



HOW CURTIS LUMBER HELPS THE TRADES FIND FUTURE EMPLOYEES

“THE UNPRECEDENTED SHORTAGE of labor in the trades was an ongoing topic at a local builder’s association monthly meeting. Young people are not getting into the trades,” says Doug Ford, vice president of sales and purchasing at Curtis Lumber in Ballston Spa, New York. “If builders don’t have the labor to build homes, selfishly they don’t buy materials from us, so the effects of labor shortages are far reaching.” To help address the dilemma, Doug decided to act, recruiting Pam Stott, executive assistant at Curtis Lumber, as his partner.

Ford and Stott met with local area school staff to get an understanding of why students weren’t considering careers in the trades. They quickly realized students weren’t being exposed to the trades, nor were the trades getting in front of the students to promote themselves. As a result of

this research, Ford and Stott formed a task force with the mission to, “Encourage young people and adults to consider a career in the construction industry by bringing an awareness to the benefits associated with it.” It wasn’t long before area business professionals from various industries jumped on board to be a part of the effort.

The trades are not just a job—they are a career—and the task force’s initial efforts focused on trade professionals presenting to middle and high school students about career opportunities in the trades and the skills involved. They discussed the realities of how work in the trades has advanced to keep up with the requirements of today’s business world. As well, they explained how the demand for work is huge, opening the doors for unprecedented opportunities, job security and stability, competitive

benefit packages, the inclusion of women, and great starting salaries without incurring years of college debt.

One of their most popular activities is for the younger students starting with 2nd grade who get the opportunity to assemble pre-cut wooden pieces into a toolbox. The students stay very engaged with this hands-on activity, and it’s an opportunity for the trades professional to plant the seed.

Tours at Curtis Lumber locations expose middle and high school students to estimating, kitchen and bath design, deck design, dispatch/logistics, and door manufacturing. “Students don’t necessarily connect the work we do here with the construction industry, so it’s another avenue of awareness for them,” Stott says. “We intentionally put younger, more relatable staff in front of them, and we always try to relate what they’re learning in school (science, math, technology, creativity) to skills required in the trades for real-world application.”

Now five years into the program, the task force is now known as the Workforce Development Coalition, with efforts throughout NY state—well beyond Saratoga County where it launched. The Coalition is comprised of 40 professionals from a wide range of businesses and organizations with a passion for raising awareness about the trades.

This growth has enabled their efforts to expand and include career fairs, job shadowing, internship placements, and construction site tours, always with a commitment to promote women in the trades. As well, Coalition member Mike Baron with Hudson Valley Community College created Expertise Platform, a video library of local jobs to expose students to opportunities right in their back yard. Additionally, the Coalition meets with legislators to keep the need for labor in the trades alive in the political arena. The expansion of the Coalition



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has also made it possible to launch a Tool Bag Program that provides area graduating BOCES and Questar III students with a Carhartt tool bag full of goodies to kick-start their career.

“We’ve built a lot of loyalty with our professional customers,” says Ford. “They appreciate and respect the work we are doing on their behalf. We’re in the schools and support the communities in all of our 23 store locations. Curtis Lumber is proud of the coalition’s accomplishments to date, and we look forward to our youth benefitting from a successful and rewarding career in the trades through our efforts.” ■

Submitted by Curtis Lumber

