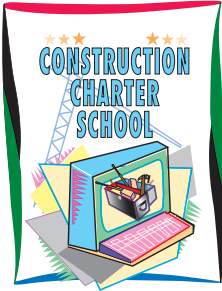


# BUILDING BRIDGES

## AGC OF ST. LOUIS WORKS WITH LOCAL CHARTER SCHOOL TO CONNECT STUDENTS WITH THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY



The face of the construction community is changing at a quickening pace. Now, more than ever, new employees are coming from nontraditional sources such as women, minorities, and immigrants. In St. Louis, Mo., the public school system is failing to meet the needs of the students, and many community members cannot afford pricey private institutions. The AGC of St. Louis knew it had to do something within the public school system to make it work for the community. The solution: The Construction Careers Center (CCC), which provides young people with an academic foundation, exposure to the construction industry, and vocational education preparation. CCC began in August 2001 and is the first construction charter school in the nation; it is both public and tuition-free. Its innovative approach has made a lasting impression in the community and set the standard for construction charter schools across the country.

Leonard P. Toenjes, AGC president, St. Louis, Mo., says, "There is no doubt that, from a construction industry image perspective, this is one of the best things our chapter has ever done."

### UNDERSTANDING THE INDUSTRY

Most high school students do not understand the pathways to construction careers. CCC has created a new awareness of the opportunities, benefits, and pay available in the construction industry. Concerned about how construction companies and unions will recruit and retain skilled employees in the future, the AGC of St. Louis and its members worked together to develop a curriculum designed to prepare students for direct employment, a construction apprenticeship-training program, community college, or a four-year degree university. Furthermore, school officials implemented student uniforms, drug testing, and an extended 11-month school year to keep students on the path to success.



*Instructor Duane McGanan and students Billy Rooks and Pride Davis work together on a masonry project.*

The AGC of St. Louis uses a pragmatic approach to integrate education with vocational experience and after school activities. A primary goal of the program is to move the students from the classroom onto construction sites. The AGC of St. Louis and its 450 members work to provide jobsite tours and apprenticeship opportunities. They also provide the Stempel Plan—a two-on-one mentoring program for women and minority business operators. Bottom line: The focus is on getting the kids into the industry.

### LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Location is critical to the success of CCC; it shares a property line with a local housing project. Because the school does not provide transportation, it must be close to student homes. With as many as 80 percent of students coming from single-parent homes and 90 percent of students on reduced or free lunches, the AGC of St. Louis and CCC recognize the need for additional assistance to ensure that students do not slip through the cracks. This charter school is a tangible manifestation of what the construction industry is doing for the St. Louis community—families and parents have taken note.

The chapter and the local construction industry are committed to providing a practical school—that is accessible to all members of the community—in order to open doors for students down the line. With a largely African-American student body, CCC is aware of the need for minority students to make contacts in the St. Louis construction industry, which is predominately white. The apprentice-training program helps to make this integration possible. "Moving into the construction community," says Toenjes, "ensures the students have a place to go after graduation." The AGC of St. Louis and companies involved in the apprenticeship-training program work with teachers on the curriculum to prepare students for entering the industry. The chapter has become a successful liaison between CCC staff, students, and the construction community members. Building bridges is important for success in the future.

### A PLACE OF THEIR OWN

Prior to the advent of The Construction Careers Center, the AGC of St. Louis implemented programs in elementary and middle schools throughout the city to promote the industry's image. A high school, it seems, was the only missing link; now, interested students have a place to learn and experience construction firsthand. CCC has inspired St. Louis public schools to sponsor a second charter school specifically for high school dropouts. Also, another management company has opened a construction charter school in East St. Louis. The Construction Careers Center, with the support of the AGC of St. Louis, is creating a construction legacy in Missouri.

The Sold on St. Louis award is another legacy of the city that recognizes companies working to improve the city while looking out for the community's best interest. This year's winner—AGC of St. Louis—was cited for its efforts in establishing The Construction Careers Center and providing a chance for education and job opportunities to students from all backgrounds.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Terry Eivins, AGC of St. Louis, director of apprenticeship and training.

**Call:** (314) 644-1525