GovDocs, 2025). Many other states are either considering or have legislation in process that would impact these rules. So, you can make the case that things are getting even more complicated!

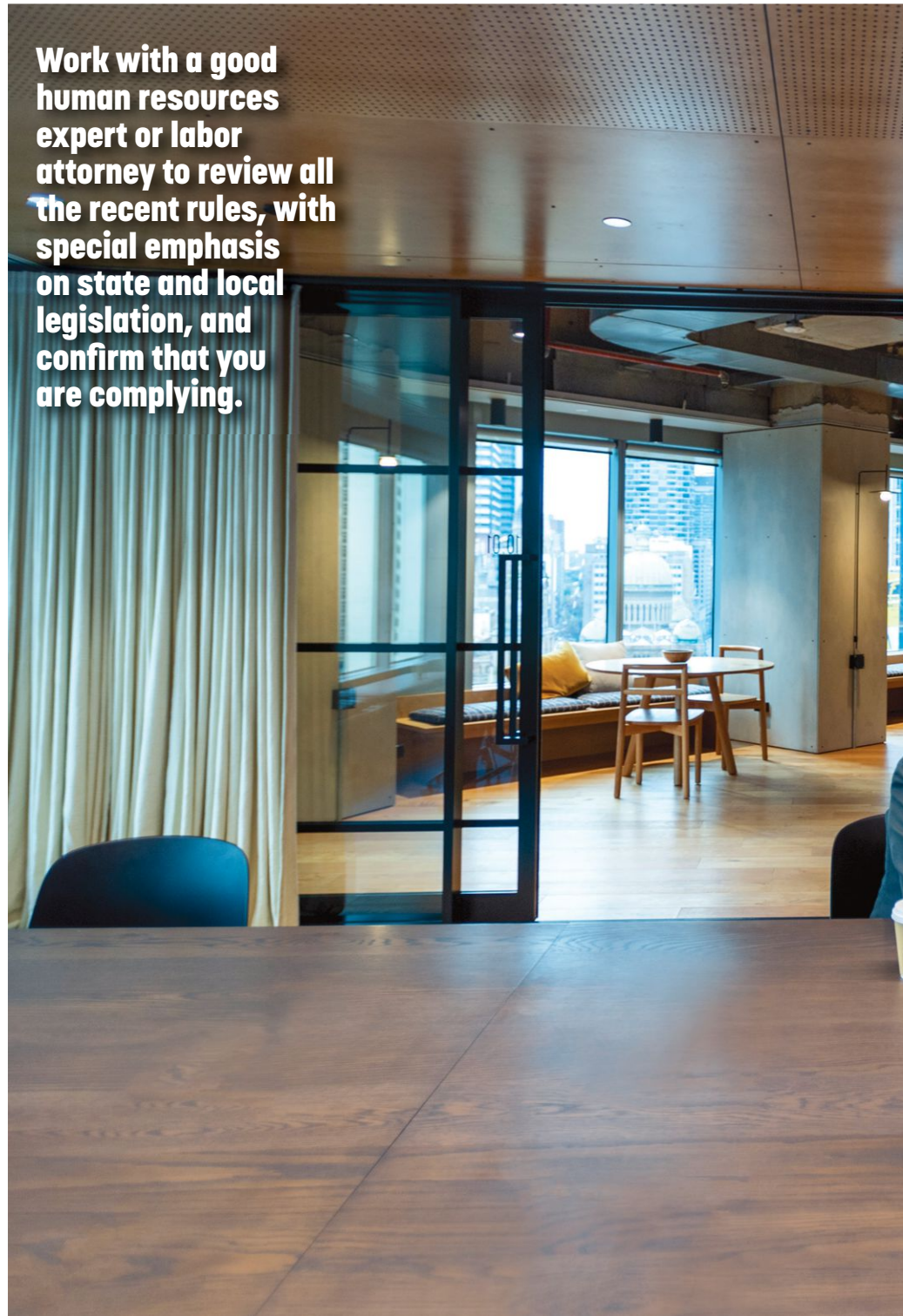
And then, of course, there's immigration. It's well known that the administration is coming down hard on illegal and undocumented immigrants and, while most of the attention has been on higher profile raids and arrests in cities the efforts of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will soon be re-directing toward employers. Of course, those employers who have undocumented workers on their payroll are breaking the law and ICE will address this. A consequence will be a further shrinking of available labor.

Work with a good human resources expert or labor attorney to review all the recent rules, with special emphasis on state and local legislation, and confirm that you are complying.

Interestingly, one area that the Trump administration has not touched is workplace safety. The Occupational Health and Safety Administration has continued to increase fines and widen its rules regarding workplace safety. However, the agency recently released new rules that could relax fines for qualifying

small businesses with no history of infractions and who address issues quickly (Bland and Pinkstone, 2025).

All of this is important, regardless of where your business is located. It's important to keep up with the rules. It's important to run a safe and happy workplace. You don't want to be found on the wrong side of these require-





rule, after being contested in court, is not being defended by the Trump administration, so federal overtime wage limits now remain at approximately \$35,000. But that's not all.

More onerous rules that would have required many employers to re-classify their independent contractors as employees are also being relaxed

(Disbrow and Ritzman M, 2025). The National Labor Relations Board has been gutted, which means that union activity will be minimal over the next few years (Kaye and O'Brien 2025). And the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has recently eliminated rules issued 2024 that greatly increased an employer's

responsibility for recognizing and addressing discrimination and harassment in the workplace (Stacey et al. 2024).

Speaking of the EEOC, the agency in April issued guidance regarding diversity, equity and inclusion, informing employers that "Under Title VII, DEI initiatives, policies, programs

ments and have employees—or your community—be aware that you're not providing the best workplace possible.

So, what to do about this? Here are three suggestions:

Work with a good human resources expert or labor attorney to review all the recent rules, with special emphasis on state and local legislation, and confirm that you are complying (or get in compliance!).

Regarding safety, it's important—for all the obvious reasons—that you are running a safe business. Finally, ask your insurance company if they offer services where internal inspectors can review your facility and practices and make recommendations (many do). Consider working directly with OSHA and using their consulting services—which are free for small businesses—to provide a safety review. Or retain an outside safety expert to conduct a similar review.

Regarding immigration, it's imperative that you've got all your documen-

tation in order and current. Make sure all employees have current I-9 forms along with supplemental documentation. Validate your employees' work status using E-Verify. Consider hiring an outside immigration attorney to be on call if they need to work directly with any of your more valuable employees that need special assistance.

Benefits

There are three critical benefits your business needs to provide: (1) health care, (2) retirement and (3) flexibility.

Health Care

Health care is the toughest. Predictions are that health-care costs for employers will be increasing 5.8% this year, and that's on top of similar increases in the past few years (Mercer, 2024). Not providing health-care benefits puts you at a serious disadvantage to your competitors, which include large companies and

the government. So how can you stay competitive?

Many employers are opting to continue to provide group health insurance but are passing a larger share of the costs to their employees. Here are some other things to consider, based on what I'm seeing and writing about.

Investigate level benefit plans. A level benefit plan is a form of self-insurance that's becoming very popular among small businesses. With such a plan you reimburse your employees for their health-care expenses up to a certain annual amount (i.e., \$500 or \$1,000) and then have a stop-loss group plan (which will be less costly) kick in after that to cover any major incidents.

The reason for doing this is because many employers have found that they're paying for group insurance that their employees, because of their youth or good health, aren't even using. So why not just pay for what's being used? My clients and others I've





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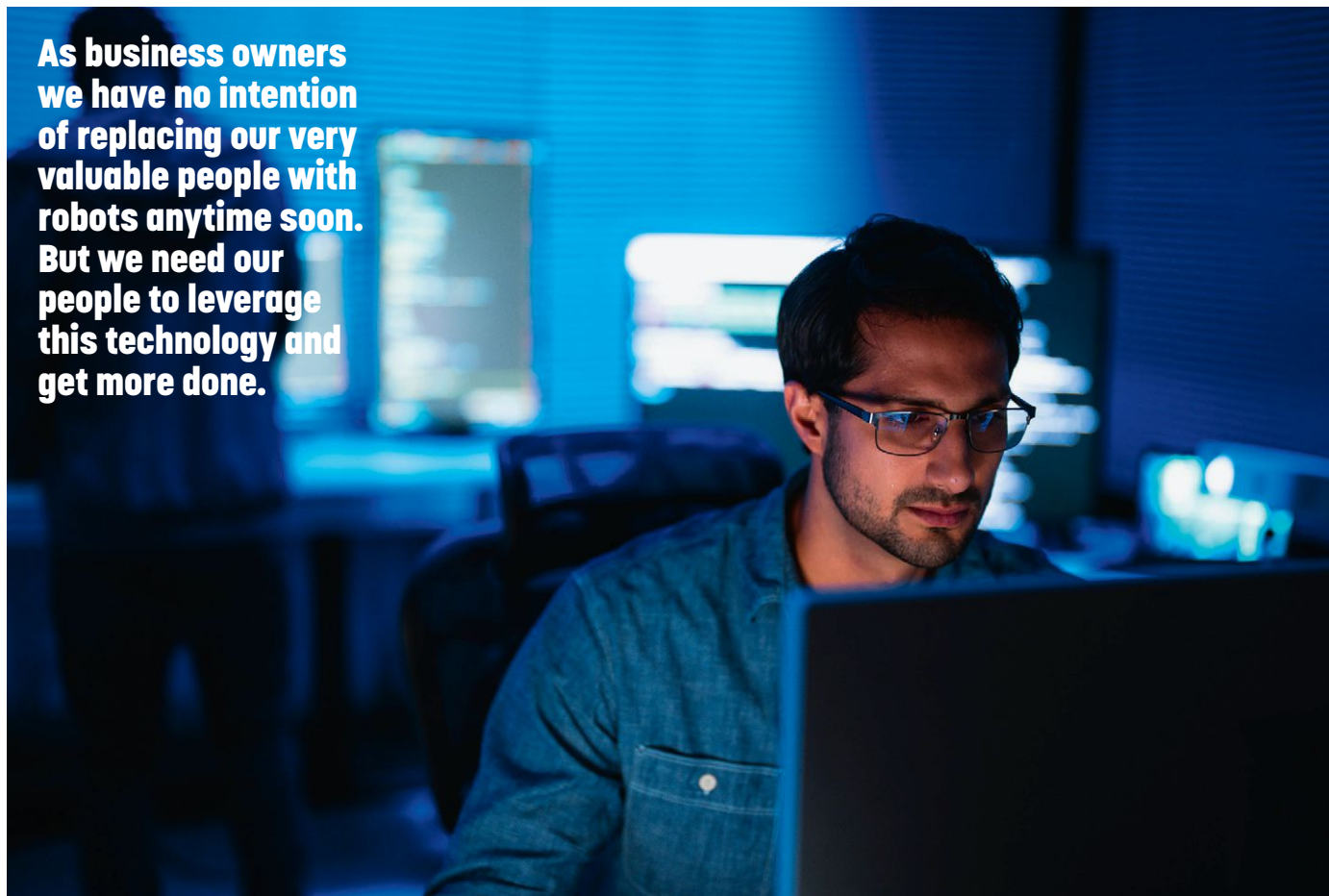
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valuable people with
robots anytime soon.
But we need our
people to leverage
this technology and
get more done.**



interviewed who do this have saved on health insurance by doing this.

Expand health savings accounts, or HSAs. An HSA is like a 401(K) for your health care and has exploded in popularity over the past decade. With HSAs, employees can put pretax money away (\$4,300 individual/\$8,550 family in 2025) and then withdraw the money tax free to use for approved unreimbursed health-care expenses like over the counter medications, dental and vision care and counselling services. Unused amounts rollover and grow and there are no minimum distributions. Better yet, recent legislation has expanded the use of HSA eligibility and funding options (Rippy and Schmid, 2025).

Also consider health reimbursement arrangements or HRAs. With an HRA, an employer can contribute pre-tax money to a special account for each employee and then that

employee uses those funds to buy their own health care, either from a recommended broker or from a health-care exchange. By doing this, the employer can determine what they want to pay for health care (rather than their insurance provider doing it for them), reduce their administrative costs and lower liability risks that could be caused by privacy violations. I have some clients and readers who have replaced their existing health plans with HRAs and others that offer the program supplementally.

Retirement

Regarding retirement, the SECURE 2.0 bill that became effective in 2022 now gives employers many incentives to set up or add to their existing 401(K) plans. Eligible employers can get tax credits for creating and even for matching their employees' contributions to their retirement plans.

New rules allow employers to match their employee's student loans, expand payments to part-timers and enter Pooled Employer Plan arrangements that reduces costs and liabilities.

Flexibility

Finally...flexibility. If the pandemic taught us anything it's that people can work from home, at least for a short period of time. Younger generations want this. Older generations want it ever more. Which means that employers have had to respond and I'm seeing three trends emerging.

The first is work from home policies. Most of my clients and business readers have them, allowing employees to work one to two days from home. The best policies I've seen make this benefit earned after a year of service with the company and subject at any time to a supervisor's discretion.



“

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—International Risk Management Institute (IRMI), August 2024

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Technology security needs to be considered. Schedules and behavior of employees when out of the office are also important. Contrary to what you may read, most employees are mandating a full return to the office, but they do require in-person face time for a majority of the week. Working from home is becoming an essential benefit.

Also connected to flexibility is paid time off or PTO. I'm seeing a trend toward more "unlimited" PTO plans. My company offers one. Like many others who have taught me, I offer my employees who have been with me a year to take unlimited PTO subject to their supervisor's approval. It's a great recruiting and retention tool and has yet to be abused.

Finally, there's abbreviated work schedules. A four-day workweek. Sabbaticals. The ability to take time off for oneself as long as the work is getting done and responsibilities are being met. I have both clients and readers who have shifted schedules to 10-hour days so their employees can work four days a week.

Others offer up to a month each or every other year for paid (or partially paid) sabbaticals that not only contribute to their employees' well-being but foster cross-training and the ability for employers to gauge just how productive their employees are by measuring output when they're not around.

AI and Technology

I cover AI for Forbes, and my focus has been on what AI tools are available, working and truly creating ROI for businesses right now. Spoiler alert: not many.

Some studies have reported that AI is being used by a growing number of small businesses (Paypal Newsroom, 2025). But let's not get ahead of ourselves. When these studies refer to AI, they're talking about genera-

tive AI chatbots such as ChatGPT, Anthropic, Copilot, Gemini and even Grok. And yes, these tools are being used by both business owners and their employees.

And they're producing some productivity benefits. People are writing better emails, getting research done faster and drafting policies and documents with minimal input from lawyers and experts except for their final reviews. This is good. What's not good is their inconsistency, unreliability and frequent generation of bad information that tech people call hallucinating.

What will really have an impact on businesses in the years to come will be agents. Already big tech firms like Microsoft are rolling out agentic AI to perform tasks—from answering customer questions, creating bills, matching invoices and doing reconciliations with minimal human involvement. But there's some way to go before these agents are working well enough for a business to rely on them.

Regardless, our employees are watching. And many of them are scared for their jobs. As business owners we have no intention of replacing our very valuable people with robots anytime soon. But we need our people to leverage this technology and get more done. To that end, we must not only encourage but invest.

My best clients and business readers are doing just that. How much Microsoft Office or Google Workspace are you really using? I bet it's less than 20% of its capabilities. That's silly, considering that we're paying for 100% of the product. And as these—and many other software companies—are rolling out new AI capabilities that knowledge gap only becomes wider.

What to do? Three things.

Challenge Your Software Vendors

Check in with your software providers

for systems like accounting, inventory, order management, CRM and HR. They're constantly investing in new AI features and capabilities. Your job is to understand these features and implement the ones that make sense for your business. Schedule a call with them twice a year. Challenge them to justify their monthly fees by showing you how their new AI and other features can help your team become more productive and your business more profitable.

Clean Up Your Data

The second thing is to have your people clean up your data. Because no matter how good AI is, it's never going to be effective if it uses lousy data. Take the time to review your databases, update old data, fill in empty fields, require data entry in some places and create alerts for when data hasn't been updated timely. Create lookup lists and custom views for your data administrators to monitor. Forces on those applications with the best AI functionality you'll be using.

Invest in Training

Hire a consultant or a trainer from one of your software vendors. Their job is to teach you how to use all the application's features that specially apply to your business. The more training people get the less fearful they'll be of this technology. They'll soon understand that by leaning into the AI features of their software they can get their jobs done quicker and easier and relieve stress.

They'll find themselves being better at what they do and take more pride in their work. The smartest employees I've met as clients and business readers understand that they can use these tools to become even more valuable to their employers, which means a better work/life balance and job security in the years to come.

Conclusion

We'll talk about lots of things when I see you at BUILD26, March 15-18, in New Orleans (www.AWCIBuild.org). But in the meantime, the article represents a few actions you can take to build a better workplace, attract better talent and retain your best people. This will always be a top concern of good business managers. CD

Gene Marks, CPA, is the founder of The Marks Group, and runs a 10-person technology and financial management consulting firm in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. He speaks 50+ times per year to business groups on technology, the economy, public policy and workplace topics and is the author of six books on business management. A former columnist for the New York Times and Washington Post, Gene now writes regularly for The Guardian, The Hill, The Philly Inquirer, Entrepreneur and other national platforms.

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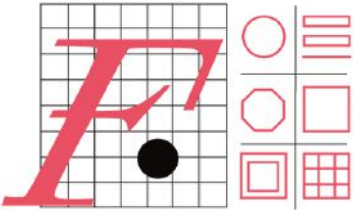
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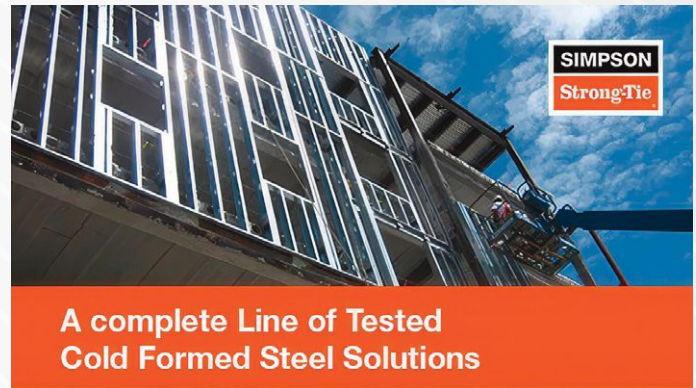


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View the Showcase



The image shows a large, modern interior space, likely a library or community center. The ceiling is a prominent feature, made of light-colored wood panels arranged in a grid pattern, with several circular recessed lights. The walls are also made of wood, and there are large windows on the right side, providing a view of the outside world. The floor is made of wood, and there are some white lines on it. The overall atmosphere is bright and modern.

Digitally Assisted Project Planning:

An Accessible Solve for Workforce Challenges

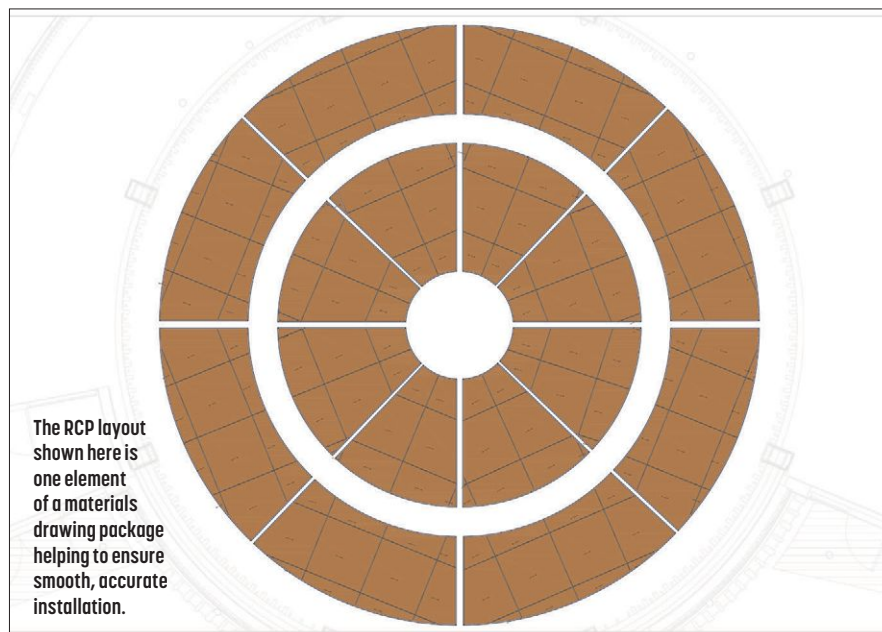
Digitally assisted project planning for ceiling and wall installations is a solution that can support contractors on multiple levels. This includes allowing jobs to be completed on time and on budget, despite fewer workers. By Eric Herr

Today's contractors are up against unprecedented workforce-related challenges. In addition to the construction industry working to successfully navigate a near half-million-worker shortage, dynamics—ranging from federal immigration policy to a rise in new construction projects—are contributing to the reality of contractors having too much work, but not enough workers to do it.

Not only is there a question of whether a project can be completed on time and on budget, but labor shortages are preventing contractors from bidding on jobs. As contractors look for ways to overcome these challenges and stay competitive, many are embracing digital pre-construction services. These offer a host of advantages, from saving time, labor, materials and costs on the job to supporting accurate bids on highly complex projects. Simply stated, digital pre-construction services present solutions that can bridge the workforce gap and bring in more business.

Present and Persistent Landscape

The workforce shortages contractors face today have been “brewing” for years. The labor pool has been slow to recover from a downturn in worker supply driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, which was preceded about a decade earlier by workers leaving the industry when an eroding housing market forced them to find work elsewhere. Not only are today's cur-



rent workforce gaps significant, but they are expected to persist for years.

Estimates from Associated Builders and Contractors indicate 439,000 new construction workers will be needed in 2025 to meet rising demand in the construction industry (Design Cost Data, 2025). Moreover, according to a survey by the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC, 2024), 94% of contractors are challenged in filling open positions, and a significant number of those positions are craft-workers who perform most of the onsite construction labor.

While contractors struggle to have adequate crews onsite, forces are at work to decrease the pool of available tradespeople. Among these are federal policy aiming to restrict immigration, a rise in the number of workers who are 55 and older, a shortage in training resources, and a lack of interest in the

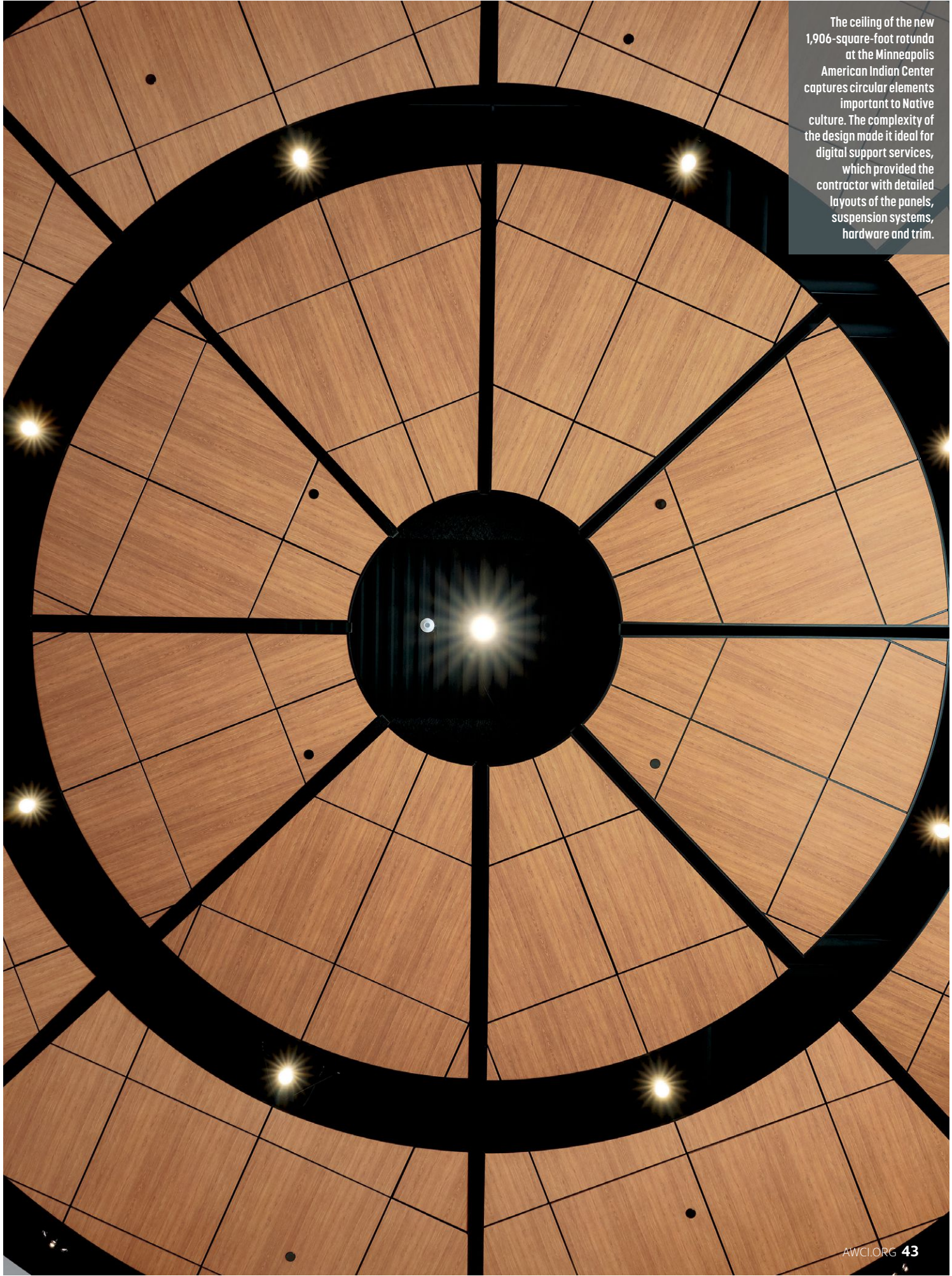
trade from the would-be next generation to come up through the ranks.

As labor shortages continue, contractors can also expect to experience a growing number of project opportunities driven by anticipated lower interest rates inspiring more new construction, post-pandemic office renovations, a surge in the building of data centers and manufacturing facilities and more.

Contractors are experiencing multiple “trickle-down” effects of the labor shortage—all of which in some way impact the bottom line. Consider the following:

- Wages are on the rise and eating into profits. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, between May 2021 and May 2022, average hourly wages for production and non-supervisory employees in construction rose 6.3%. Between February 2024 to February 2025 alone wages increased \$1.39 per hour.
- Contractors aren't only competing for projects, they are competing for workers, which can also drive up the cost of incentivizing new hires through better wages, benefits and more.
- Unsure if they can handle certain jobs, contractors are forgoing job

Contracting businesses can use new digital support services to handle labor shortages and capitalize on the increasing number and complexity of renovation and new construction projects.



The ceiling of the new 1,906-square-foot rotunda at the Minneapolis American Indian Center captures circular elements important to Native culture. The complexity of the design made it ideal for digital support services, which provided the contractor with detailed layouts of the panels, suspension systems, hardware and trim.

opportunities. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce reported that in 2021 more than one-third of contractors turned down projects.

- According to AGC, 54% percent of contractors are experiencing project delays due to labor shortages. Fewer workers can delay project completion schedules, add to budgets, and prevent a company from moving onto the next job.
- Contractors may also be out-bidding themselves to account for labor-related cost increases and delays.
- Company image, and new-job referrals, can be negatively impacted if a job takes longer to complete or requires additional budget.

Digital Advantages

By using emerging digital support services that offer complete design-to-installation support, contracting businesses can overcome labor challenges as well as take advantage of shifts in the number and complexity of renovation and new construction projects. Following are several advantages digitally assisted support services offer.

Digitalization of the takeoff process supports faster, more confident bidding. Digital services are revolutionizing the way contractors bid on a project. For instance, ceiling solutions can be digitalized and, when applied to a reflected ceiling plan (RCP) layout, automate the exact quantities of every component needed for that project. This capability greatly increases the accuracy of materials needed on the jobsite. Ultimately, digitalization takes the guesswork out of estimating, provides a total materials package in which the contractor can be fully confident, and significantly expedites the bidding process.

Digital support services simplify and accelerate project installation by pro-

Contractors can anticipate more project opportunities due to ongoing labor shortages and upcoming trends.

viding contractors with one convenient and complete drawing package to guide them every step of the way. Digital technology can evaluate a project scope while considering the installation process. As a result, any potential issues, like perimeter hardware clashing, can be vetted before any materials reach the job site. Drawing packages should include a bill of materials, accurate and comprehensive finish schedules for all components across the project, clear layouts, and highly detailed drawings and schematics that enable seamless installation.

Digitalization supports fewer wasted hours. The best digital service will take the lead and collaborate with architects in the design phase of a project to clearly understand the materials needed to execute the design intent. That digital service will then collaborate with the contractor to revise plans based on actual job-site conditions, eliminating time that otherwise may have been wasted backtracking to fix mistakes. This level of collaboration and project efficiency will enable a project to be completed on schedule and on budget and allow contractors to move more quickly to their next job.

Digital technology can optimize materials within a project space based on realistic scrap reusability. For example, digitalization can analyze every cut panel at the perimeter of a ceiling and determine if the cut-away scrap can be used in another perimeter location. This significantly reduces material, providing huge

cost savings for the contractor while helping to facilitate sustainable construction practices.

Digital support services give contractors the confidence to take on more complex designs that often come with a higher “price tag.” As architects push the boundaries to meet expectations for greater individuality and ingenuity in their designs, contractors must install these complex visuals with impeccable precision. When ceiling and wall designs handed down from architect to contractor become increasingly complex, the accurate, fast bidding supported by digital services can offer contractors a critical competitive advantage on a project. Moreover, these digitally assisted services can help ensure things are completed correctly the first time, outline recommendations for easing installation and, overall, reduce time, material, and labor—delivering outstanding results no matter how complicated a design vision.

Project Planning Support

In choosing a partner offering digital services, keep in mind the following.

- The service should offer complete support and bring designers, architects, product manufacturers and the contractor into the process.
- Every asset provided needs to be integrated into the entire project, including estimating, product ordering, and so forth. In addition, the service should never be exclusively digitalized.
- The strongest services respect and leverage the value of human collabora-

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oration on everything from design evaluation to ways to enhance digital technology.

- A digital service that is complimentary says a great deal about the value that provider puts on engaging in a true partnership with the contractor.

Digitally Assisted Planning

When designing the interior of the new rotunda, a circular space inside the newly renovated Minneapolis American Indian Center, the architects from the Cuningham Group understood the importance of incorporating circles into the design. “Circles are very important within the Indian community,” explained Eric Lagerquist, associate principal, Cuningham Group Architecture, Minneapolis. “The medicine wheel and the drum circle are big elements of Native culture.” These two concepts figure prominently in the ceiling design for the 1,906-square-foot room which serves as a ceremonial space within the building.

Today, when a visitor steps inside the rotunda, the circular design creates the illusion of eight wedge pieces extending out from the center of the ceiling. However, achieving this effect requires many components and a great deal of accuracy. This design included suspending 16 ceiling clouds from the plenum to form the inner and outer circles. The plenum itself was painted black and had suspended pendant lights flush with the level of the ceiling clouds, creating an illusion of a floating ceiling.

Each ceiling cloud was created using 4' x 4' panels, field cut to fit the design and installed in a black exposed tee grid system, which was also field cut to accommodate the shapes of the panels. Black straight and curved perimeter trim was then installed to enclose the outer edges of each ceiling cloud.

The complexity of the design prompted ceiling contractor TJ Rokke of Architectural Sales of Minnesota to seek guidance for the installation from the Armstrong design and pre-construction service. In addition to a drawing package, which included detailed layouts of the panels, suspension system, hardware, and trim, digitally assisted project planning provided the Armstrong manufacturing team with a detailed trim schedule showing the exact length, radius and miter of every trim piece in the project. The trim was then pre-cut, pre-mitered, pre-curved and shipped to the jobsite. The trim pieces, which formed the outer edges of the 16 ceiling clouds, were assembled on the ground and suspended 20 feet above the floor. Working from scissor lifts, the installers were then able to lay in the grid and ceiling panels that would complete the complex design.

“This is a high-profile design,” said Rokke. “These are not your standard square or rectangular ceiling panels. Measuring and cutting all the angles takes time in the field, but with the trim being cut to size in advance by the manufacturer, that saved a lot of time and helped make sure that the ceiling clouds in the inner circle and the ceiling clouds in the outer circle were the same size.”

The highly unique, incredibly precise circular ceiling design that welcomes guests of the Minneapolis American Indian Center is one of dozens and dozens of digitally assisted installations meeting client expectations and impressing people occupying a wide variety of spaces. Moreover, these installations have provided contractors with the on-site efficiency they need to complete projects on time and on budget, as well as the confidence to bid on more “showcase” projects.

Conclusion

The challenges of fewer workers and other factors expected to further shrink the availability of qualified labor and increase the number of construction jobs require construction firms to have a business strategy focused on more than just recruiting workers.

Digitally assisted project planning for ceiling and wall installations is a solution that can support contractors on multiple levels. This includes allowing jobs to be completed on time and on budget, despite fewer workers.

In addition, digital services can allow contractors to bid on more construction projects and tap into the movement toward more complex ceiling designs—ultimately, helping ensure they not only maintain their business, but support its growth. CD

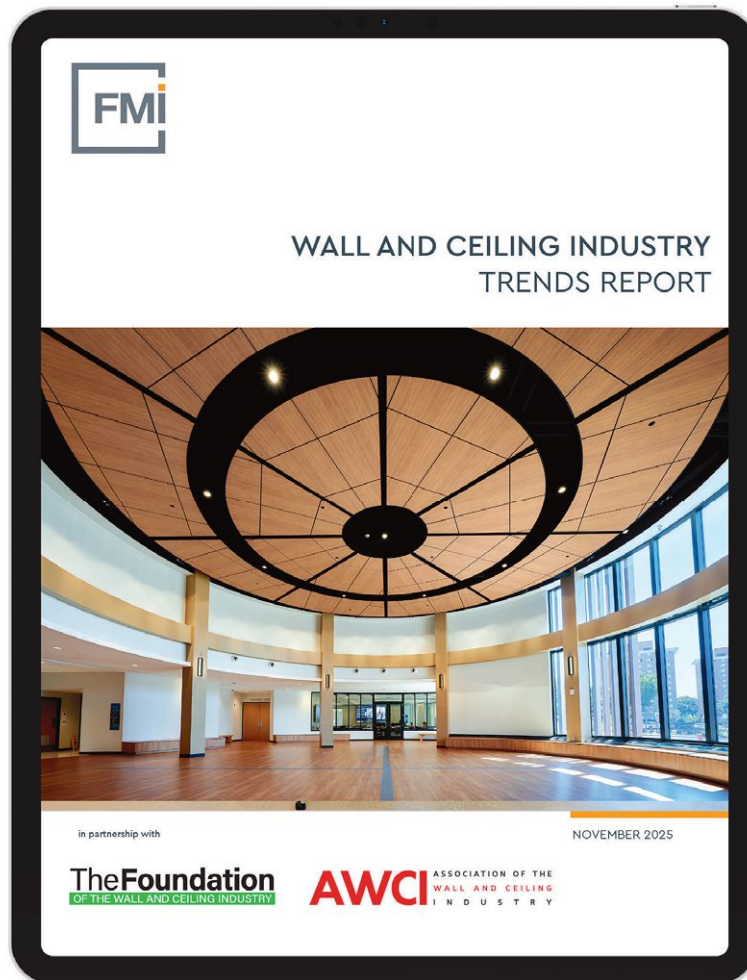
Eric Herr is the senior manager of sales and operations, ProjectWorks, Armstrong World Industries. Herr leverages nearly 25 years of experience in distribution and the construction industry to ensure customers can easily design, bid, order, and build with Armstrong products. As a ProjectWorks leader, he focuses on customer-centric solutions that facilitate stronger relationships between designers and contractors, efficient and accurate installation, and beautiful results.

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- Segment outlook
- Business operations
- Strategic priorities
- Competitive landscape

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Health insurance remains a patchwork of partial solutions that employers must stitch together as best they can. The right mix of benefits will ensure better coverage for employees while capping escalating costs. And those costs need to be managed like any other business account.

Employers everywhere are facing a continuing escalation in health insurance costs. Wall and ceiling installers face a number of challenges relating to the high-risk nature of much of their work. Traditional

cost-shifting tactics such as copays, deductions and coinsurance seem to have a diminishing effect. Employers should augment such practices with new insurance vehicles that can help save money.

The nation's business owners expect health insurance premiums

to increase by some 8% in 2025, according to a new survey from the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans (IFEBP). That comes off a 7% price hike in 2024. The average annual premium for family coverage now tops \$25,572, as tracked by KFF, a consultancy.

What's driving the price escalation? Catastrophic claims, specialty prescription drugs, and chronic medical conditions. "A cancer or a musculoskeletal diagnosis can result in a strong expense impact on any employer's health insurance plan," said Julie

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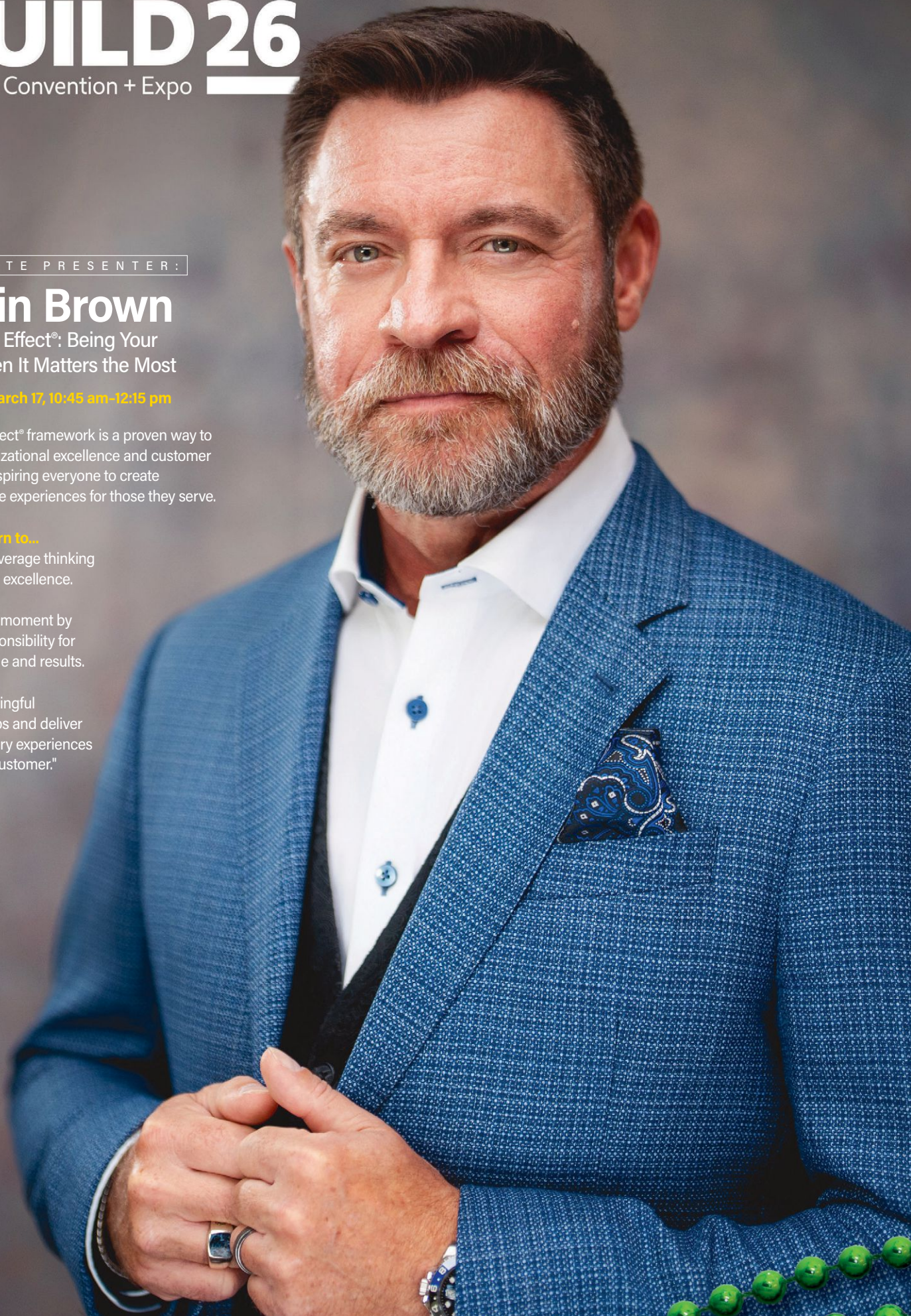
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Stich, vice president of content at the IFEBP. “So can chronic conditions such as diabetes or hypertension.” A host of new specialty medications top things off. “About a third of respondents to our recent survey reported that they now cover GLP-1 drugs for weight loss as well as diabetes.”

Companies in the wall and ceiling industry face special challenges. Insurers will often classify the companies as high risk, given the need for workers to engage in physically demanding tasks required by the installation of drywall, plastering and insulation. Additionally, acoustic ceiling installations require work to be done at heights that increase the risk of falls.

The problem is made worse by the fact that many wall and ceiling businesses operate with minimal staff, relying heavily on short-term labor

or specialty contractors that make it tough to meet minimal standards for group enrollments. And many of the sector’s smaller outfits find it difficult to qualify for lower cost group plans.

Companies have long tried to control costs by getting workers to pick up more of the tab. Figures in a new KFF report, though, suggest that employers are putting less faith in cost-shifting tactics. While premiums for family coverage increased 24%

Comments from consultants suggest employers are looking for new health insurance models that will break through traditional barriers to care while capping costly fees.

over the past five years, employers have hiked worker contributions to those premiums by only 5% over the same period. Deductibles, for their part, have risen only 8% over the past five years. And co-pays and coinsurance payments in 2024 were no higher than the previous year.

It’s no secret why employers are reluctant to load more costs onto workers’ shoulders. “Benefits are a big piece of total compensation,” explained Walter Winter, senior vice president of employee benefits for Woodruff Sawyer, an independent insurance broker. “The employer who just keeps cost shifting is going to end up with a workplace less attractive to employees and job candidates. Retention and recruitment may suffer.”

Too, there’s a growing realization that employee participation just kicks the health insurance can down the

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road. “The old cost-shifting thing is played out,” said Mike Barton, chief growth officer, employee benefits, at World Insurance, a broker. “You can increase deductibles and co-pays, and take more out of the paychecks, but that doesn’t reduce the overall spend.”

New Initiatives

The wall and ceiling industry clearly needs some fresh paths through the health insurance wilderness. Many observers expect Washington to provide them. “The first Trump administration relaxed some of the regulations and tried to increase access to healthcare through market competition and price transparency,” said Steve Kelly, partner at AZ Health Insurance Brokers. He expects similar innovation in the months ahead.

The latest federal legislation to affect employer-sponsored health insurance is the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. Passed in July, the act provides more leeway for employers who sponsor health savings accounts to utilize efficient and economical telehealth. Employers are now allowed to deduct telehealth visits even if they are below previous minimum levels, without disqualifying their health savings accounts. “This provides a major encouragement for employers to use telehealth as a part of their group health plans,” said Jay M. Kirschbaum, benefits compliance director at World Insurance.

Looking to the road ahead, perhaps the most likely initiative to come out of Washington will be a further expansion of a new insurance vehicle called the Individual Coverage Health Reimbursement Arrangement (ICHRA, pronounced “ICK-ra”). Introduced in 2020 by the first Trump administration, these arrangements allow employers of any size to reimburse participants for the premiums they pay for a health insurance plan of their

choice. Employer reimbursements are tax deductible, and employees receive them tax-free.

“An ICHRA is like a 401k plan for health care,” said Jack Hooper, CEO and co-founder of Take Command Health, a provider of health reimbursement arrangements (HRAs). “Each employee can put money toward a high-quality ACA plan that has their doctors and prescriptions covered. It’s a win-win where employees are going to enjoy more value, and the employer is saving money.”

ICHRAs have been popular with employers, increasing in usage by some 29% in 2024 over the previous year, according to the HRA Council, a consultancy. A big reason is the flexibility they bring to the buying process. In the traditional shopping process, employers will attempt to control overhead costs by finding a one-size-fits-all health insurance plan suitable for their diverse employee pool.

Too often, that leads to overbuying, burdening the business with a plan that meets the needs of the management-level staff but is far too costly for field-level workers. And when only the sickest members of the latter group sign up for the insurance, the result is an adverse selection that sends costs into an upward spiral.

ICHRA puts a stop to that, since employers no longer need to find one plan that satisfies everyone. Too, a business need not have a huge pool of workers to benefit. “ICHRA can be used by the very smallest of employers, who traditionally have had trouble finding good rates and who are tired of negotiating renewals every year,” said Hooper.

Despite their limited history, ICHRA plans have proven themselves capable of expanding coverage: Some 83% of employers adopting them report they are offering health insurance to their workers for the

Checklist: Rx for High Health Insurance Costs

Have you taken all the steps possible to control your company’s health insurance costs? Find out by taking this quiz. Give yourself 10 points for each “Yes” answer. Then total your points to rate your performance.

1. Do you look upon health insurance costs as an incoming stream of invoices that need to be analyzed?
2. Do you seek out providers that will help you prioritize price transparency?
3. Have you taken on the services of an advisor with underwriting experience to help select insurance vendors?
4. Have you fine-tuned cost sharing practices to balance the economy and staff morale?
5. Do you incentivize annual checkups and other early care?
6. Do you encourage telehealth?
7. Do you communicate health insurance benefits, in dollar terms, to employees?
8. Have you investigated association plans as vehicles for reducing premiums?
9. Have you looked in HRAs and ICHRA as possible replacements or adjuncts to your current plan?
10. Have you explored the offerings at [healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov) for programs that may help your company?

What’s your score? **Over 80:** Success! You are doing a great job controlling health insurance costs. **Between 60 and 80:** Time to fine tune your procedures. **Below 60:** It’s a good idea to re-gear by instituting ideas in the accompanying story.

ICHRAAs are just one of a variety of HRAs with which employers can fashion health insurance programs that meet diverse needs. Organizations seeking still more flexibility can add an HRA as an adjunct to, rather than a replacement for, their current plans. “You can be very flexible and creative with how you construct HRAs,” said Winter. “One of our clients wanted to add orthodontia to their dental plan. When they discovered very few employees would use the coverage, they decided that the increased premium quotes were too high for the expected benefit. They ended up setting up an HRA to cover orthodontia only.”

Joining Forces

Trump 2 may also see a revival of interest in association plans that allow a consortium of employers to pool workers into one large buying group. The previous Trump administration had championed such plans as a way for employers to enjoy lower premiums. The Biden administration stigmatized them, citing their tendency to default and leave beneficiaries without coverage. Trump 2 may well revisit the topic, under a new regulatory framework to better bolster their financial strength.

Washington could also pursue other initiatives to loosen the market. Allowing health insurance companies to sell policies across state lines, for example, could put downward pres-

sure on premiums by increasing competition. "We need price competition in health insurance, and we don't have it yet," said Kelly.

Increased price transparency can also help employers manage costs. “One of the biggest limitations we have is that employers cannot get information on what it will cost to see a provider or undergo a procedure,” said Kelly. “We’re not getting that right now, and that’s a problem.”

Market observers also are looking for clues as to whether Washington will extend Biden administration tax subsidies for health coverage passed in The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and extended in the Inflation Reduction Act. Such subsidies have been giving financial incentives

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to employers to encourage workers to get coverage through the marketplace provided by the Affordable Care Act.

Watching the Till

Comments from consultants suggest employers are looking for new health insurance models that will break through traditional barriers to care while capping costly fees. Some observers believe employers should go further: Start thinking about health-care coverage less as traditional insurance to cover unlikely events, and more as a separate stream of incoming invoices that will require financing—and would benefit from the same control as any business account.

“Understand that everybody in the health-care system makes more money when premiums rise,” said Donovan Ryckis, CEO of Ethos Benefits, a consultancy. “That includes doctors, hospitals, pharmacies and drug manufacturers. To think they’re going to manage things prudently and responsibly...it’s just not going to happen. Once we understand that, we can take steps to lower costs by finding more responsible vendors to price things more appropriately.”

Tracking prices and negotiating for better ones requires expertise, and it behooves employers to work with service providers who understand the complexities of physician networks, coverage and benefits categories, prescription drug coverages, and cost management. “The right advisor can act as an employer advocate with the markets,” said Barton. “The result can be a favorable outcome in terms of program construction, cost and performance.”

The best advisors share several characteristics, noted Barton. The first is knowledge of the market. The second is a personal relationship with carriers, which can translate into better leverage and buying power.

A third characteristic, a background in underwriting, allows the advisor to deconstruct an employer’s current health insurance model, break it apart, and strip out waste of any kind. “Someone with underwriting experience with the big health insurance companies know where all the bones are buried and how to get the most out of that program for you,” said Barton.

Traditionally, said Barton, a broker will collect a bundle of information about an employer’s health plans, claims history, and employee census, send it to the insurance carriers and hope to get back a good rate. The knowledgeable advisor will reverse the negotiation process by working up a benefits program, constructing rates, then going to the market and finding out which carriers will match or beat the proposed plan.

Cutting Costs

Employers should also take these steps to stem the rising tide of health-care expenses:

Schedule early care: “Identifying medical issues early means treatment can start without delay, and that can translate into lower costs,” said Barton. “Employers should consider incentivizing workers with gift cards or time off to visit their physicians for routine preventative care, immunizations and screenings.”

Encourage telehealth: One-to-one video conferencing over a smart phone costs a lot less than in-person appointments. Employers need to work with their plans to ensure that telemedicine is employed as often as possible.

Shift costs: While traditional cost-shifting tactics are losing their punch as tools for capping costs, they remain an important piece of the health insurance puzzle. “We never recommend an employer pay 100% of their insurance costs,” said Kelly. “That



can result in employees over-using their benefits, which drives up costs for everyone.”

Communicate value: “It can be helpful to include a statement on employees’ pay stubs about how much the company is paying for health insurance,” said Ray. “That can open a lot of people’s eyes about the value they are receiving from their employer.”

Selling the Staff

Retooling a company’s health insurance plan is one thing. Selling it to the employees is another. “Employers need to avoid rolling out a new plan in



Retooling a company's health insurance plan is one thing. Selling it to the employees is another.

a way that makes people feel they're losing existing coverage," said Amy Skinner, director of content and brand marketing at Take Command Health. "Instead, say something like, 'we are replacing the plan that you were only lukewarm about, with a new vehicle that gives you exactly what you want.' That's a powerful message that will get employees excited."

The calendar must also be used to advantage. The more alternatives being offered to employees, the more time and hand-holding the transition will require to avoid emotional blowback. "Allow yourself enough runway

to make a change," said Skinner. "Give your employees enough resources to make informed decisions on the new health plans. Without that, it's all too easy for people to get frustrated and end up signing up for a plan that doesn't meet their needs."

Health insurance remains a patchwork of partial solutions that employers must stitch together as best they can. The right mix of benefits will ensure better coverage for employees while capping escalating costs. And those costs need to be managed like any other business account.

Change, bluntly, is afoot. "If we con-

tinue to do what we've been doing, the cost of health insurance will continue to rise unabated," said Barton. "We must do things differently. The only way to reduce the cost of health insurance is to reduce the cost of health care." [CD](#)

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Phillip M. Perry is a full-time freelance business writer with more than 20 years of experience in the fields of workplace psychology, employment law and marketing. His byline has appeared over 3,000 times in a variety of business publications.



A New Generation of Leaders: The AWCI Emerging Leaders Program

Through curated education, experiential learning and peer-to-peer networking, the Emerging Leaders program aims to strengthen leadership and ensure a strong future for the industry. • By Annemarie Selvitelli

Since its launch in the fall of 2020, the Emerging Leaders Program has been dedicated to cultivating the next generation of professionals in the wall and ceiling industry. The program was designed to engage contractors, manufacturers and suppliers who aspire to lead and make a lasting impact.

The Emerging Leaders Committee was formed with a clear purpose: to strengthen membership and leadership within the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industry (AWCI). “The Emerging Leaders Program has become an essential part of AWCI’s

strategy to ensure a strong future for our association and the industry as a whole,” says AWCI CEO Michael Stark, CAE.

What started as a committee quickly grew into a purposeful, multi-faceted program aimed at developing well-rounded leaders. The results have been impressive, with each graduating class showing increased participation on AWCI committees.

A Comprehensive Approach to Leadership Development

While drive and hard work can get you promoted, true leadership requires a

different set of abilities—the interpersonal skills needed to empower others. The Emerging Leaders Program provides a unique, curated experience that goes beyond what a professional might learn at their own company.

“It’s been inspiring to see the incredible caliber of leaders emerging from this program,” says AWCI President Jeff Dreisewerd (T.J. Wies Contracting, Inc.). “Their dedication and fresh perspectives are exactly what our industry needs to thrive in a rapidly changing world.”

The program’s 18-month curric-



ulum blends three key components:

1. Curated Education: Combining soft-skill development with technical training.

2. Experiential Learning: Participants visit jobsites, supplier operations, and manufacturing organizations, where current leaders share insights on business management, company culture, and core values.

3. Peer-to-Peer Networking: Participants build a lasting network of peers and confidants, fostering connections that will support them throughout their careers.

The program is a living model that is constantly refined based on feedback from each graduating class. For instance, the Class of 2026 officially kicked off in Tampa, Florida, with a two-day session that included team-building activities, open discussions on leadership challenges, and an introduction to a 13-week personal development and leadership course from Stagen.

The Stagen course is designed to help leaders develop crucial cognitive, psychological and interpersonal skills through a practice-based, peer-supported approach. It aims to equip leaders with the tools for greater awareness, choice and responsibility, enabling them to create lasting impact by fostering personal transformation and sustainable growth in their organizations and communities

Insights from Leaders and Alumni

The passion behind the program is clear when you hear from those who built it and those who have benefited from it.

Mike Garcia (Trim-Tex, Inc., Chief Revenue Officer), Co-Chair of the AWCI Emerging Leaders Committee

“Our industry is evolving quickly—every year we welcome more young talent, embrace innovative technology,

and challenge traditional ways of building. We need leaders who know how to guide that change as previous generations step back.

This program is designed specifically for our industry, bringing together contractors, manufacturers, and suppliers in one space. That mix helps participants recognize the common threads that connect us all. It’s an opportunity not just to sharpen your leadership skills, but to expand your network and your perspective on the role you play in shaping the future of this industry.”

Travis Vap, (South Valley, CEO), Co-Chair of the AWCI Emerging Leaders Committee, AWCI Past President (2022–2023)

“Developing people is the number one thing we must do as leaders. We owe it to our industry to give back and help others, just as we were guided and mentored. What sets this program

apart is its design. Each 14-month class doesn't just graduate with new skills; they walk away with a lifelong peer group they can trust. We curate immersive opportunities such as site visits to mega projects, testing labs, and advanced manufacturing facilities. The result is not just education, but transformation."

Phil Humphrey (Georgia-Pacific Gypsum, Building Envelope Manager), Class of 2024

"What makes the Emerging Leaders Program exceptional is the people. It brings together professionals from across the country, each with diverse backgrounds but a shared focus on the industry. The program provides a unique opportunity to form meaningful connections and build a strong, pre-established network among like-minded peers."

Dan Schnippert, (MAREK, Procurement Director), Class of 2023, AWC Board Member

"The curated content and experiences were tailored for our industry, and the relationships I formed with the manufacturers, distributors, and other contractors in the class continue to

be a reason to return to association events. There is no substitute for experiencing learning and development in an environment where the entire group can relate to the everyday leadership challenges we face."

Kerri MacAlpine, (Mac-Lad Corporation, Senior Vice President), Class of 2023

"The Emerging Leader program made the transition to more involvement into AWC so much easier because it taught me how the organization works and how I can best serve the organization.

It was really intimidating to attend AWC before, but the program gave me a lot of familiar faces, and I've met a lot of people I would not have otherwise. Being part of the program allowed me to grow within the AWC organization. As a distributor, I was able to be in the room with both my customers and vendors, gaining invaluable market insight and a deeper understanding of how the industry works."

Courtney Spies, (ClarkDietrich, Director of Sales-Northeast), Class of 2024

"The AWC Emerging Leaders Pro-

gram was a truly transformative experience for me. It helped me expand my professional network from a regional to a national level, which has benefited both my organization and me personally. The program also deepened my understanding of the AWC's pivotal role in the construction industry and helped me refine my professional perspective. I'm committed to staying involved as a board member for the Emerging Leaders Committee to help strengthen the program for future leaders."

Join the Next Generation of Leaders

The AWC Emerging Leaders Program is an intentionally selective, once-in-a-career experience. The current class of participants will graduate at BUILD26: AWC's Annual Convention + Expo, March 15-18, 2026, in New Orleans.

The application period for the class of 2028 opens in May 2026.

- The program is exclusively for AWC members.
- A task force of program alumni reviews all applications.
- The employing company must approve the employee's eligibility and support the relate expense and time commitment associated with the program's required five to six in-person events.
- Class size is limited to 18-22 people to ensure an immersive experience.

Are you ready to accelerate your career and help shape the future of the wall and ceiling industry? Contact Annemarie Selvitelli at selvitelli@awci.org. [CD](#)

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Annemarie Selvitelli is the director of education and member services for AWC. She also is the executive director for the Foundation of the Wall and Ceiling Industry.



constructiondimensions

2025 CORPORATE PROFILES

On the pages that follow, you will find 18 industry partners communicating their corporate vision. As we begin a new year, these consociates recount the progress they've made this year and tell of their plans for next year and beyond. Some describe their company history; others provide new information.

Companies with full-page advertisements in this issue were invited to become a part of this

Corporate Profile. They were provided a full-page "advertorial" to communicate their company's vision to the wall and ceiling industry.

You won't find the listings in traditional order. The companies appear based on their commitment to AWC, AWC's *Construction Dimensions* and the wall and ceiling industry throughout 2025. We thank and salute these industry players for their ongoing support.

Company Name	Listing Number
AMES	6
Armstrong	8
CEMCO	2
EIMA	14
Glasteel	13
Grabber	1
GMS	11
OPCMIA	4
PABCO	12
Specified Technologies, Inc.	9
Steel Framing Industry Association	12
Stockton	5
Super Stud	7
Steel Framing Industry Association	10
Trim-Tex	3
VALTO Engineered Materials	9

Getting the Most Out of Your Labor. More Important than Ever



Grabber Construction Products has been your partner in productivity for nearly 60 years. What began with a single, innovative drywall fastener has grown into a portfolio of more than 16,000 products, from professional-grade fasteners to state-of-the-art collated systems to game-changing drywall fabrication solutions. While each product is engineered for a different task, they all share one purpose: helping you and your crew accomplish more each day, growing both your business and your bottom line.

At Grabber, we take pride in offering premium products built to the highest standards and backed by decades of professional expertise and trusted supplier relationships. For us, the status quo is never enough. Our team is committed to intentional innovation, working

nonstop to develop smarter, better ways to help your crew succeed.

Every solution in our productivity portfolio is designed for jobsite reliability: consistent, dependable, and built to get the job done right the first time. That means fewer callbacks, fewer delays, and most importantly, a reputation you can count on. And when challenges do arise, we don't pass the buck. We solve the problem, and we work to earn your trust in the process. Because that's what getting the job done right truly means.

Trust is the foundation of everything we do. At Grabber, our relationships with contractors, distribution partners, and vendors are what set us apart. Our GrabberPro representatives are experienced industry veterans, averaging

more than 13 years of experience. They're ready to be on your jobsite or at your location, answering questions, solving challenges, and showing you how to get more from your labor while capturing real ROI. With GrabberPros in every market, we stay close to our customers' needs and focused on delivering real solutions.

Our customers don't just use Grabber's productivity-driven tools and systems, they experience the results. Jobs get done faster. Resources are used smarter. And day after day, those gains add up. We're proud to be by their side, every step of the way.

Learn more about how our portfolio of productivity can streamline your jobsite at www.grabberpro.com/about-us.

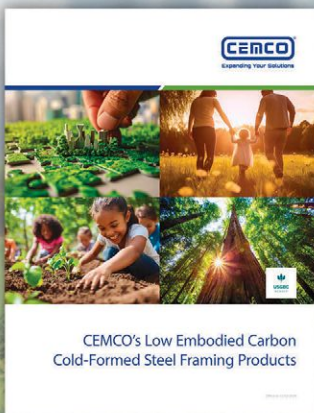
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Expanding Your Solutions



EXPERIENCE | INNOVATION | INTEGRITY



CEMCO®, a JFE Shoji America Company, is your source for steel-framing products, metal lath/plastering accessories and firestopping solutions. Our four state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities are strategically located in Los Angeles, California; East Bay/Northern, California; Denver, Colorado and Ft. Worth, Texas. Each facility is committed to providing the highest quality products and service CEMCO has been known for over the past 50 years!

Since 1974 CEMCO continues to provide the highest quality products, friendliest customer service, complete architectural, engineering, and technical support, as well as constantly developing new product innovations such

as HOTROD®, HOTROD® XL, Fire Bead®, Fire Gasket®, Flute Shield™, FireRip® and Super Seal-X™ for your fire-rated head-of-wall applications.

CEMCO now offers our CT Shaft Wall Stud for elevator and stairwell applications. Other innovations such as Sure-Board® for shear-walls, Sure-Span® steel floor joists, and the ProX Header® are available to help cut your labor costs. CEMCO's Structural Design and Engineering Group in conjunction with the CEMCO Technical Services Group combine to give you, architects, and engineers the support you need to ensure the right products are specified for your job. Both groups offer full-scale engineering support that includes

calculations and details, along with full-scale engineering and drawing packages.

CEMCO is a proud Lifetime Member of AWCI and a member of the Steel Framing Industry Association. CEMCO's commitment to the industry is also evident by being an active member of ASTM, the Cold-Formed Steel Engineers Institute (CFSEI) as well as the USGBC. CEMCO's products are manufactured from mill-certified hot-dipped galvanized steel, giving the industry confidence that CEMCO's products will perform as intended long after your project is finished.

Contact CEMCO at 800-775-2362 and ask how CEMCO can help you today.



www.cemcosteel.com

Elevate Outdoor Finishes with Trim-Tex Exterior Solutions' PVC Beads and Trims



Since 1969, Trim-Tex has been a world-class extrusion manufacturer. Now, they've expanded outdoors with exterior finishing beads that promise top-tier quality and unmatched durability. Crafted from a proprietary blend of premium exterior-grade PVC, Trim-Tex Exterior Solutions offers everything needed to flawlessly finish a building's exterior, from stucco homes to structural sheathing. These rust-proof beads and accessories enhance exterior finishes in every way—even in the harshest, most humid conditions.

Following the acquisition of Plastic Components, Inc., in February 2025, Trim-Tex

has become the most comprehensive source for both interior and exterior PVC finishing solutions in the industry. Today, they offer more than 300 exterior-grade profiles to help finishing professionals take on any job and solve any challenge.

Some of these superior solutions include: Corner Beads to create perfectly clean, crisp edges that last; Casing Beads of all shapes and sizes for seamless transitions between stucco and other materials, such as windows and doors; Control Joints and other movement-ready beads to keep walls clean and crack-free; lightweight yet resilient plastic laths for heavy-duty applications;

Starter Tracs that provide a strong, clean shelf for EIFS systems and many more.

High-quality finishing materials make a massive impact on the lifespan, look and structural integrity of any building. PVC/vinyl beads are a more impact-resistant, rust-free and easy-to-install alternative to metal accessories. As any drywall finisher can attest, Trim-Tex has long been the industry leader in producing the highest-quality vinyl beads — and the same excellence now extends outdoors. Trim-Tex Exterior Solutions help you create crisp edges, reinforce walls, and weather any storm.

TRIM-TEX
EXTERIOR SOLUTIONS

exterior.trim-tex.com

OPCMIA of the United States and Canada



As the oldest building and construction trades union in the United States, OPCMIA traces its roots back to 1864, during the American Civil War, when an organization known variously as the National Plasterer's Union or the National Plasterers Organization began to unify the various local craft unions that represented workers in the trade

Plaster and concrete are ageless building materials that will not fall out of favor as long as there is a sufficient amount of workers who are skilled in the arts of installation and finishing. These materials are as unforgiving as they are durable and beautiful. Skilled hands and competent management must work together to achieve the desired result and to promote and protect this vital construction resource. We dedicate ourselves to the promotion of these materials, the recruitment and training of skilled craftsmen to meet the demand of our industry, and hold ourselves responsible to this commitment for the future of our industry and the welfare of all those who earn their living in it.

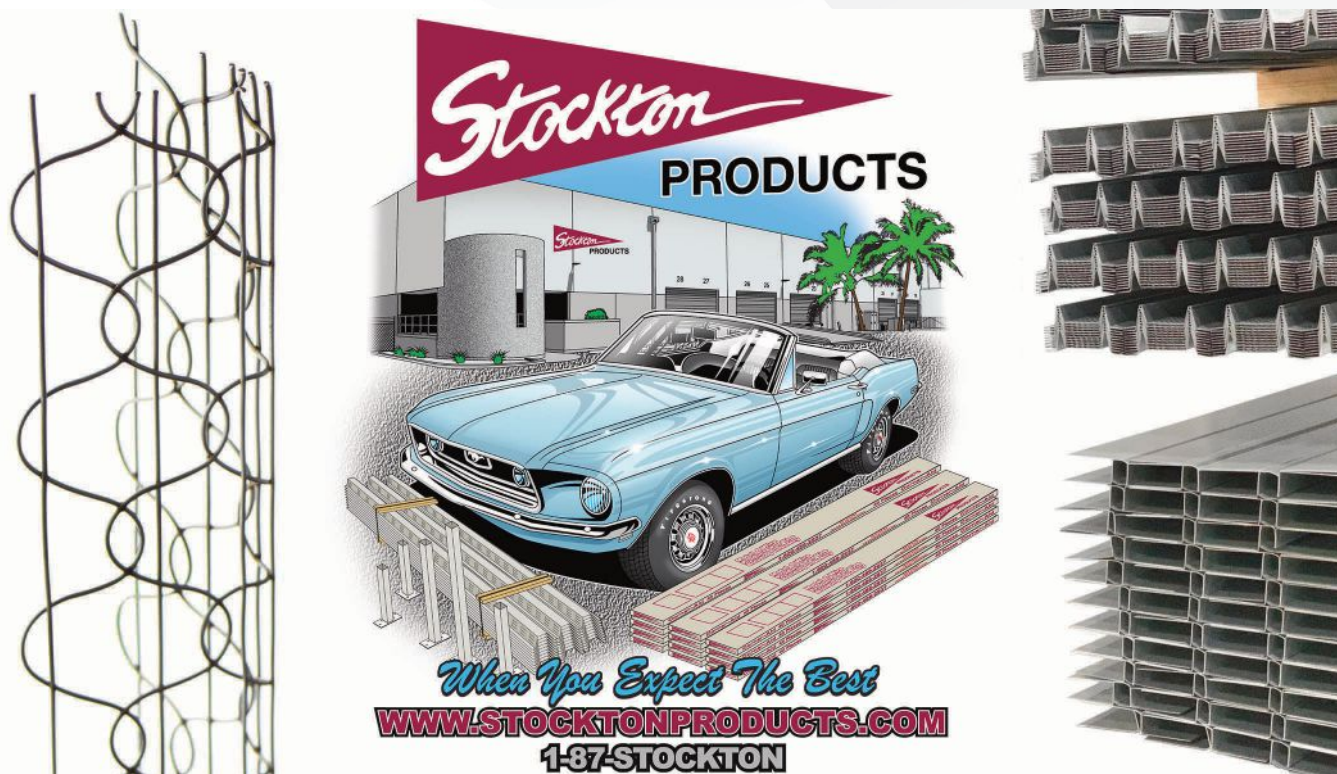
The new union endorsed the eight-hour day movement while pledging to avoid "unnecessary strikes," and instituted apprentice training and regulations. The union amended its constitution in 1887 to include Canadian workers. Reflecting the fact that its members did more than finish cement, the union changed its name in 1951 to the Operative Plasterers' and Cement Masons' International Association.

Today the OPCMIA continues to live by the principles upon which it was founded and that will continue to be its strength in the future. As it has been for over a century, the OPCMIA continues to be proud, strong and united. Come partner with us. Go to www.opcmia.org.



www.opcmia.org

Stockton Products® Metal and Wire Products



For more than 70 years, Stockton Products® has been serving the unique and specialty product needs of the construction industry. Starting with the industry-changing welded wire CornerAid® products for stucco reinforcement, Stockton Products has continued to innovate solution-based products to meet the continued needs of the construction industry and new evolving building systems and styles. Our products are widely used by the sheet metal, framing, lathing, plaster and drywall trades as well as specialty cladding systems, fiber cement panel systems, rain screen, architectural panels, moisture management and air-barrier systems.

We can precision laser cut, punch, brake form, weld and roll form galvanized steel,

stainless steel, copper, zinc and aluminum in stock shapes and custom sizes as well as offer a complete line of extruded aluminum moldings in a variety of finishes in both stock and custom shapes. We can curve, vent and fabricate weep holes and slots in most of our trims and moldings.

We service the industry through four manufacturing locations and distribution centers: Burbank, California; Livermore, California; Orange, California; and Phoenix, Arizona. To expand our metal forming capabilities to meet the growing demands of the marketplace for specialty metal products, we launched Stockton Custom Fabrication in 2018. This investment has allowed us to greatly expand our product line and market reach with heavier

gauges, giving us the ability to offer a wider variety of custom fabricated metal items.

We have best-in-class brake presses, shears, roll formers, turret punches, standard punch presses and a programmable fiber laser, and our experienced operators and staff have more than 120 years' combined materials, manufacturing and equipment experience. We are confident we can handle all your stock and specialty metal needs. At Stockton Products, "We can do it!" Visit us at www.StocktonProducts.com for more information on all our products.



www.stocktonproducts.com

TapeTech Launches Expansion into EIFS Industry!



PREMIUM EIFS TOOLS



tapetech.com

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TapeTech Tool Company, established in 1982, has been a leading provider of automatic taping and finishing tools for the drywall industry for over four decades. Renowned for quality design, engineering and performance, TapeTech's tools are trusted by drywall finishing professionals worldwide for their dependability and ease of maintenance.

That's why we're excited to announce an expansion of our catalog to include exterior insulation and finish systems (EIFS) tools. EIFS tools are specialized instruments designed to facilitate the installation and finishing of these systems, playing a crucial role in ensuring the efficiency, quality and durability of the application process. You can trust that our comprehensive range of specialized EIFS products meet or exceed TapeTech's Gold Standard quality you've come to expect. Our new line is designed to enhance the efficiency and quality of EIFS applications, and includes items such as:

- **Floats:** Essential for achieving smooth finishes, TapeTech provides various float options tailored for EIFS applications.
- **Hot Knives and Wire Foam Cutters:** These tools facilitate precise cutting of insulation materials, ensuring accurate fits and reducing material waste.
- **Sanders and Vacuums:** Designed to prepare surfaces and maintain cleanliness during EIFS installation, these tools help achieve optimal adhesion and a professional finish.
- **Scoops and Featheredges:** These instruments assist in the even application of base coats and finishes, contributing to a uniform and aesthetically pleasing exterior.
- **Ornamental Tools:** For intricate designs and detailed finishes, TapeTech offers a selection of ornamental tools to meet diverse aesthetic requirements.

TapeTech also emphasizes ergonomic designs and durability across its EIFS product range, making them suitable for high-demand professional environments. By integrating these tools into their product lineup, TapeTech continues to support professionals in the finishing trades, providing reliable and innovative solutions that uphold the company's longstanding commitment to excellence and craftsmanship.

Visit our website at <https://tapetech.com/product-category/eifs/> to learn more and to see our complete catalog.



<https://tapetech.com/product-category/eifs/>

Eastern Metal Building Products



A Family of Companies Building with Strength and Precision

Eastern Metal Building Products is leading U.S. manufacturer in cold-formed steel and building system innovation. Through the 2024 acquisition of EB Metal US, Super Stud Building Products, Galaxy Metal Products, DragonBoard USA and Eastern Offsite Solutions, the company has united a network of brands serving nearly every stage of modern construction.

Together, these companies deliver engineered quality and reliability to architects, contractors, and distributors in the Eastern United States. With production facilities in New Hampshire, New Jersey and Mississippi and a dedicated technical support team, Eastern Metal Building Products provides consistent service, code-compliant performance and trusted expertise from design through installation.

EB Metal US and Super Stud Building Products form the foundation of our steel-framing division, manufacturing structural and non-structural cold-formed steel studs, track, joists and accessories for commercial and residential projects. Product highlights include SuperMAXX Joist, offering one of the highest strengths to mass ratios of any structural material, with large, stiffened punch outs for trade accessibility; RC Premier, a resilient channel system that enhances acoustic performance; and The Edge™, a patented nonstructural stud featuring the industry's only double lip return, designed for precision and screw engagement.

Eastern Offsite Solutions designs and manufactures prefabricated cold formed steel wall panels, trusses and custom assemblies. Its truss systems require less permanent bracing, saving manhours and simplifying installation.

Galaxy Metal Products has a proven history of manufacturing high quality, UL and Intertek compliant fire rated products. The company produces both standard and custom metal doors and frames to support wholesale and specialty distribution partners across the construction industry.

DragonBoard USA manufactures a premium structural subfloor made from magnesium oxide cement (MgO). UL certified for one- and two-hour floor assemblies, DragonBoard delivers strength, fire resistance and durability for mid-rise, modular and multifamily construction.

Together, these brands reflect the shared values of Eastern Metal Building Products, building a stronger future for the construction industry.



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Build It Better with Integrated Solutions and Decades of Construction Industry Expertise



At Armstrong, our passion for innovative ceiling and wall solutions extends beyond an individual product design. Our mantra of “Faster, Easier, Better” is a commitment to develop ceiling and wall solutions that seamlessly integrate with the ever-changing construction conditions you encounter every day.

Build it better with cost-saving solutions and the broadest portfolio in the industry, backed by decades of innovation and installation expertise. Our pre-engineered solutions reduce time, material and labor creating construction efficiency from one end of the building to the other. We take great pride in helping you improve jobsite productivity and constructability through pre-construction services, prefabrication solutions and training.

Do you have questions about the ceiling schedule, cost or installation technique? We have regional experts with answers and expertise to help you keep your project on time, on budget and on the mark.

We're Here to Help You

Leverage and create real advantages in ceiling construction through integrated solution experts for:

- Pre-construction planning and estimation services
- RCP review to identify time- and cost-saving opportunities
- Drawing detail services that focus on integrated solutions
- Conflict resolution with various trades
- Installation details and hands-on training support

Stay in the Know: Get in the Club

Get in the club to join thousands of others who are receiving monthly tips and tricks, staying up-to-date on the latest product and installation solutions, training opportunities and more. Benefits of being a member include:

- Be in-the-know with the latest ceiling solutions and services from Armstrong
- Learn about estimation and drawing detail services

- Get help finding construction efficiencies with our installation and integration specialists
- Receive monthly success stories from other contractors
- Access to special events throughout the year

Visit armstrongceilings.com/contractors to join.

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VALTO Engineered Materials: Revolutionizing Surfaces with Innovative FRP Solutions



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NEW NAME. same trusted brands.

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As a global leader in fiberglass reinforced plastic (FRP) wall and ceiling panels, VALTO Engineered Materials (formerly Crane Composites) has led industry innovation for nearly seven decades by developing quality products that perform in demanding environments.

Since 1954, we've consistently delivered cutting-edge solutions that combine unparalleled hygiene, durability and style. Our pioneering solutions have earned customers' trust worldwide. By combining composite material science, advanced processes, and state-of-the-art technology with a deep understanding of customer needs, we consistently deliver exceptional products that outperform traditional materials, including metals and wood.

Customers can choose from an extensive range of FRP panels ideal for virtually any commercial space, while benefiting from unique attributes that only VALTO delivers:

High-End Style

A wide variety of surface types, textures, and colors offer endless design possibilities, enabling customers to create practical and durable, yet visually striking environments.

Reliable Performance

VALTO FRP panels are exceptionally strong and durable. They're resistant to mold, mildew, bacterial growth, stains and chemicals, ensuring long-lasting performance.

Simple and Cost-Effective

Our popular panel options offer affordable, high-value solutions designed for longevity and low maintenance, with easy installation over existing wall surfaces.

VALTO Engineered Materials continues to push the boundaries of possibilities in surface solutions. Our launch of GLASBOND® in 2025 underscores our continued commitment to innovation. GLASBOND is a next-generation FRP solution that features a revolutionary prefabricated adhesive-backed design, enabling installation up to 60% faster than traditional

envelopes, while offering the same exceptional qualities as VALTO's traditional FRP. This groundbreaking product has redefined the future of hygienic wall solutions.

All our lightweight composite product options deliver unsurpassed strength and durability backed by expert technical and installation support. By consistently pioneering patented technologies and partnering with customers and suppliers, we've built an exceptional track record of delivering for customers. VALTO Engineered Materials remains the preferred provider for advanced industry-leading FRP solutions that combine performance, style and durability with continued innovation that adapts to evolving customer needs.

VALTO | ENGINEERED MATERIALS
www.valtoem.com

Insist on SFIA-Certified Steel



Cold-formed steel (CFS) products certified by the Steel Framing Industry Association (SFIA) undergo rigorous third-party inspections. This ensures they meet industry standards for building code compliance.

Ask your supplier for SFIA-certified steel. And watch for our new circle SFIA Certified Product label—coming soon.

Trusted Code Compliance

SFIA Code Compliance Certification Programs for framing members and connectors help lower the risks for framing contractors and panel installers. SFIA labels ensure that the steel framing products manufactured and sold by SFIA members meet the applicable building codes.

Our product certification programs focus on the requirements set forth by the International Building Code, applicable provisions in the ASTM and AISI reference standards and various state and municipal codes.

SFIA certification uses a third-party administrator for unannounced visits to member

plants to audit their products. The auditors test both structural and nonstructural stud and track products for their mechanical properties, coatings and dimensional quality.

Similarly, SFIA's Contractor and Truss Fabricator programs identify contractors who have demonstrated expertise in cold-formed steel framing and truss fabrication.

The Full Supply Chain Behind You

Our members include steel mills, coil coaters, processors, stud and connector manufacturers, panelizers, engineers, material suppliers/distributors and framing contractors.

The Cold-Formed Steel Engineers Institute (CFSEI) is also part of the SFIA family. Together, our 2,500 CFSEI and SFIA members enjoy opportunities for business growth.

SFIA Gives You More

- **Tools:** Product Technical Guide, ICC-ES #4025, Intertek CCRR #0224
- **Learning:** BuildSteel.org, AIA-accredited seminars, Provider Directory

- **Insight:** CFS volume reports
- **Advocacy:** ANSI standards leadership, defense of fair codes
- **Sustainability:** Industry-wide Environmental Product Declaration (EPD)

When you choose SFIA-Certified Steel, you're choosing quality, independent testing, and peace of mind. Don't settle for less.

SFIA-Certified Steel. Insist on it.

Find certified suppliers at BuildSteel.org/stud-manufacturers.



Gypsum Management & Supply, Inc. (GMS)



We Supply Building Products But Deliver So Much More.

When Gypsum Management & Supply Inc. opened its doors in 1971, customer service was the cornerstone of everything we did. The same holds true today. Our unique service model combines the benefits of national scale with a local go-to-market strategy. Using an integrated national platform, we operate in the United States and Canada under more than 60 local brands with solid reputations, strong relationships, and local expertise. With more than 300 locations distributing products from the industry's leading manufacturers, GMS is truly a one-stop shop.

Our People

From day one, GMS has been defined by its people. Beyond simply hiring employees with skills and experience, we seek out team members who embody our values of hard work, entrepreneurial spirit, service to others and integrity to bring our mission to life. Our guiding principle has always been that you can never go wrong doing the right thing, and we know quality people make all the difference.

The Leader in Safety

At GMS, safety is a commitment to our customers, our employees and everyone on the job site. Our regional safety managers oversee our

industry-leading safety program that includes ongoing safety training, audits and jobsite evaluations. We ensure our employees have the right tools, knowledge and equipment to do their jobs safely and return home safe to their families every day.

There's a GMS Location Near You

Visit gms.com today and find a local GMS location near you!



www.gms.com

PABCO Gypsum: Building Excellence Through Innovation and Expertise.



For nearly 50 years, PABCO Gypsum has been a trusted provider of high-performing gypsum panel products across North America. Family-owned and operated, PABCO is dedicated to a culture of caring focused on people, relationships and communities.

Building Excellence Through People and Innovation

Our purpose is to create an environment where people matter, feel a sense of belonging, and have the opportunity to succeed. By empowering employees, we've earned a strong industry reputation for outstanding customer service, responsiveness, and problem resolution. We ensure quality product is available when you need it.

Beyond reliability, PABCO is an industry leader in specialized applications. We have pioneered sound control solutions like our QuietRock® line of advanced acoustic panels, which allow contractors to achieve superior noise reduction with thinner, lighter wall assemblies—saving time, materials and complexity on the jobsite.

Building Meaningful Relationships and Community

Our mission centers on strong relationships with customers, suppliers, and the PABCO family, built on service, trust, and expertise. This is evident in our long-term partnerships with dealers and contractors. We work closely with acoustical consultants and

rigorously test our products in both labs and real-world field applications, which is essential to project success.

PABCO is also dedicated to enhancing our communities and the environment. We promote a healthier built environment through waste reduction, recycling, efficient water management and alternative energy. By holding key roles in influential associations like AWC1, ASTM and the GA, we actively help shape the industry's future.

Whether focused on people, relationships, community, or pioneering innovative solutions, we're building something special—together.



pabco gypsum.com

Glasteel: The FRP Panel Experts



Glasteel, a subsidiary of Stabilit America Inc., is the leading manufacturer of fiberglass-reinforced plastic panels in North America. With over 65 years of experience, Glasteel offers the largest selection of fiberglass-reinforced plastic, polycarbonate and PVC panels available in the market.

Glasteel's philosophy is one of continuous improvement, constantly striving to offer the highest quality. Through its state-of-the-art manufacturing units, distribution centers and international presence, Glasteel provides value-added products that meet the highest global quality standards, competitive pricing and exceptional customer service. We address various needs, including cladding, natural lighting and anti-corrosion requirements in industrial, commercial, residential projects and the transportation industry.

Incorporated in 1997, Glasteel is a performance-driven organization 100% committed to fully understanding our customers' needs. We deliver innovative products known for their

exceptional strength and durability, outperforming traditional construction materials like ceramic tile, metal and wood. Over the years, our wide assortment of high-quality products and friendly customer service has helped us build a reputation for delivering technologically advanced and creative building solutions.

Glasliner FRP meets the requirements of demanding applications with high sanitation standards, such as food processing areas, restaurants, grocery stores, restrooms, clinics, hospitals, governmental offices and storage areas.

Glasteel's manufacturing process combines a unique high-strength polyester resin with fiberglass reinforcement to produce liner panels of superior quality and durability. The result is a resin-rich panel that is tough, durable and easy to clean.

Features:

- Moisture and high-impact resistant.
- Will not rust or corrode.
- Tough resin surface that resists shattering,

scratches and abrasions.

- Easy to clean.

Benefits of Glasliner FRP:

- Easy to install and maintain.
- Low installation cost.



www.stabilitamerica.com/company/glasteel

Dedicated to the Growth and Advancement of the EIFS Industry



The EIFS Industry Members Association (EIMA) is the recognized voice and authority of the Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems (EIFS) industry. EIMA unites suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, contractors, architects and other professionals who share one vision: strengthening and advancing EIFS as today's premier building envelope solution.

Now is the time to position your company at the forefront of this dynamic industry. Membership in EIMA is more than an investment in your organization—it's an investment in the future of EIFS.

Membership provides direct access to the tools, insights, and connections that help companies grow. Members also gain the influence to shape the future of the EIFS industry and the opportunity to be part of a collaborative community working toward a stronger, more sustainable future.

Influence in Shaping the Industry

EIMA plays a central role in establishing and advancing industry standards. Through advocacy at the local, regional, and national levels, EIMA ensures its members' voices are heard and that EIFS continues to expand as a preferred cladding system.

Access to Knowledge and Resources

EIMA membership opens the door to the latest research, technical expertise, and educational resources that keep your business competitive. From in-depth technical bulletins and industry updates to exclusive reports, members receive practical information they can use every day.

Networking and Collaboration

The association fosters a vibrant, engaged community where professionals can connect, exchange ideas, and collaborate. Whether at national events, specialized task group meetings,

or through virtual forums, members build valuable relationships that spark innovation and create opportunity.

Commitment to Growth and Advancement

EIMA leads initiatives that promote the benefits of EIFS, expand training opportunities, and strengthen education in the design and construction sectors. These efforts ensure the industry not only adapts to change but drives it—showcasing EIFS as a resilient, sustainable, and high-performance solution for today's buildings.

Join EIMA today. Stay ahead of trends, grow your network, and help shape the future of EIFS.



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AWCI INDUSTRY LEADERS CONFERENCE

2025: November 11-13

Omni Louisville
Louisville, KY

2026: September 29-October 1

Grant Hyatt Indian Wells Resort & Villas
Indian Wells, CA

BUILD

AWCI's Convention + Expo

2026: March 15-18

Hilton New Orleans Riverside and
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New Orleans, LA

2027: April 12-15

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2028: April 18-21

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2029: April 17-20

Hilton West Palm Beach and The Palm
Beach County Convention Center
West Palm Beach, FL

Visit www.awci.org/events to learn more!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

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issue regarding data center usage and other AI related requirements. Natural gas provides a stable and reliable resource for peak demands in power generation.

Cost efficiency. Natural gas can be more cost effective than fossil fuels and/or renewables.

Expansion flexibility. As data center expansion becomes more critical, scalability of plant growth becomes more equally urgent. Natural gas utilities can adapt more readily to expansion than competing services.

Emphasis on Nuclear Expansion

Long term. Offers a near-permanent solution to energy demand. Eliminates fuel consumption.

Zero carbon dioxide. Completely eliminates greenhouse gases.

Conclusion

One conspicuous aspect of this recent shift in energy policy lies with a

perceived retreat from the development of renewable sources. Granted, the sense of urgency seems to have abated somewhat. But solar, wind, and hydroelectric power continue as vital contributors to a total approach to power generation, as reflected in overall policy.

While we concede that many arguments to these proposed strategies, both pro and con, can be legitimately raised, we prefer to conclude by accentuating the positive aspects that expansion and acceleration of building added power plants—specifically natural gas and nuclear power plants—can bring.

First, a shift is synonymous with change and change with renewal. A new direction in energy policy indicates new opportunity augmented with added growth. Second, we recognize that old strategies become stagnant with time, and construction activity thrives on constant innovation. Lastly, we identify secondary

stimulation chain reaction of activity positively impacting one with another, as is the case with development of infrastructure because of primary projects.

One can easily see how building more power plants impacts estimators, i.e., the cost effects of everything. We will recognize the changes in security, safety, special tools and fasteners, material costs, special programs (read: increased BIM enhancement), new terminology, next generation technologies, the list goes on forever.

All of this adds up to the fact that a new opportunity is knocking at the door of contractors and managers in the form of a change in energy policy. We wall/ceiling contractors and estimators hope the shift is welcomed with open arms.

.....
Vince Bailey is an estimator/project manager in the Phoenix area.

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do is powerful. Engage with the Steel Framing Industry Association (SFIA). Follow the results of CFS10 and talk about them. Share the story with your clients, engineers and architects. Let decision-makers know that steel framing isn't just another option—it's the resilient option. And keep your team sharp with training like AWCI's Steel—Doing It Right® educational

program. A new release of this program is coming January 2026.

The payoff could be big. New standards calling for more CFS will bring new opportunities for wall and ceiling firms—and more market share.

I saw the videos of that 10-story building swaying under seismic loads, standing up to controlled fire tests. It was a sight to behold. No collapse.

No catastrophic failure. Just proof that with the right science, design and materials, we can build better. Let's spread the word.

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Mark L. Johnson writes for the walls and ceilings industry. He is also the editor of BuildSteel.org. He can be reached via LinkedIn.com/in/mark-johnsoncommunications.

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⁽⁴⁾ASTM C1787 Standard Specification for Installation of Non Metallic Plaster Bases (Lath) Used with Portland Cement-Based Plaster in Vertical Wall Applications

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Jeff Bowlsby, ASTM Fellow, is a licensed architect in California and Nevada and

is a stucco consultant with Simpson, Gumpertz and Heger based in Northern California. He specializes in exterior wall and stucco assembly consultations to architects, contractors and manufacturers. His nationwide practice focuses on new building enclosure design, renovations and forensic eval-

uations. Jeff chaired or co-chaired several ASTM stucco committees over many years including ASTM C1063 and C1861 and is the author of Stuccometrics.com.

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