

## School construction *quality at issue*

In looking to save a few dollars, has the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) allowed shoddy construction at public schools to become the standard, rather than the exception? Some feel that has indeed been the case.

"They're trying to save a buck by hiring the cheapest labor and it's not only causing facility problems, but costing the state more money in repairs," says Calvin Jefferson of BMA Media, who serves as spokesman for the Ohio Construction Coalition, Ohio's only legal, statewide, multi-craft labor-management group representing contractor associations and numerous local construction-trades labor unions.

Created in 1997, the OSFC provides funding,

management oversight and technical assistance to school districts embarking on construction or renovation projects. The OSFC funds approximately 75% of the construction costs for renovation projects and new school buildings.

With the inception of the commission, school districts no longer had to hire contractors who pay prevailing wage. Their guidelines were to hire the lowest bidder...period. The commission also did not require the hired contractors and school districts to adopt a "responsible contractor policy."



The OCC worked diligently to change that. On February 15, 2007, the OSFC approved a resolution that allows school districts participating in a Commission program to have authority to establish qualification standards to assure that bidders are "responsible contractors."

This includes establishing that the contractor provides a drug-free workplace, employee benefits, insurance stipulations and references, as a part of a responsible contracting code. The bidding contractor must also certify that it will only use skilled trade personnel with three

years experience who were trained in a state or federally approved apprenticeship program.

**Why is "quality contractor/responsible contracting language" so critical?** Sub-standard construction has been found in dozens of school districts throughout the state during the last few years. In 2005, the OCC randomly investigated 32 districts that have had construction projects through the facilities commission. Problems were found in all 32 districts, due to poor quality construction. Collapsed walls, toppling windows and major structural deficiencies have shown up in new schools from Marietta to Toledo, Dayton and Cleveland.

\$6.5 billion will be spent in the next five years for school construction, and if it's

*(cont'd. page 2)*

## Top 10 most wanted: Electricians!

Reporting on findings by careerbuilder.com, one of the world's largest job-search and employee recruitment sites, CNN placed the electrician on the list of the top ten blue-collar jobs based on current salary medians and expected growth by 2014.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that by 2014, the nation's need for electrical workers will rise to more than 734,000 – a figure 78,000 beyond the number currently employed.

For nearly two decades,

the Construction Financial Management Association has conducted an annual survey asking contractors what they foresee as their greatest challenge. "Shortage of trained field labor," which is among the most frequently cited responses since 2002, rose to the top of the list in 2006. "Shortage of trained project managers," a response that did not show up in

survey findings prior to 2005, is now second.

Accordingly, the National Electrical Contractors' Association (NECA) and the International Brotherhood of



Electrical Workers (IBEW) are spreading the good news that young people can look forward to a wide-open employment market, good pay, ample opportunities for advancement and, most important, *freedom from fear that their jobs will be exported overseas*. Unlike manufacturing in this country, the building trades will continue to flourish.

Right now, nearly 40,000 apprentices enrolled in 290 NECA / IBEW electrical training programs around the country are earning while

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## School quality *cont'd.*

not quality construction, the costs could be significantly higher.

Here are some examples of the problems.

- A leaking roof on a 3-year-old school in Canton, finally let go, dumping gallons of water through the ceiling onto the floor.
- Another school had problems during a renovation with heating and air-conditioning systems, grounding of the cable tray and power problems with cameras and speaker systems.
- Another district's construction problems included leaks, incorrectly poured footers and a wall that fell during construction, damaging plumbing, which cost the district an additional \$21,000. In addition, tiles in the gym and cafeteria lifted because of moisture under the

floor, the cooling unit on the roof had to be replaced because it wasn't properly grounded and the floor

come after construction begins). Those changes included replacing water-damaged ceiling tile, meeting

- Nine months after dedicating a \$48 million complex, officials of Waverly schools grappled with uneven floors and various heating and cooling problems that required more than \$160,000 in repairs.

- At Adena Schools, in Ross County, administrators dealt with leaky roofs, cracked masonry and bumpy floors.
- Zane Trace High School in Chillicothe is only 5 years old, but its roof leaks in numerous places. Although the district has spent \$200,000 to correct flaws, plastic buckets still hang from the rafters in the school's gymnasium.

To find an Electrical Contractor that meets the "responsible contractor" guidelines, call the Western Ohio Chapter of the National Electrical Contractor's Association (NECA) at 937-299-0384 or visit [www.wocneca.org](http://www.wocneca.org).

### What is prevailing wage?

Ohio's Prevailing Wage Law was established in 1931 to require construction contractors who work on publicly funded projects to pay construction workers at least the prevailing wages and benefits for their respective trades in the area in which the work is performed. This law prevents building contractors from undercutting workers' wages and benefits and the local economy.

The Ohio Division of Labor & Worker Safety Wage and Hour Bureau determines prevailing wage rates for the construction industry and enforces the Prevailing Wage Law on construction projects when public funds are involved.

The Ohio Construction Coalition supports enforcement and preservation of the state's Prevailing Wage rules – because they help protect Ohio's building-trades workers and the construction industry as a whole, while providing a more skilled workforce and higher quality construction.

cracked in the performing arts hall. Public records document thousands of dollars in change orders (changes in plans, specifications and costs that

electrical codes not on electrical drawings, and modifying columns after anchor bolts were set in the wrong place.

## Top 10 *cont'd.*

they learn. Visit

[www.electrifyingcareers.com](http://www.electrifyingcareers.com) to browse through descriptions of nearly 60 different types of jobs available, as well as watch video testimonials from students already pursuing careers in the electrical construction industry.

### And what about training Project Managers?

Many Project Managers are recruited from within and NECA's Management Education Institute (MEI)

offers 62 different courses to project managers, estimators, superintendents and other managerial staff to enhance their management skills.

Recently the MEI course Electrical Project Supervision Level 1 (Foreman training), was held at the IBEW Local 82 union hall. Taught by Roger Howard, Project Manager at ESI Electrical Contractors, the program enriches the Foreman's understanding of the business and process of construction and gives them insight into what might be ahead as they move up the administrative ladder. Course topics include defining the supervisor's role, team building, verbal communications, performance management, labor relations, safety, planning and scheduling, material management, and understanding costs.

But at traditional four-year universities, there is a shortage of faculty with the background and resources to prepare students in undergraduate construction programs for management roles. In response to this situation, in conjunction with the Mechanical Contracting Education and Research Foundation, NECA's ELECTRI International is co-sponsoring a Mechanical-Electrical Construction Faculty Boot Camp this spring. It's a "train-the-trainer" program to provide a short, intensive course to make construction management professors more proficient in delivering practical instruction matched to real-world needs.

Skilled labor is at a shortage. We need to encourage our youth to look at the construction trades as a viable career.

## Did you know?

- A lump of pure gold the size of a matchbox can be flattened into a sheet the size of a tennis court.

- Bill Gates formed a company to sell a computerized traffic counting system to cities, which made \$20,000 its first year. Business dropped sharply when customers learned Gates was only 14 years old.

- Per capita, Canada has more doughnut shops than any other country.

- On the average, more animals are killed by motorists than by hunters with guns.

- On a bingo card of 90 numbers, there are approximately 44 million ways to make B-I-N-G-O.

## CONNECTIONS

April, 2007

Your comments, suggestions and questions are welcome! Contact the Western Ohio Chapter - NECA.

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# Helmets to Hardhats revamps website

Helmets to Hardhats helps service members and military veterans put their training to use as they transition to jobs in the building and construction trades. Launched in January, 2003, with funding from the Defense Department, Helmets to Hardhats connects National Guard, Reserve and transitioning active-duty military members with quality career training and employment opportunities within the building and construction industry.

The Helmets to Hardhats program is jointly sponsored by the fifteen unions of the Building and Construction

Trades and their signatory Construction Industry Employer Associations ([www.bctd.org](http://www.bctd.org)). Collectively, these organizations represent three million construction workers and about 82,000 contractors nationwide. The



trades and employer associations recognize that, in addition to having certified skills, veterans possess hard-

to-find traits like maturity, accountability, responsibility, and teamwork. The trades and the employers associations support the program because it fulfills an important promise to returning veterans to help ensure their successful return to civilian life.

In March, the Center for Military Recruitment, Assessment, and Veterans Employment (CMRAVE) announced the launch of the revamped Helmets to Hardhats training and employment program. Military.com and Monster Government Solutions (MGS) collaborate to provide the technology and expertise to power the revamped website and enhanced program.

### Contractors: take advantage of this website!

If you need highly qualified workers, set up an account at [www.helmetstohardhats.org](http://www.helmetstohardhats.org). You can post career opportunities and search the database for potential employees.

### What's on the website?

- Information about each construction industry's apprenticeship program, and descriptions of the type of work.
- Benefit packages offered through the trades.
- How to create a resume and how to interview for the construction industry.
- Veteran's benefits information.
- The ability to set up your own account in order to post and monitor your personal information on the website. You can also search the database of job listings.
- And most important, Trade Associations, Apprenticeship Programs and Employers can post career opportunities and search for highly qualified veterans in the database.

# Solar Power... *will it keep the lights on?*

Solar cell power has been around for decades. Remember the old solar panels that would have to be large enough to cover your entire roof just to create enough energy to run a fan? With new research and development, solar power may become a reliable source of energy.

A new concentrator solar cell produced by Boeing-Spectrolab has recently achieved a world-record conversion efficiency of 40.7 percent, establishing a new milestone in sunlight-to-electricity performance. Currently, solar cell modules only achieve an efficiency of 12 to 18 percent. This breakthrough may lead to systems with an installation cost of only \$3 per watt,

producing electricity at a cost of 8 to 10 cents per kilowatt-hour, making solar electricity a more cost-competitive and integral part of our country's energy mix.

In other solar cell news, a team at Pennsylvania State University has developed a new analytical technique that uses infrared spectroscopy to study light-sensitive organic materials. In other words, the research could lead to the development of cheaper, more efficient solar cells with organic photovoltaic



(OPV) devices, which cost much less to produce than silicon-based solar cells. To improve performance, researchers need to understand what happens at the molecular level when light is converted to electrons. This will lead to an increased usability and reliability of solar power.

### Who's taking the initiative?

In a city known for its dark clouds and rain, officials in Portland, Oregon are hoping to turn the lights up on solar power. The city recently launched its Solar Now! campaign. The one-year effort aims to increase awareness of the benefits of solar power by getting 100 new, high-profile

systems installed. The program's goal is to have the systems installed by well-known and visible businesses and community members in locations where they will receive the maximum exposure to the public.

Energy Trust of Oregon reports that last year, city residents took advantage of the organization's tax incentive programs to install 29 photovoltaic (PV) and 101 solar water-heating systems. That is nearly double the 20 PV and 49 solar water-heating systems installed the year before.

Like any new technology, once the efficiency increases and the cost decreases, more customers will seek installation. New research into the use of using solar power will help reduce our nation's reliance on imported oil and increase our energy security.