

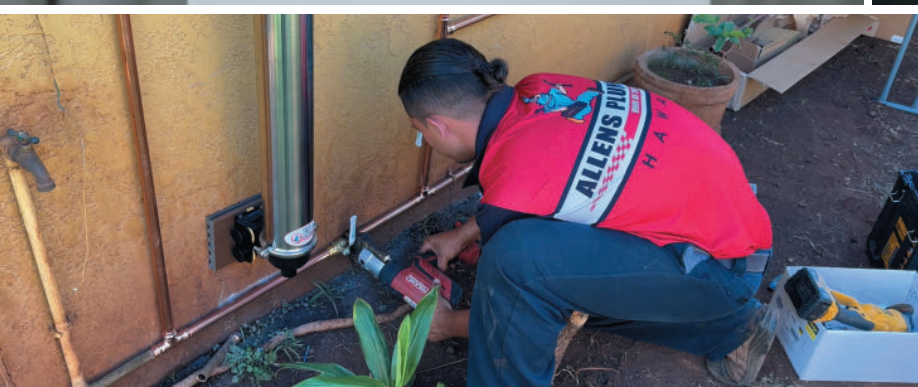
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WE'RE ENVIRONMENTALISTS BY TRADE

BY JOE CORNETTA
PHCC—NATIONAL PRESIDENT

As plumbing and HVAC contractors, we are typically blue collar, self-employed, hard-working, and patriotic tradesmen and tradeswomen carrying the weight of the U.S. economy through essential services that Americans *literally* cannot live without.

Plumbers and HVAC contractors have a constitutional right, like any citizen, to petition their government for a redress of grievances, a right enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. We have a duty to our industry and our customers to advocate on their behalf; however, we must also run our businesses. Fortunately, when we are tied up, we have a common association – PHCC – to advocate on our behalf before legislators at all levels of government.

The Latest Attack on Our Industry

Like any industry, we are regularly targeted by policymakers at all levels of government seeking more tax revenue, more regulations, and more concessions that are costly for business owners like us. The latest attack on our industry is a variant historically unfamiliar to us in that it targets one of our critical skillsets for elimination by banning the use of natural gas. We recognize the need to reduce carbon emissions for the sake of our environment. However, the urgency to decarbonize the country – especially through the elimination of natural gas and propane as an energy supplement – will permanently affect our livelihood.

Licensed plumbers and HVAC technicians are environmentalists by trade. We protect the health and safety

of the American people through modern technology that provides clean potable water and indoor air. We are in the best position to serve as subject matter experts on the best method of clean dependable fuels to heat homes and water for homeowners, commercial building owners, and their tenants.

This wildfire of an all-electric nation started on our west coast. The Santa Ana winds swept it to my backyard almost overnight. State by state, citizens are finding out – after the fact – that for any major renovation, or any new home they want to build, they will not have the choice to connect to a natural gas utility.

A Threat to Consumer Choice

Currently, Americans have a choice (as they should) – they can opt to connect or maintain a natural gas connection to help them keep energy bills down, or they can disconnect from gas and invest the tens of thousands of dollars necessary to upgrade their electrical panel and appliances. Natural gas bans will force Americans to choose the latter, which isn't much of a choice at all. It's a situation the PHCC Legislative Affairs department has taken seriously.

Here in New York, contractors are spreading awareness and shouting from the rooftops that giving up your gas stoves, hot water heaters, and clothes dryers is not the way to make America "greener!" The reaction to the new mandates from the vast majority of the customers with whom we speak is a mix of disbelief and anger.

This past summer New York Governor Kathy Hochul, with the blessing of an

environmental study, signed a state budget to ban natural gas connections for all new construction in the state. New York City's former mayor had already signed the city's gas ban into law with little fanfare, days before his final term was set to expire.

Many in our industry think this is the first bite from the apple. The next ban will be gas replacement boilers or water heaters. PHCC—National alerts us that the Department of Energy is again looking to abolish commercial gas water heaters and non-condensing furnaces.

So what's next? How do we amass our voices in peaceful protest? How do we notify the public as to what's happening?

In New York, we take the governor and her decision to court. Last fall, PHCC of New York, PHCC of Long Island, PCA of Long Island, and other New York stakeholders from the building trades joined a lawsuit to reverse the state's decision. PHCC of Long Island and New York state are supporting the same law firm that was successful in Berkeley, California. The lawyers and a public relations firm are desperately trying to alert homeowners and business owners of this law.

If our efforts here are successful, and New York survives a stay of execution, then our strategy will be used as a model for other states under attack.

Please join us by voicing your opposition to this movement. ●

PHCC—National Association President Joe Cornetta is co-owner of Cornetta Bros., Inc., a third-generation plumbing and heating business in Elmont, New York.

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LET'S SKATE TO WHERE THE PUCK IS *GOING* TO BE

BY CINDY SHERIDAN, CAE
PHCC CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

It's a given – societal clout shifts from those who are older to those who are younger. Tomorrow inevitably belongs to the young ... in terms of purchase power, cultural change, and business success.

Ever since PHCC was founded 140 years ago, we have witnessed the beauty of that shift ... the next generation learning from the one before it, business owners getting their children involved in the family business and in PHCC, member contractors volunteering to guide young apprentices, PHCC zones collaborating with each other to create fun activities that engage the future of the industry ... the list goes on.

At some point, the older generation retires and leaves that future in the hands of the young, and they bring new ideas, new energy, and new points of view. The cycle continues, while progress is made.

Securing the Future

And so, for PHCC, the challenge isn't merely to find new members; it's to attract and engage *younger* members, the ones with all those new ideas. It's the younger members who will help PHCC embrace the future in ways that ensure our continued success and, most importantly, *growth*.

We need younger members to step up ... to volunteer to be chapter leaders or zone directors, to participate in career fairs, to engage with PHCC on social media, to serve on a committee, and to lobby on policies that are important to the industry and consumers. Fortunately, we are seeing younger faces at PHCC events – individuals who have a lot of potential to lead the organization in the future – but we've got to tap into their strengths and encourage them to get more involved. At the same time, we need to be on the lookout for others who can make an impact on the organization.

Our veteran members often share how volunteering benefits their businesses exponentially more than what they give. "I hope others step up, because the more you do, the better off you are," said our new PHCC—National President Joe Cornetta, a testament to his more than 23 years of experiences on both the giving and receiving end of PHCC (see story on page 12).

So how do we get the next generation involved so they, *too*, can realize the benefits of *active* membership as well as the responsibility they have to secure the future of this essential industry?

My Challenge to You

Steve Jobs always said that the guiding vision of Apple was based on something hockey great Wayne Gretsky once said: "Skate to where the puck is *going* to be, not where it has been." As we all know, Jobs was visionary in the sense of "programming the future." And there are some lessons we at PHCC can take from that.

As was discussed among the PHCC Board of Directors recently, we have to realize that the leaders of tomorrow – some of whom are young children right now – have or will have a different paradigm, a different view of the world. Overall, the Board concluded that the needs and time constraints of younger contractors have changed, and – accordingly – PHCC's membership value proposition needs to change.

So my challenge to all of you is:

- What are some top-level ideas, strategies, and approaches that will enable PHCC to reach, recruit, and *engage* younger contractors?
- What can we do that we are not doing now that will help us capture the attention and attract the next generation of our industry?

I want to hear from you! Please email me at executiveoffice@naphcc.org with your thoughts on forward-thinking approaches. Just like Jobs' Apple products, we need our people – and their ideas and efforts – to represent the future. ●

Cindy Sheridan, CAE is Chief Executive Officer of PHCC—National Association. With decades of association management experience – most recently as the Chief Operating Officer of the PHCC Educational Foundation – Sheridan and her team work to ensure that PHCC contractors are the best choice for professionalism, reliable products, and knowledgeable service.





RESET THE PRESET

BY CHARLOTTE R. PERHAM

PHCC EDITOR AND VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING

Have you ever been excited about presenting an idea to make a big change or to just try something different and heard the response, “That won’t work. We’ve always done it this way.”? I think most of us have run into that situation where people who are “preset” to do things the same old way simply will not budge. Or perhaps we have been the ones to nix a new idea and then wonder later if we should have just gone ahead and tried it.

So I certainly related to the keynote address at PHCCCONNECT2023 by Coach Ken Carter. “Reset the preset,” he said, reinforcing the need to try new things and adjust quickly in certain situations. “Instead of taking your kid’s cell phone,” he used as an example, “take their charger. When it gets to 20 percent, you’ll get their attention, hands down.” It’s a new day, he added, and – with that – comes a new way of doing business.

Coach Carter’s message really struck a chord with the audience. In fact, he inspired people so much that there was a lot of hugging, crying, and punching (well, simulated punching) going on in the room, with one member even delivering 10 push-ups on stage to rousing applause!

My professional takeaway from his advice for 2024 is that I will strive to have an open mind and consider all new opportunities. In the fast-changing world of marketing communications – just like in your businesses – we definitely cannot expect success by doing the same thing over and over again. At PHCC, we’re constantly adjusting our strategies to adapt to our audience ... their interests, their behaviors, changing demographics.

So in 2024, a big question for the PHCC team working on your behalf will be: What new, exciting possibilities exist to meet and engage with contractors like you “where you are” and with the type of communication you prefer? We know we can’t be “preset”



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and remain relevant. There are a lot of exciting opportunities to consider.

A New Way of Doing Business

The beginning of a new year is a good time to evaluate how you’re doing business ... and how you may need to *adjust* to employee wants and needs, economic influences, new technologies, workforce trends, and more.

During a workforce development panel discussion at CONNECT, there was quite a bit of discussion on hiring practices and the need to address gaps in a company’s workforce. One tip that resulted was re-evaluating job descriptions. “Don’t just use the same old ones you’ve been using for years. Adapt them for today’s workforce to attract the best and brightest.”

In this issue of *Solutions*, we address more ways PHCC contractor members are “shifting” to meet changing needs. Our overview of the Women in the Industry panel at PHCCCONNECT2023, for example, offers way to adapt your workplace culture that builds respect for *all* positions within a company.

Past PHCC—National President and mechanical contractor Chip Greene shares the “aha moment” that made him realize that – if he was going to effectively work on complex commercial jobs and grow his company – he needed to have a service team. Construction and service “need each

other,” he says. It took some big changes, but you can learn from his lessons on how to build a company that offers both.

Our Industry Spotlight also offers some points to ponder on how to adapt to today’s ever-changing business landscape. Your relationships with suppliers and wholesalers are more important than ever. How can you strengthen them?

Ch-Ch-Changes!

We’re even seeing some changes in when and how students can get *started* on a plumbing apprenticeship. Recognizing that apprenticeship opportunities have been underutilized in Louisiana, the state is implementing a “Fast Forward” program that will help public high school graduates complete high school with college credit (academic and/or career-technical), a postsecondary credential of value, or both. And PHCC of Louisiana jumped on this initiative to prepare those students for careers in plumbing!

Noticing a pattern? To succeed today, you must listen, learn, understand ... and reset. Happy New Year! ●

Charlotte R. Perham is Vice President of Communications & Marketing for PHCC—National Association. She specializes in strategic communication of news, trends, and events in the construction industry.



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New PHCC—National President Joe Cornetta welcomes members at PHCCCONNECT2023 in Cleveland, Ohio.

PHCC'S PROUD PROTECTOR

OUR NEW PRESIDENT IS FILLED WITH PRIDE, PASSION, PURPOSE,
PROFESSIONALISM, AND PATRIOTISM. MEET JOE CORNETTA!

BY KRISTIN F. ELSON

One invitation to a PHCC meeting was all it took. Joe Cornetta was working as a service technician at a plumbing and heating shop run by his father and uncle when he was invited to an event in the fall of 2000 hosted by Dan Holohan, a well-known expert on hydronic and steam heat. “I was giddy,” says Cornetta, who had read Holohan’s books and other writings.

The event turned out to be a promotion for PHCC of Long Island, and Cornetta instantly recognized the value of the collaboration among its members. “I started to meet other contractors and business owners. I knew they were in competition with each other, yet they were one big, happy family,” he says. “I sipped the Kool-Aid, and I was in.”

While Cornetta’s dad and uncle taught him everything about plumbing, he says these PHCC members taught him everything about *how to run a business*, from estimating and establishing flat rate pricing to time management and employee training.

Today, Cornetta and his cousin Steven are co-owners of Cornetta Bros., Inc. in Elmont, New York, a small business with 15 employees and nine trucks providing plumbing and heating service in the Nassau County area of Long Island.

With “A Family Tradition Since 1946” as his company’s motto, Cornetta is proud of his roots. His father, two uncles, and five cousins all achieved certification

as master plumbers; his wife, Lillian, currently serves as the company’s office manager, a position previously held by his grandmother and mother; and his daughter, Melissa, started working in the office last year. “I’m proud to introduce the fourth generation,” he says.

Likewise, Cornetta is proud of PHCC’s tradition of procuring and growing better professionals. “Better training, better served,” he says. “That’s what we’re serving ... the fine-tuning to make a well-developed business.”

Protecting Each Other

As a business owner, Cornetta has realized first-hand what he continues to view as the biggest PHCC member benefit: networking ... “networking with wholesalers, supply houses, manufacturers, and other contractors.”

Especially as a small shop owner, Cornetta acknowledges the “value of not being afraid to ask questions of your peers.” Over the past 23 years, he has called on other member contractors

with business management questions, government relations questions, and “even technical questions,” he says. Now *he’s* the point person. “I get calls all year long,” he adds, citing a recent example of a member who called him with a human resources dilemma.

Cornetta was able to advise him on how to develop an offer letter, job description, employee probationary period, etc. “That member now has my knowledge of how to hire,” he says. “Don’t be afraid to ask questions.”

Protecting Our Communities

Cornetta is so passionate about serving his community that his goal was to make “helping those in need” his campaign platform when he was running for PHCC—National vice president two years ago; Cornetta successfully was elected for that position and was sworn in as PHCC—National president at PHCCCONNECT2023 in Cleveland, Ohio, in October.

In recent years, PHCC of Long Island has helped build several homes for Habitat for Humanity, as well as a custom smart home for the Tunnels to Towers Foundation, a charitable organization that supports the families of fallen first responders and wounded veterans; it was founded in tribute to New York Fire Department firefighter Stephen Siller, who died during the September 11 attacks.

“These projects bring our PHCC family together ... we’re going to a job site; we’re working together; and it’s all for a good cause,” he says. While Cornetta admits the feedback to these efforts from both the press and local politicians is positive recognition for PHCC, “more importantly, it just leaves you with a pretty good feeling when you put your head on your pillow at night.”

Cornetta is admittedly “extremely patriotic,” adding that he was heavily affected when the country was attacked on 9/11. “I’m a strong believer in what this country has to give and share and what we stand for,” he told *Plumbing & Mechanical*.



Joe Cornetta poses in front of a photo of the truck of Edwin Cornetta, who founded the Cornetta family business.



Joe Cornetta lobbies at a recent gas ban rally with incoming PHCC of New York President Ron Doughty.

“My business is much more successful today because of PHCC. I’m able to hire better employees, manage the business better, evaluate jobs better.”

~ Joe Cornetta

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He is a strong advocate for easing regulatory burdens and for consumer fuel choice. He believes America's energy portfolio should remain diverse and "leverage the energy resources we have here at home." (Read Cornetta's first President's Message on page 6.) PHCC of Long Island – along with PHCC of New York and the PCA of Long Island – joined a lawsuit this year to fight back against the gas ban in New York. "We're doing this for the industry, not just my business," he says. Eliminating natural gas as a fuel choice will impact industry businesses tremendously, he adds.

Protecting the Future

"Master plumbers are environmentalists," Cornetta says, explaining that plumbing and HVAC contractors assume the essential role of protecting the air and water of homes and businesses.

As PHCC—National president, he intends to promote the impressive skill sets needed by those working in the industry, as well as the crucial work they provide. He hopes every young member of PHCC posts the classic American Standard poster that reads "The Plumber Protects the Health of the Nation."

"What we do every day as licensed professionals can never be understated," Cornetta recently shared with *PHCP Pros*. To PHCC members, he says, "Be proud of your work. Be proud of your industry. Be proud you're a member of PHCC."

That pride for the industry is also apparent in one of Cornetta's initiatives to attract and recruit the *next* generation to plumbing and HVAC work. Working

together with the PHCC Educational Foundation and SupplyHouse.com, Cornetta has developed a PowerPoint presentation to use on his speaking circuit to local high schools, trade schools, and other organizations, such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. The 30-minute presentation – with effective use of graphics, photos, and video clips – exposes developing minds to the history of the plumbing and HVAC trades, the exciting career opportunities available, the technology-driven skills needed and resources used, and how important industry jobs are to protecting the health and safety of society.

Speaking of the next generation, Cornetta was thrilled to see PHCC members bring the young rockstars from their businesses to the Rising Leaders Summit at PHCCCONNECT2023 in October. He hopes members of all ages will step up more to donate their time to ensure the future of this industry is in good hands for years to come. “We need leaders in the industry,” he says. “People need to be willing to donate their time; the benefits come back 10 times over when you give of your time.”

Cornetta certainly speaks from experience. “People are always asking me, ‘how do you find the time?’ Does it take time from my business, my family, my golf game? Yes. But the benefits of this association outweigh the divvying of my time. My business is much more successful today because of PHCC. I’m able to hire better employees, manage the business better, evaluate jobs better,” he says.

“I’m not just going to (PHCC) meetings. I’m running to the top of the ladder, getting exposed to what state, local, and national are *all* doing to make me a better business owner,” he adds. “So I hope others step up, because the more you do, the better off you are.”

While his personal free time is very limited, Cornetta *does* like to “lose golf balls whenever I can.” Passionate about spending time with his family, he shares that he loves to travel with them to their second home in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. “When we can sneak away there, my wife has the beach, and I have 109 golf courses to pick from!” ●

“I’m not just going to [PHCC] meetings. I’m running to the top of the ladder, getting exposed to what state, local, and national are *all* doing to make me a better business owner.”

~Joe Cornetta

Kristin F. Elson is a freelance writer who has covered education as well as the construction, utilities, and home remodeling industries for more than 20 years.



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WOMEN SPEAK OUT AT PHCCCONNECT2023



The Women in the Industry panel, featuring (l-r) Susan Frew, Laura Beltz, Linda Hudek, Ashley Martin, Cassie Pound, Angie Snow, and Jacquelyn Lindsey Wynn.

SPECIAL EVENT PROVIDED VALUABLE INSIGHTS ON HOW TO BRING MORE WOMEN INTO THE TRADES.

BY ADAM TURNER
NAYLOR ASSOCIATION SOLUTIONS

It was a busy day at PHCCCONNECT2023 in Cleveland, Ohio, when guests gathered for a luncheon that would prove as informative as the food was tasty. The Women in the Industry Luncheon – *Unlocking Potential and Breaking Barriers: Fostering Success for Women in the Trades through Gender-Inclusive Practices in Recruitment, Retention and Engagement* – brought together seven individuals involved in Women in Plumbing & Piping, a non-profit organization dedicated to attracting women to the plumbing industry.

The assembled panel included moderator Susan Frew, co-owner and president of Sunshine Home Services, along with Laura Beltz of Beltz Home Services Co.; Linda Hudek of LH Plumbing Services; Ashley Martin of NIBCO; Cassie Pound, host of Power Women of the Trades podcast and co-owner of Quality Heating, Cooling & Plumbing; Angie Snow of ServiceTitan; and Jacquelyn Lindsey Wynn of Lindsey Brothers Inc.

Over the course of two hours, the women on the panel shared their insights on how PHCC members can attract more women into the trades and how it would improve not just the companies but the industry as a whole.

Attracting Them Young

One of the key takeaways from the event – which was sponsored by Oatey and hosted by the PHCC—National Auxiliary and Women in Plumbing and Piping – was that plumbing and HVACR contractors need to target girls in elementary and middle school if they want to attract more of them to the industry.

“No one ever took me aside and said the trades are for women,” Beltz said. “I could have taken over my grandfather’s [plumbing] business, but I never even knew it was an option.”

Beltz mentioned that her grandfather sold his business once he retired and that the new owners “ran it into the ground,” a destruction of his legacy that could have been avoided had she known growing up that taking over the business was a possibility. Beltz and many of the others on the panel said that the trades were never presented to them as a career option when they were young, and if the industry wants to attract more women to the trades, they have to plant the seeds early.

When asked what she would tell an 8-year-old girl about working in the trades, Hudek said that she would explain how satisfying it is to create something with your own hands and “let them see the pride that comes with that.” She recommends that to do this, companies should bring as many employees (especially women, if they

have them) and tools as they can, as both will help to break down stereotypes about the trade.

Changing Company Culture

Another vital component to attract and keep women in the trades is shifting the company’s culture to make it more inviting to them. It takes everyone in the company being on the same page to integrate women into a previously all-male workforce, and Pound learned that the hard way when she hired Quality Heating, Cooling & Plumbing’s first female technician.

Pound was very excited to hire this female tech, but when she did, she didn’t have a conversation with her team letting them know the boundaries and expectations they are expected to observe. Backlash from her male employees ensued, and Pound was forced to go back to square one and have that conversation with her team.

And the responsibility of the owner to create space for women in their company doesn’t stop at hiring them. Too often, women in the industry aren’t treated like the professional adults they are, which is reinforced when employers refer to them as “the girls,” and they must fight against the assumption that they know less than the men in the room, which simply isn’t true.

“You have to own your space because you bring value to the table,” Wynn advised the women in the room. “My philosophy is that if someone has a problem, that’s their problem. Make sure you are prepared, because people will doubt you.”

Owners should ensure that they keep an open ear to their female employees so that their input is heard and they feel like a valued part of the company.

All Roles Are Vital

Whether an owner is hiring women as technicians, sales reps, CSRs, or some other position in the company, it’s important to treat everyone as a vital member of the team. All the roles within a company help it to grow, and if both employees and owners maintain this mindset, it will make everyone, not just

women, feel more valued, according to Pound.

It helps, Hudek said, to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each new employee to determine where they would best fit in the company. Depending on the size of the company, owners can specialize field positions to allow their female employees to thrive. Hudek gave the example that not everyone, man or

Solutions You Can Use

For having a company culture that welcomes all, including women:

- Bring as many women (and tools!) as you can to attract young students to the trades, which will not only help illustrate the pride that comes with creating something but will help break down stereotypes about the profession.
- Treat everyone as a vital member of the team.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each new employee to determine where they would best fit in the company. As an example, not everyone, man or woman, can use a 90-pound jackhammer, but that doesn’t mean they’re useless in the field. It’s all about finding the niche where they can best thrive.
- Build respect for *all* positions within the company. For example, have CSRs do a ride-along with field members, and have field members spend time in the office. This helps everyone see the value that *other* positions bring to the company and understand how they *all* contribute to its success.
- Make sure job descriptions are written for everyone. By using gender-neutral language, women will feel more inclined to apply for positions that previously may have been seen as a “man’s job.”

woman, can use a 90-pound jackhammer, but that doesn't mean that they're useless in the field. It's all about finding the niche where they can best thrive.

When everyone is doing the job that best fits their strengths, it's easy to make them feel important to the company. Snow recommended that, to build respect for other positions within companies, owners should have "CSRs do a ride-along with field members and have field members spend time in the office." This helps them to see the value that the *other* positions bring to the company and understand how they *all* contribute to its success.

A Solution to the Workforce Shortage

All seven panelists agreed that by resetting the industry's expectation of what women can do in plumbing and HVACR, companies can tap into a massive pool of workers who never may have considered a career in the trades otherwise.

"Make sure job descriptions are written to allow for everyone," Martin said in response to a question on how to make the culture more welcoming for women. By using gender-neutral language, women will feel more inclined to apply for positions that previously may have been seen as a "man's job."

It's up to companies to take those small steps in their communities to bring women into the trades, and in doing so, they will set a wave in motion that will make the plumbing and HVACR industry a better place for everyone. ●

Adam Turner is a Digital Content Strategist at Naylor Association Solutions. He helps trade associations in the construction, healthcare, and financial sectors develop content for member communications.

"You have to own your space because you bring value to the table."

~ Jacquelyn Lindsey Wynn



Katie Byrd

Women Expanding Their Roles

PHCC recently caught up with Katie Byrd, a master plumber and gas fitter and CEO of Clarksburg Plumbing, LLC in Clarksburg, Maryland, who is one of five women on the Board of Trustees for Quality Service Contractors (QSC), a PHCC Enhanced Service Group. Other women on the QSC Board include Chair Deidra McElroy from Magnolia Plumbing, Inc., Vice Chair Karen Hill of HM Plumbing, Amy Hart of Continental Plumbing Services, and Industry Representative Stacey Ziegler Harp of Hodes Company. "Each one of these women is in a role within their own organization where they have gained a ton of experience and have words of wisdom they are able to share," Byrd says.

Women, she adds, have always been integral to the trades but used to be in more "stereotypical positions," such as receptionist or bookkeeper or office manager. "Now women are in *all* facets of the company, from testing backflows to permitting, from completing service calls to running equipment on job sites." She also believes that women carry some unique characteristics, such as the ability to empathize with employees and customers. "Women are emotionally intelligent."

That said, Byrd is quick to point out that, "man or woman, if you treat others with respect, generally they are going to respect you. It's simple – treat others how you want to be treated. I want others to see me as a kind, caring, honest, and hard-working woman." She adds that prior to every situation, she considers what she brings to the table. "It should never be just that I am a woman. It should be my competency, my licensure, my experience, my creativity, my expertise."

She encourages more women to join in her choice of careers. "In my opinion, the best way to get more women into the profession is for the women who *are* in the profession to reach out and invite someone to work with them," she says.

Byrd applauds the work of the Women in Trades program, a start-up non-profit group partnering with the Career and Technology Center in Frederick, Maryland. The two organizations work hand-in-hand to get more girls to attend the plumbing, electrical, and HVAC programs the Center offers. "Recognizing the importance of engaging girls during their elementary and middle school years and demonstrating the value and acceptability of a career in the trades is crucial for the inclusion of women and girls in this industry."

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For an aquatics center in Houston County, Georgia, Greene & Associates, Inc. works on units that condition and dehumidify the rooms for pools.

NEW CONSTRUCTION AND SERVICE: A SHOTGUN MARRIAGE

THIS MECHANICAL CONTRACTOR (AND A FAMILIAR FACE IN THE PHCC FAMILY!) SHARES HOW CONSTRUCTION AND SERVICE ‘NEED EACH OTHER’ AND HOW HE BUILT A COMPANY TEAM WITH BOTH.

BY CHIP GREENE

PHCC brings a blend of service and repair contractors as well as those in new construction; my background is in the latter. From my observations, service companies tend to shy away from construction projects, which tie up their people too long and are not the market they want to pursue. Construction contractors typically have a one-year warranty to carry after substantial completion, which can be challenging to handle, especially with HVAC projects.



Chip Greene

Working for my father's mechanical contracting firm in high school, we primarily performed construction work with the occasional addition of a unit or system repair for a regular client. We had two HVAC "techs" who could be pulled off a project to go diagnose an air conditioning issue that was under warranty. We would also troubleshoot and repair the systems of one or two commercial customers (they originally were construction clients, so we took care of them on the service side). My uncle, the operations manager in my dad's

business, believed that service work was disruptive, and clients were too demanding about when they wanted the work done, so we avoided doing it.

When I began my career working for a mechanical contractor doing large plumbing projects and HVAC systems that had chillers and boilers, we had mechanics who could install the systems, but none who knew anything about starting them up and making them work, especially if the system had a compressor on it. We did our best to have manufacturers include the first year's labor warranty on the equipment.

Split systems with refrigerant piping were a necessary evil, but we would subcontract the installation and start-up of these systems. If a drain line was blocked in a building we had just completed, we would use our 100' sewer tape to try and unblock the line, usually with only moderate success. Because we did not do service, we did not own a sewer machine! For a young project manager, it was a cumbersome process, as we were constantly talking with clients about whether something was or was not part of the scope of work when we received warranty calls.

Trouble in the Marriage

Then about a year before I struck out on my own, the company opened a service division doing commercial service, a franchise no less. Finally, I thought, we can now start up and service our equipment in-house. However, there were some disputes between service and construction, mainly having to do with what rate construction paid to service and billable hours. As I later learned, this is a common dispute when a company has both construction and service.

In late 1990, I opened Greene & Associates. We got a few jobs, built them, and began to grow. We were better at plumbing than HVAC. When we would do HVAC projects (if start-up was not done by a factory), we struggled to handle it and the warranty. Some of my foremen had a little system knowledge so they could do some troubleshooting, but many times they were already on another project. When I needed them to go troubleshoot the issue, the call went something like this:

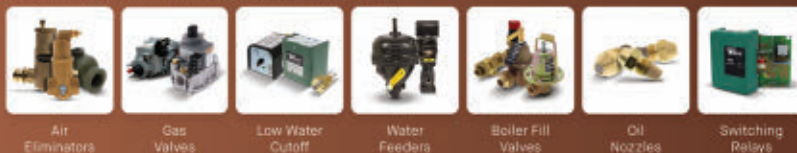
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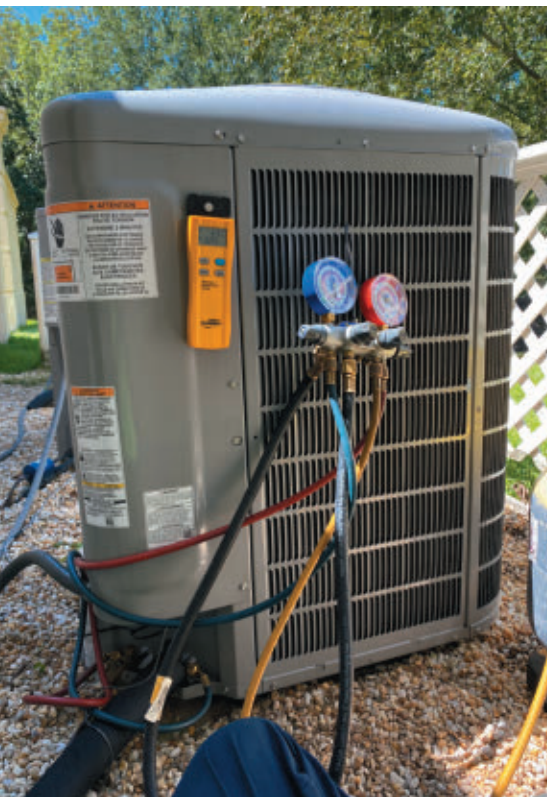


PHOTO PROVIDED BY GREENE & ASSOCIATES, INC.

A Greene & Associates service tech weighs in the refrigerant charge on a unit compressor replacement.

Me: "Johnnie, can you go back over to [a school project] and see what's going on? They are reporting an issue with the HVAC system."

Response: "I'm busy trying to stay ahead of the block mason on my current project, and if I leave, he will cover me up."

Me: "We have to do something; the owner is stating that it is hot inside the building."

Response: "HOT! If they want to know what hot is, they can come out here with me and they will find out what it *really* means to be hot!"

Eventually we would get it resolved, but it was a struggle!

We rocked along like this for 15 years. Sometimes our solution to solving a problem was to change parts; eventually we would change the right one and fix the issue. It was a terrible way to do service, and it did not generate satisfied clients.

In 2005, we worked on our largest project in the history of the company – a \$4.4 million outpatient surgery center. It was right up our alley – two centrifugal

chillers, cooling towers, pumps, air handling units, etc. Toward the end of the project, I was walking around with my superintendent, and we walked into one of the air handling unit mechanical rooms. In there was a unit the size of a boxcar with triple chill water coils, supply and return ductwork that was 4 feet wide, and an electric heater that was 5 feet tall. With the insulation finishes on the piping and ductwork, it looked amazing.

My Aha! Moment

My superintendent commented, "Don't I do good work?!" I replied, "Yes, now we just have to make it run." ... which generated the response, "Well I reckon you need to call the Trane man, because I don't know nothing about that electricity stuff!" It was an *Aha!* moment for me; if we were going to continue to grow and do work of this complexity, I had to have a service team.

continued on page 26



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*Has given me so many
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During the recession years, we acquired the assets of a plumbing service company and an HVAC service company. That did not work well, as both owners came with the purchases and had their own ideas about how the service business should work. And in the case of the HVAC company, the transition from the flexibility of being an owner to now being an employee became harder and harder. After two or three years, they both left.

Our next step was to hire someone to sell service. The young lady I hired knew nothing about the ins and outs of our industry, but she knew how to build

relationships with people and gain their confidence about us doing their work. After about a year and a half, she pursued a better opportunity. In hindsight, had she stayed, our service department would have developed faster.

Instead, we continued to flounder for another three or four years. We would hire a tech; then they would get disgruntled and leave. Then we would hire another tech, and we would discover they oversold their abilities. We hired another service manager with industry experience; that failed because he could not get along with anyone else in the company. We

hired a service manager from outside the industry; he had great people skills but no knowledge of what we did. This failed because, in order to be successful, this individual had to convince people to let us spend their money, a concept he later admitted was a struggle. Another *Aha!* moment.

To pause here, the root of the problem was Chip Greene. I did not really understand the business of service. I had done construction projects for so long that I expected the service technicians to know what I needed them to do. Only a small percentage of service technicians



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are well versed in servicing commercial plumbing and HVAC equipment. So, I have had to learn to expound on what we need them to do on larger start-ups and troubleshooting of those systems.

In 2019, we hired a seasoned HVAC tech and had an employee return who had become a very good plumbing service tech. Finally, we were making traction.

In 2020, we hired an experienced service coordinator; this was the last piece of the puzzle. We had a team that knew how service was supposed to be run. We also integrated our existing company management to oversee the business and operations side of service, providing continuity between the construction division and the service division. Service revenue increased 50% in 2020 and 25% year over year in 2021 and 2022.

Lessons Learned

What lessons were learned from this journey? First of all, both construction and service need each other.

- Installations need an approach of just getting it in ... deal with the obstacles and overcome them. Start-ups and repairs are all about details: perform the diagnostic, read the operations and maintenance manual for the equipment, and determine a course of action. Construction mechanics do not have the patience for this!
- If you specialize in construction, hire someone with experience to oversee your service start-up.
- Service operates very differently than construction. Typically, you only get four to five hours of billable time out of an 8-hour day with service. As a construction guy, that's nuts me up. Get over it!

Build a company team between service and construction. Our construction mechanics welcome our service techs to do the start-up on their projects. The mechanics realize that making the equipment run is the culmination of all their hard work installing the systems. And on the warranty side, the service department handles these calls, and the construction mechanics are on to building the next project.

At the end of the day, you have a shotgun marriage ... a match made in heaven! ●

Chip Greene is president of Greene & Associates, Inc., in Macon, Georgia, and served as PHCC—National president in 2015-2016.

“It was an *Aha!* moment for me; if we were going to continue to grow and do work of this complexity, I had to have a service team.”

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Allens Plumbing employee Sam installs a water filter in Lahaina.

HELPING MAUI RECOVER

A PHCC MEMBER (AND PILOT!) VOLUNTEERS HIS PLUMBING SERVICES AND WEIGHS IN ON THE STATUS OF THE RELIEF EFFORTS.

BY JEAN FEINGOLD

On Aug. 8, 2023, wildfires erupted on the Hawaiian island of Maui. They quickly spread, ultimately killing 99 people and damaging or destroying more than 2,000 structures, including much of the town of Lahaina. Some limited tourism, the island's main industry, reopened on Oct. 8.

Help From a PHCC Member

Among those stepping up to help was PHCC member Steve Allen, owner of Kahului-based Allens Plumbing. In addition to his plumbing skills, Allen is a pilot. After news of the fire spread on Aug. 9, he was among a group of general aviation pilots

who voluntarily assembled the next day to transport needed items to the Kapalua Airport on the west side of Maui. Regular truck deliveries for barbecue grills, charcoal, drinking water, pet food, diapers, and other goods were impossible, as all roads to the area were closed.

"I fly a Piper Saratoga, as did two other pilots," Allen says. "These models can carry a thousand pounds of cargo, so they did for multiple flights for days on end. The support on the receiving end was as enthusiastic as can be imagined. After seven days, the roads were opened up to the area, and our flights stopped."



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Plumbing Assistance to Shelters

Because so many homes were damaged or destroyed, many displaced residents were initially housed at emergency shelters. Workers from among the 46 Allens Plumbing employees assisted in providing filtered drinking water to the relief shelters.

"The Kapalua Airport, the same place I landed for the supply airlifts, was a staging center immediately after the fire," says Allen. "For the first few days afterward, there was no water whatsoever. The pumping stations were down, so there just wasn't any water," he adds.

"On day five, water pressure was restored," Allen continues. "We installed filter stations at the main relief shelter in Kahului within four days of the fire evacuation. We installed another filter station on the west side at the Kapalua Airport. Another filter station we did was in the burn zone. We staged it at a house in the Hawaiian Homelands area in a town called Wahikuli. The agreement was that any neighboring people could access this station for their drinking needs. That is what took place, with neighbors filling up drinking water jugs to take home."

Allen had a bigger idea than providing drinking water – installing hot water systems as well. That didn't happen. "The intention was to install filtered drinking water stations to the relief shelters," he says. "This was just to ease the demand of thousands of people on the limited support staff at the beginning of this nightmare. We were made aware that hot water was in limited supply at that time, and we were willing to provide it. Bureaucracy amid the confusion squelched us from installing any hot water systems. The speed of our local government in providing housing with the intent of emptying the shelters as soon as possible was the true dictator of dealing with the hot water system installations."

In addition to the problems near Lahaina, a bottled water notice for Up Country Maui was issued on Aug. 11. "There was lots of confusion regarding the bottled water and what areas were under advisory notice," says Allen. "That advisory notice has since been lifted."

Donated Plumbing Supplies

While Allens Plumbing was ready and able to provide labor, they needed help with materials. For those, Allen turned to plumbing supply company Ferguson Enterprises.



A water filter installed at the Kahana Airport by Allens Plumbing.

Maui Branch Manager Roma Tuaoa says the company provided 14 faucets and related plumbing fittings that were used in the filtered water systems installed in the shelters. “We wanted to partner with Steve Allen to help the affected families that have been impacted by the fire,” he says. Beyond this, Ferguson partnered with local food truck owners to cook for families that couldn’t return to their homes in Lahaina.

Where Things Stand Now

“As a community, everyone wanted to help in some way,” Allen notes. “What ultimately happened is – with FEMA, Red Cross, and other disaster relief groups providing services – local involvement came to a stop. People who were displaced were provided housing. The burn area was on lockdown. There really is only time now to deal with it. Temporary housing units have been started. I’m aware infrastructure and county ordinances are causing roadblocks on those at this time.”

PHCC of California and PHCC of Texas also offered help. Allen decided their efforts should be coordinated through the PHCC—National office, which provides aid through the PHCC Disaster Relief Fund. That fund – accessed at phccweb.org/disasterrelief – provides immediate assistance to members in need as a result of flooding, storms, fires, and other disasters.

The Fire’s Effect on Allens Plumbing

Only one Allens Plumbing employee was directly affected with their house being

destroyed by the fire. “We had others whose immediate families were impacted in different ways,” Allen says. “Anybody who lost hours due to the fire was paid. The emotional toll was a burden in itself. Lots of confusion followed the fire,” he adds.

“I was very scared for the island as a whole for the first few weeks,” Allen continues. “Tourism, our biggest industry, came to a screeching halt. We couldn’t even gain physical access to half of our marketplace for over two weeks. The real impact has not been felt yet. The best I can do is perform at a top level to take care of our people going forward. Be as smart as possible and keep showing up every day to keep the machine moving.”

What You Can Do to Help

Allen suggests contributing to the Maui Fire Disaster Relief Fund through the Maui United Way (mauiunitedway.org/disasterrelief). They provide fast-tracked grant approvals to existing local grassroots organizations focused on basic needs with the desire to increase equity and decrease disparities for communities.

Another place to donate, recommended by Tuaoa, is the Maui Strong Fund (hawaiicommunityfoundation.org/strengthening/maui-strong-fund), part of the Hawaii Community Foundation. The fund provides financial resources to support immediate and long-term recovery needs for all aspects of the lives

of people and places affected by the Maui wildfires.

Looking Ahead

Complete recovery from the fires will take years. “The real truth is I don’t know what we or others can do at this time,” Allen says. “The shelters have been completely closed. Government agencies are in charge of cleanup, resident relocation, and social welfare programs. Now how the EPA, FEMA, Red Cross, and related organizations go forward will dictate the recovery efforts,” he adds.

“The true loss and its impact are still coming,” Allen continues. “Existing residents will not all be able to stay here long enough to survive the reopening. It’s going to be years before any rebuilding takes place in the burn zone.” Allen says he’s hearing it will be a minimum of two years before any rebuilding can start. “That doesn’t account for building plans, permit approvals, and acquiring the labor force needed to do this work. Not to be a pessimist, but I see more negatives than positives ahead for the Lahaina fire victims,” he adds. “As for my business, we’ll adjust accordingly.” ●

Jean Feingold is a freelance writer who has written for trade magazines in the construction, energy, marketing, insurance, banking, trucking, and other industries for more than 25 years.

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Participating in an industry roundtable at PHCCCONNECT2023 in Cleveland, Ohio, are (l-r) Robert Grim of InSinkErator, Scott Robertson of Robertson Heating Supply Co., Dan Callies of Oak Creek Plumbing, Inc., Kathryn Poehling-Seymour of First Supply LLC, and Jason Pritchard of PriCor Technologies.

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IN TODAY'S EVER-CHANGING BUSINESS LANDSCAPE, STRENGTHENING THE CONTRACTOR/WHOLESALER CHANNEL IS CRITICAL TO SURVIVAL. A RECENT GENERAL SESSION AT PHCCCONNECT2023 DRILLED DEEP INTO THE CONVERSATION.

BY JOHN MESENBRINK

“How does my supplier make me look like a rock star?” asked Dan Callies, president of Oak Creek Plumbing, Inc., Oak Creek, Wisconsin, during the “Collaborative Connections: Strengthening Supplier-Contractor Relationships for Success” general session at PHCCCONNECT2023 in Cleveland, Ohio. Joining Callies on stage

was an all-star cast featuring moderator Robert Grim, senior vice president, Global Sales, InSinkErator, Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin; Scott Robertson, president, Robertson Heating Supply Co., Alliance, Ohio; Kathryn Poehling-Seymour, president and CEO, First Supply LLC, Madison, Wisconsin; and Jason Pritchard, co-founder, PriCor Technologies, Seattle, Washington.

That's the million-dollar question, right? How does the supplier/contractor relationship make each other better at his/her jobs *and* contribute to the overall company mission? Throw in the manufacturer here, too, for that matter. Some of the fundamental tenets for strengthening that relationship that were discussed at the general session included collaboration, value distribution services,



"How does my supplier make me look like a rock star?" asks Dan Callies (center) during a session on supplier/contractor relationships at PHCCCONNECT2023.

availability, technology and training, and expectations.

Can't We Just Get Along?

InSinkErator's Grim asked about the value of working together, and Poehling-Seymour stressed that collaboration is critical in this relationship. "We must understand the pain points and what is working and what isn't," she said.

And with that comes better communication. "We are in a relationship industry where communication is imperative," said Pritchard. If that means paying a bit more for that stronger relationship, then so be it, intimated Pritchard.

Callies echoed this but stressed right communication over more communication. The common thought is "wide equals pricing and deep equals relationships," said Callies.

So, let's go deep as an industry. When asked what the landscape is going to look like in five-to-10 years for the contractor/wholesaler/manufacturer, people, processes, and services matter. Through trust and preferences, "relationships are going to matter more," said Pritchard.

What about expectations? "We want to be around for another 10 to 20 years," said Robertson. "We want to see contractor loyalty in the channel," he continued. "And that means a loyalty to the wholesaler in your particular market."

Stock Market

Let's not avoid the 800-lb. gorilla in the room. With contractor loyalty comes availability and pricing. For Robertson, inventory presence is critical so much so that Robertson Supply holds inventory for approximately 100-125 days. "Listen, we don't make or install anything, so we better be damn good at inventory management," he said.

Value distribution services ties right in here ... "It's about right product, right time, right price," said Poehling-Seymour. "Be that added value family."

Tech Relevant

It's imperative for these brick-and-mortar supply houses to stay on top of the latest trends and technology. "The key to survival is to stay progressive and current," said Robertson. Upon further self-reflection, "how do we make it easier to find product?" he asked. "This includes being totally integrated with our contractor partners and researching and developing a technology that contractors will use."

Poehling-Seymour added that First Supply LLC institutes "customer councils" to continuously get a pulse of the customer. "We try to make sense of the noise," she said. "Where is critical mass in that noise so we can make the right decisions?"

Unless you've been hiding under a technology rock, artificial intelligence

(AI) has dominated the talk in most every corner of the tech universe, and it has crept into the plumbing and HVAC industry as well. While artificial intelligence, in and of itself, can sound scary and intimidating, according to Poehling-Seymour, "AI has real application in the industry purchasing and predictability."

For suppliers, it's imperative to keep all "moving-forward" options available, as Robertson suggested. This includes, and nothing new and earth shattering in our industry, maximizing e-commerce when necessary. "E-commerce presents the right tools at your fingertips," said Poehling-Seymour. Robertson added that, for his company, online ordering represents 20% volume. Other tech advancements – including the use of QR codes to streamline processes and online training – were also mentioned.

Training Room

InSinkErator's Grim offered that, in today's business landscape, there is more need for training.

In fact, he said, PHCC members ask for training and education now more than ever. "With evolution and advancement comes training and education," said Callies. Doubling down on this, Poehling-Seymour stated that First Supply opened a training center and offers a variety of training through streaming content.

Callies suggested that people still are the cogs in the wheel that makes this industry run; "Digital when you can, verbal when you must." Pritchard and Poehler-Seymour agreed, saying that people and the process are key through direct communication, and that includes all members of the channel: contractors, manufacturers, all the way down to the inside and outside sales, drivers, dispatchers, and others within each organization.

So, let's go back to the original question: How do we all make each other look like rock stars? Consuming all of the above, and, quite simply, "look for successes and build on them," said Callies. ●

John Mesenbrink, president of Mechanical Hub, and editor-at-large at CONTRACTOR Magazine, has been covering the plumbing and HVAC industry for nearly 20 years.



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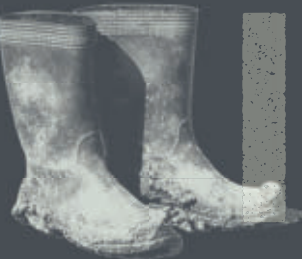
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WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT ...

INFLATION REDUCTION ACT DEPENDS ON PHCC CONTRACTORS

BY MARK VALENTINI

PHCC DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

Education is a familiar role for PHCC members. They educate apprentices on how to ply their trade, legislators on how our industry works, and customers on how their homes' plumbing and HVAC systems operate and the importance of maintenance.

So, they'll be in a familiar role when it comes time to educate everyone on how the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) financial incentives work when these programs are fully implemented ... and the impact it will have both on our industry and homeowners.

The IRA: A Primer

To recap, on Aug. 16, 2022, the \$739 billion IRA was signed into law. It is expected to be the most consequential law to p-h-c contractors of any legislation signed in recent history, affecting just about every contractor in the residential and commercial installation, service, and repair sector.

The IRA incentivizes investment in building electrification through rebates on the purchase of heat pump products and associated electric panel upgrades for residential buildings, in addition to tax credits and deductions for residential and commercial building envelope and HVAC upgrades.

A boom in electrification projects might be expected, which would see an increase in sales of heat pump HVAC systems, heat pump water heaters, and associated electrical and building envelope upgrades as homeowners are enticed with rebates up to \$14,000, as well as tax credits up to \$2,000 for qualified residential work and deductions up to \$5 per square foot for qualified commercial work.

Read the Fine Print

But the criteria to qualify for rebates and tax incentives are very complex, and contractors – being the primary interface between federal policies and building owners – will be in the precarious position of having to clarify for customers on how these incentives work.

The heat pump rebates are income-based, meaning that some homeowners may not fully qualify for rebates offered under the IRA. Homeowners can only qualify for the full rebate if their household median income is 80% or less of the average median income in their area. The rebate is reduced as a homeowner's household median income exceeds that 80% threshold, and homeowners fail to qualify for any rebate when their household median income exceeds 150% of the geographical average.

HVAC upgrades that qualify for tax credits need to meet Consortium for Energy Efficiency (CEE) standards, which are more

stringent than Energy Star, therefore qualified equipment may be more expensive, though there are no income requirements to qualify for the tax credit. For commercial tax deductions under Section 179D for building envelope and HVAC upgrades, installations must meet prevailing wage and apprenticeship requirements, or else building owners will only realize a fraction of the full deduction, as low as 50 cents per square foot.

Will Rebate Programs Work as Intended?

State energy offices will determine how the rebate program will work; the question for contractors is where does the rebate occur and how do they navigate the bureaucracy? If it occurs at the point of sale, is the contractor expected to install a system at a discount and wait to receive the difference by check? If that's the case, many contractors may not be able to afford to wait for that check in the mail.

While initially the financial incentives may be enticing for consumers to invest in higher-efficiency, higher technology heat pump systems, those same consumers may need to temper any expectations they may have for cost savings. Contractors will be in the precarious position of having to explain to customers how the financial incentives work, the limited product selection that qualifies, and whether the potential up-front cost savings are worthwhile when replacing a gas system with an electric heat pump.

It is possible homeowners will opt to install a new gas system or repair their old system upon realizing that cost savings might diminish with a heat pump system, especially when factoring in higher electric utility bills and improving building envelope to ensure a heat pump system works at peak performance.

A Sufficient and Sufficiently Trained Workforce is Critical to the IRA's Success

Contractors were already struggling to find qualified workers before the IRA became law. If there is indeed an uptick in demand for installations and upgrades under the IRA, there may be a struggle to keep up, meaning homeowners might have to wait longer than anticipated for a new installation. To address that possibility, some stakeholders are advocating for a more accelerated training process that fragments a skillset by credentialing individual skills, with the hope that it gets workers into the field more quickly; instituting a heat pump installation certification is one example.

This is a mistake. Plumbers and HVAC contractors will not hire a one-trick pony. Credentialing will only water down the construction workforce with underqualified workers who can only perform

limited tasks, and whose jobs won't pay nearly as much nor last nearly as long as a tradesperson with a complete skillset. It will take time and precision to rebuild the thoroughly skilled workforce from which our entire nation will both depend on and benefit beyond our lifetimes.

It Falls on Contractors

Make no mistake, p-h-c contractors will bear the weight of the IRA. They will be expected to educate policymakers on its impacts, consumers on its criteria, and the incoming workforce through instruction and on-the-job training. They must be accurate in how they market the potential benefits and financial incentives that are available so they don't risk being labeled as crooked or misleading.

Because consumers won't deal with the legislators who passed this law, the regulators who wrote the guidance to implement this law, or the state energy offices that administer the grants, they will interact *directly* with the contractor, the person who will do the work on which the value of a family's biggest investment depends, and whose name and logo appear on the final invoice. ●

Mark Valentini (valentini@naphcc.org) is the Director of Legislative Affairs for PHCC—National Association. A veteran government relations professional with more than 20 years of experience on Capitol Hill and with several national trade associations, Valentini applies his expertise in public policy, workforce and training, and insurance and tax matters to advocate on behalf of all PHCC members.

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WRESTLING WITH HOW \$8.8 BILLION IS DISTRIBUTED

BY CHUCK WHITE
PHCC VICE PRESIDENT OF REGULATORY AFFAIRS

Perhaps you have heard, the federal government is about to pour buckets of money into the HVAC industry by way of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Astute readers have asked me how this reduces inflation, but these days, Washington, D.C. names things in an opposite fashion (but I digress).

\$8.8 billion is going to be distributed through the states, but what does that mean? Are the states going to become huge ATMs that hand out cash at a moment's notice? There are lots of questions that need to be answered ... for contractors, consumers, and the state offices that will distribute the money.

I have represented PHCC at two recent national meetings that have wrestled with this distribution situation. One meeting was with the Consortium for Energy Efficiency (CEE) and the other with the National Association of State Energy Offices (NASEO). NASEO seems to be the point organization that represents the state energy offices, while CEE connects more with utility incentive provider organizations. These meetings discussed the many aspects of IRA programs, but there are a few items of particular interest related to the interaction between these offices and installing contractors.

Common Threads

An overarching theme in nearly all these sessions revolved around the independence of the involved states, territories, and tribal lands. Each state has a different point of view. This makes it difficult for the industry to interact with the IRA programs as a single point source; interactions will have to be through outreach to the various eligible state energy offices. Time after time it was stated that all the states will be different; in fact, some states may not take the money at all. Some states may engage organizations that previously have administered other incentive programs, but that is not guaranteed. We are somewhere near a year into the IRA, and all we have to show for it is more questions.

The second glaring aspect was the lack of outreach to contractors. It seems like the state offices, utility providers, and incentive program administrators believe they know what

obstacles contractors face and think they have solutions. Session after session talked about how contractors need training and education. When asked what education was needed, these folks don't know, but they know the industry needs it.

Opportunities for You

More direct engagement with the contractors is needed; there are lots of contractors who know how to assess a building's needs and how to properly select equipment. Contractors even know what heat pumps are ... maybe that's a surprise to NASEO and CEE. Quality installations are key to the success of the IRA, and these folks talk about qualified contractors but can't say what that means. How can our industry meet unspoken expectations?

Lastly, the IRA represents significant opportunities for contractors, but there will need to be a change in mindset for the bulk of the funds. NASEO and CEE understand this and hope to change your businesses to match this new paradigm.

Per the U.S. government, the big money targets low- and moderate-income households, and the intent is not to play repairman and fix as necessary. The program is intended to have contractors look for these consumers and proactively reach out and offer replacement work. The program seeks to find the clients that fit the requirements and convince those clients to replace working systems and pay for all of that work with IRA funds. With a combined funding source of \$14,000 per home, that may or may not be feasible.

The IRA represents significant opportunity in the energy efficiency arena. PHCC is working to understand the programs and network with the state decision makers. PHCC members need to decide if they wish to engage; this will be a lot of work and some contractors will do it ... shouldn't it be you and your business? ●

Charles "Chuck" R. White serves as Vice President of Regulatory Affairs for PHCC—National Association. White works closely with government regulatory bodies, such as the DOE, and serves on a number of councils and coalitions including NSPC, PERC, ABPA and IAPMO as a representative of PHCC's contractors.

THE KEY TO RETENTION? SIGNS POINT TO *EDUCATION*

The PHCC Educational Foundation is noticing a trend ... and we like what we're seeing! The apprentices receiving scholarships from the Foundation are – for the most part – staying put with their current employers.

"In the PHCC Educational Foundation scholarship program, if an apprentice leaves their PHCC employer, they are no longer eligible to receive a scholarship," explains John Zink, the Foundation's vice president of development and communications. "In 2022, we had eight scholarship winners disqualified because they had changed their educational plans or had left their PHCC employers. This year, we only had one winner disqualified for that reason. It's not a scientific measure, but it certainly feels like apprentices are now more likely to stick with their current employers instead of bouncing around in search of other opportunities."

This observation seems to be in line with nationwide data, with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting that construction employment *hires* are exceeding *quits* in each region of the country. The reasons, it states, could be a slowing in the number of those quitting their jobs because of higher wages elsewhere, or a fear of rising living costs, tighter lending requirements, and an impending recession, causing employees to see a greater value in job security.

'They Want to Be the Best They Can Be!'

Indeed, Brenda Barker, owner and vice president of Barker and Sons Plumbing in Orange County, California, "100% agrees" with these trends. She says that – in past years – employees could "easily be swayed around," even when a company would pay them handsomely.

"There has been a turn," she adds. And, at her company, she claims the key to that retention is education and a trustworthy and grateful culture. "We were shocked ... even our senior technicians wanted to go to school this year. They want to be the best they can be!"

Barker and Sons, a PHCC member company, works closely with the PHCC-ORSB (Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties) apprentice school, run by Doug Allen, the chapter's education director. Barker and Sons currently has 15 employees in that apprentice program. "Through educating and training our staff, we can confidently say we are able to offer our customers the very best in the industry and grow our company," says Barker.

"We feel really fortunate that we're a PHCC member and have access to the school," she adds. "We're incredibly grateful, because once [students] meet Doug at the school, it's a total



win ... everybody who goes to the school wants to stay. Doug understands this population. He knows how to teach them; he knows how to keep their attention; he gives his all to them."

'Utmost Gratitude' For Those Scholarships

Several of those students in the program have received scholarships from the PHCC Educational Foundation to help offset their costs. Barker says that it's imperative that the *employer* supports the apprentice school *and* the scholarship application process. "One of the amazing things that Doug does is he makes the scholarship application process part of the curriculum, but the employer has to back it up." Her message to other employers: "These young people get overwhelmed by the process ... your participation is essential."

Barker explains that her company will pay for the apprentice education as long as the student applies for the scholarship. "They have to have some skin in the game. We tell them 'it's okay if you don't get it, but you have to apply for it.' You're agreeing to partner with them, and they're agreeing to partner with you. It's saying, 'We're here for you.'" The result? The employees are not only receiving quality training and education, but they're *remaining loyal* to the company that supported them.

To the PHCC Educational Foundation donors that make these scholarships possible, Barker offers her "utmost gratitude," adding "it excites me so much that they do this." From her experience, teachers and school counselors are eager for any type of information they can get on the scholarship program ... "because they have all these great kids that need a path, and the donors make that path possible."

"We finally made it to where people *want* to go into the trades," adds Barker, "and to back it up with a financial investment like this, it's just amazing." ●

FAST FORWARD

FOR PLUMBING APPRENTICESHIPS IN LOUISIANA, THIS IS A ‘GIANT STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.’

Recognizing that associate degree and apprenticeship opportunities for high school students have been underutilized in Louisiana, the state has a goal that – beginning with the freshman class of 2025 – all Louisiana public high school graduates will complete high school with college credit (academic and/or career-technical), a postsecondary credential of value, or both. With that, its Fast Forward program will prepare students for current and emerging professions that *expose students to high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand occupations*.

Say no more! PHCC of Louisiana is thrilled to get in on this initiative and work with the state’s Department of Education to prepare these students for careers in *plumbing*. Through the Fast Forward program’s “High-Demand Apprenticeship Pathway,” the chapter will offer its plumbing apprenticeship – using curriculum written and provided by the PHCC Educational Foundation – in high schools beginning with the 2024-2025 school year.

“Our apprenticeship program is the largest open-shop apprenticeship program in the state,” says PHCC of Louisiana Executive Director Crystal Carter. “When this new pathway was created, the Louisiana Department of Education reached out to us to gauge our interest. Of course, we were excited to learn more about it and to begin the process of working with schools we have already formed relationships with

in previous efforts to provide plumbing education at the high school level.” As of press time, the chapter has met with several school parishes as well as one of the technical community college systems to also offer the apprenticeship as a dual enrollment toward an associate degree. “Exciting times!” Carter exclaims.

Shaping the Pathway

The High-Demand Apprenticeship Pathway is not a cookie-cutter program. PHCC of Louisiana is in a position to work with schools independently to design a curriculum that makes sense for their school’s community, current curriculum offerings, and the established apprenticeship program. “In a sense, schools are able to fit their program into ours, rather than the other way around,” says Carter.

She explains that, at this time, the chapter is imagining a hybrid approach for most schools, beginning the education with a brick-and-mortar option weaved into the school’s curriculum for the first year of the apprenticeship, and then leveraging the PHCC Academy for students’ senior year when they are able to earn OJT hours full time. “If the partnership is structured as such, students could be working full time in the apprenticeship program their senior year of high school, never stepping foot on campus and considered dually enrolled,” Carter says.

Fortunately – and conveniently for this opportunity – PHCC of Louisiana has built its plumbing apprenticeship program exponentially over the past few

years and is confident in knowing that it is offering the superior educational resources the PHCC Educational Foundation publishes. “Our relationship with the PHCC Educational Foundation is invaluable!” Carter says. “Angela Collins and her team have always been ready to offer supplemental resources and data to help us build the trust and validity of the curriculum to schools,” she adds. “In addition, being able to offer the Academy as an online solution will help us talk with schools in rural areas, as well as help students be fully immersed in the apprenticeship their senior year as a dual enrollment.”

In the early stages of this new program, Carter explains, the state has allocated funds for up to 500 students; the funds are provided per student based on the school’s status as rural or non-rural and may be used for materials, tuition, and instructional costs.

Building a Workforce

Ultimately, adds Carter, this is a move “to build a pipeline of workforce and allow students graduating to have an established career with a competitive pay and opportunities for growth within two years of graduating high school.” As an added incentive, this opportunity “allows students to learn more about and train in this trade earlier, before beginning paths on other trades that have historically prevailed in the high schools,” she adds.

“This is a giant step in the right direction.” ●

WELCOME!

FIND YOUR PEOPLE THROUGH PHCC'S ENHANCED SERVICE GROUPS.

A PHCC member recently said that “PHCC is a place of education, partnership, and family ... a place of heart and soul.” And members tend to experience that ten-fold when they join one of PHCC’s Enhanced Service Groups, because they’re connecting with like-minded “family” in their specialized business sector and participating in targeted education and networking opportunities that address their unique needs.

These three Enhanced Service Groups are **Quality Service Contractors (QSC)** for service and repair contractors; **Construction Contractors’ Alliance (CCA)**

for contractors specializing in residential, industrial, commercial, and institutional new construction; and **Union-Affiliated Contractors (UAC)**, representing a unified voice for signatory contractors.

For Katie Byrd, CEO of Clarksburg Plumbing, LLC in Clarksburg, Maryland, “some interesting times” in 2020 prompted her to seek the support of peer service and repair contractors.” Kenny Howes with Mallick Plumbing and Heating in Gaithersburg, Maryland, had been encouraging her to join QSC for years. “He always told us the resources and relationships within QSC had been invaluable for their team’s growth,” she

says. After running Clarksburg Plumbing for two years without her in-laws – and knowing she needed help navigating the challenges resulting from the pandemic – “we knew we would need a group to lean on, ask questions, and get insight on what to do,” she adds.

Now, “each time a situation arises that I am unsure of how I can handle, before I make a snap decision, I collaborate with our QSC/ PHCC family, and someone has already experienced it and can give us words of advice,” she says. “Having peer resources that you can trust and be vulnerable with has helped us grow, be better leaders, and better serve our customers.”



Quality Service Contractors (QSC)

QSC is an engaged and interactive community of service and repair contractors who leverage specialized training and coaching to *enhance* their businesses. Among the many benefits:

- A seat in a chosen “performance group” that meets monthly to share successes, failures, lessons learned, and commonalities to help everyone in the group improve their individual companies and obtain their goals. Byrd shares that – with the guidance from others in her performance group – her company has implemented a new workflow, learned about managing inventory, adopted a more effective shop set-up, and made a positive switch to new software.
- A virtual annual business review with a QSC business coach (learn more on page 24-25).
- SESCO HR assistance partner.
- Q-List, an intranet site designed for direct and immediate communication with your peers, coaches, and industry specialists. Says Byrd: “Participating in the Q-List discussions has brought another layer of professionalism and a ‘well I never thought of that’ aspect to our daily discussions.”
- A complimentary subscription to Training Today, a platform for workplace safety

and training that includes a dashboard for you to assign and keep track of your employees’ safety training.

- Discounted fee to access the PHCC Labor Unit Database – simplify your estimating process, prepare accurate bids, and become more efficient and profitable.
- Free PHCC Water Supply Calculator App – download and go!
- Engage with one of our four peer groups – Commercial Service Managers, Residential Service Managers, Dispatcher, and CSR.

Plus, all QSC Pro and Industry Partner members receive one free registration, and Premium members receive two free

registrations, to the group’s annual Power Meeting, always a packed agenda of solutions-based education sessions and other opportunities to share best practices and trends for the future. *Save the date for Power Meeting 2024, July 16-18, in Denver, Colorado!*

And take advantage of special pricing for QSC training, including specialized sessions for service professionals (Frontline Service Training), CSRs (Customer Loyalty Specialist Training), service managers, and business owners and key management personnel. QSC training and education can be delivered to the contractors directly or through a partnership with one of the PHCC chapters.





Construction Contractors' Alliance (CCA)

Since 1998, CCA has been bringing together new construction contractors whose business operations, the ways they collaborate with other industry professionals, job sites, and even their *websites* are very different from those of service contractors.

Twice a year, these new construction contractors come together for two to three days to engage in open and honest discussions about the state of their businesses, their strengths, their struggles, and what the future looks like. Also featured are high-caliber speakers on topics such as the future of information technology, how

to create transferable value, succession planning, and more.

One of those meetings each year includes an expert-led session on preparing an economic scan for the coming year. Alternate

meetings include a “contractor spotlight,” where members learn more from a peer contractor and then engage in a Q&A session on current experiences, challenges, lessons learned, and more.



Union-Affiliated Contractors (UAC)

The signatory (union) contractors that PHCC serves and represents inhabit a distinct space that's uniquely accompanied by specific opportunities, obligations, and challenges. Over the decades, UAC has earned a track record as a key advocate for these signatory contractor members, fulfilling a role as a “bridge” – a reliable communications link, a trusted counterpart, and a worthy teammate with the UA (United Association of Journeymen & Apprentices of the Plumbing & Pipefitting Industry of the U.S. & Canada).

Cooperation and collaboration have helped maintain this mutually beneficial and respectful relationship. Today the UAC is powering ahead, thanks in equal parts to an invigorated and results-oriented Advisory Board, a renewed level of support and encouragement from PHCC's National Board, and a staff approach that's driven to grow and advance the UAC so it is consistently prepared to anticipate and meet its members' needs.

What can the UAC do for you?

- This past year, the UAC offered two highly successful Collective Bargaining Agreement seminars. Look for more to come on this and other worthwhile topics.
- PHCCCONNECT2023 featured three lively, informative, and practical sessions geared specifically to union contractors. The first session thoroughly examined Trust Fund Audits; the second provided a detailed overview of the responsibilities of



Benefit Funds' appointed management Trustees; and the final offering took the form of a constructive and insightful forum featuring UA (union) and UAC officials. Future sessions planned for signatory PHCC members at CONNECT likely will explore additional pertinent topics such as succession planning, arbitration resources available through the Industrial Relations Council (IRC), and even anti-trust violation prevention.

- On the horizon are Zoom and in-person forums on bargaining best practices and other relevant subjects; quarterly virtual-facilitated discussions on union industry issues; Fund trustee orientation and insights into the serious responsibilities that come with appointments; an all-new consortium open exclusively to signatory PHCC chapter executives; peer-to-peer networking opportunities; and more.

In addition to PHCC Senior Director of Membership Kim Dresser and her staff, PHCC has added a special representative/

consultant – S. J. Peters of PCA of Greater Chicago – to our team to help assist and advise signatory contractors and chapter executives; to provide communications input; and to serve as a spokesperson and liaison to the UA, its locals, and other labor (and labor-related) organizations.

We're also conducting in-person visits to state and local PHCC chapters (and their union counterparts) to explain and promote the worth and resources offered by the UAC ... all in order to further build membership and seek ideas for more ways to expand services and value. ●

Want to Know More About QSC, CCA, or UAC?

Contact Kim Dresser, PHCC's senior director of membership, at dresser@naphcc.org or 703-752-9882.



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CALENDAR OF KEY PHCC EVENTS

(as of November 9, 2023)

CCA Meeting 2024

Feb. 28 - March 1, 2024
New Orleans, Louisiana

PHCC Legislative Conference

May 21 - 22, 2024
Washington, D.C.

QSC Power Meeting 2024

July 16 - 18, 2024
Denver, Colorado

PHCCCONNECT2024

Oct. 7 - 10, 2024
Birmingham, Alabama

FOR THE FULL LIST OF EVENTS AND STATUS, VISIT www.phccweb.org/events

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