

A Labor Symposium: Taking a Fresh Look at the Problem

Attracting workers to construction, particularly those skilled enough to work with little direction or lead others, is tough. The work is physically hard and often dangerous, employment often for short periods, and the pay for most isn't great. The problem isn't new and a variety of industry efforts have not solved it.

The Lean Construction Institute (LCI) in conjunction with the Construction Program at the University of New Mexico will hold a symposium on labor on May 10 & 11 in Albuquerque, NM. The meeting is designed to take fresh look at the labor supply problems facing the construction industry, what causes them and how they might be solved. The meeting will feature speakers from a variety of positions and perspectives, each with strong opinions and willing to argue their corner as they learn in discussion. Invited speakers include representatives of trade unions, national training organizations, local and national contractors and associations.

The session will feature a presentation by Gunde Odgaard of the Danish Construction Building Trades, long an advocate of lean construction. Other speakers include:

- § Glenn Ballard, Lean Construction Institute, presenting LCI's position paper as a framework for the discussion.
- § Douglas McCarron , Carpenters Union, speaking on their vision for unionized labor and their strategy for a new way of working with employers and with other crafts.
- § Paul Reiser, Boldt Construction, reporting on their Helping Hands initiative, launched in collaboration with the Carpenters and other Building Trades, where all workers pledged to work under the direction of those competent in the relevant trade rather than let work stand idle.
- § Don Whyte, representing the NCCER, explaining how they see the problem and what they're doing about it
- § Greg Sizemore, Executive Director of the Construction Industry Round Table, which has a number of labor initiatives underway
- § Mike Pappas, Ph.D., P.E., Lecturer at The University of Texas at Austin and Pappas Consulting, LLC: "The Two-Tier Construction Workforce Strategy – Theory and Implementation," summarizing research recently completed by CII and the Center for Construction Industry Studies at The University of Texas, and presenting a framework for implementation which includes LCI's Last Planner.
- § Don Kawal of Klinger Constructors and Sean Graystone of Toltec Builders representing the construction industry in New Mexico.

The meeting will begin with presentations from the speakers. Each will describe the problem as they understand it and suggest solutions. Presentations will be followed by structured and facilitated discussions to clarify and consolidate understanding. The Symposium will produce a document in response if not support of the LCI position paper. We intend this paper to form the basis of a larger effort to improve the situation. To that end, we will work to identify consensus where possible and capture dissent and alternate views.