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BUILDING A WORKFORCE STEP BY STEP-TOGETHER

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The AED Foundation

No longer content to wait for a knock at the door, more equipment dealerships and manufacturers are joining forces to recruit and train skilled employees.

Although it's difficult to see anything positive in the industry's shortage of skilled workers, one important benefit is that the problem is forcing equipment dealerships and manufacturers to search for new and better ways to find employees.

Efforts in that direction are long overdue.

That's because most of us—especially when good employees were readily available—were content to sit back and wait for high schools and trade schools to produce the people we needed.

That strategy began breaking down in the 1980s, when changes that diminished the number of students entering construction-related businesses out of high school began.

For example, the computer industry began luring students with attractive offers that construction-related businesses couldn't match. Increasing societal pressure to attend four-year college further diminished the number of young people entering the trades and the technical disciplines. Young peoples' fascination with the world of MTV and pop culture accentuated our industry's less-than-hip image. And as construction equipment became increasingly sophisticated, most high schools missed the boat by de-emphasizing instruction in science, math and language skills.

All of these factors combined to produce what the construction and related industries face today: a serious workforce shortage.

Fortunately, businesses across the nation are mobilizing to more aggressively attract people into the industry. The AED Foundation, an affiliate of Associated Equipment Distributors, is identifying these companies so their efforts can be used as models for others to follow.

Working partnerships with local schools have been developed by businesses in states including Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Texas and Utah.

In most cases these businesses are working to improve the level of education at post-secondary trade and technical schools that have programs in diesel engines, equipment technology or the construction trades. But in others, efforts are directed toward preparing high school students for entry-level jobs in the construction equipment industry.

Local chapters of the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) are participating in many of these and other programs by sponsoring career day activities where thousands of students can operate equipment and watch machine demonstrations.

As an important step in partnership-building, these groups are actively involved in their local schools. They visit students to tell them about construction industry careers, provide input to teachers on technical subjects, loan out machines and tools, talk to parents about construction industry career advantages and much more. Some groups offer scholarships to post-secondary technical schools; others provide apprenticeships and internships.

Endeavors like these are making the construction industry much more proactive in training and recruiting employees, a strategy that could lessen the severity of worker shortages in the future.

To learn more about these programs, go to www.aednet.org/aedf/wf_index.htm and select *Creative Connections*. With more of these partnerships coming on board in the years ahead, there will be fewer businesses making the mistake of waiting for potential employees to knock on their doors.