

# Industry works together to overcome work force shortage

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Walk around any jobsite and you're bound to hear a common topic of conversation — the need for more workers. With many members of the baby boomer generation retiring and fewer young people entering the industrial workplace, industrial contractors are left with a smaller work force that lacks the necessary knowledge and experience.

By turning to other industries, using recruiting tactics and educating young people about the careers available, industry is taking an active stance to ensure that workers are available and have the needed skills for future projects.

## Recruiting tactics

With more than 100 new offshore rigs and several hundred land units under construction, the drilling contractor work force is stretched thin, and personnel are at a premium. To find the rig employees to operate and maintain the high-tech rigs of today and tomorrow, the industry is looking to new markets — such as the auto industry, which has seen a large amount of layoffs in recent

months — to attract skilled and semi-skilled workers.

Recently, the International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC) partnered with the Ford Motor Co. on a "Direct Employer Workshop" with the goal of finding new careers for the auto industry's skilled workers facing immediate job losses.

"Working with Ford Motor Co. is the first step to address nontraditional sources to attract skilled workers to our industry," Dr. Lee Hunt, IADC president, said.

The IADC isn't the only organization that has turned to other industries to find skilled laborers. During a recent work force shortage workshop hosted by the Baton Rouge, La., Area Chamber and the Greater Baton Rouge Industry Alliance, Fred Woods, human resources manager of Georgia Pacific Port Hudson, La., Operations, said that he has also tried recruiting workers from other industries.

"It's important to keep a close eye on the market data," Woods explained. "Pay attention to what companies are downsizing and what companies have unhappy clients."

Woods has also turned to Georgia

Pacific employees to help find skilled workers.

"Talent brings other talent," he said. "You need to 'pick the brains' of talented people to bring talented people."

## GREAT campaign

After the devastation of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, industry joined together to launch the Get Rewarded for Education and Advancement Training (GREAT) initiative, a program working to recruit and train up to 20,000 new construction workers in the Gulf Coast region by the end of 2009.

Timothy Horst, program manager for the GREAT campaign, said that the initiative has recruited and trained about 5,500 people, which is right on track with the campaign's anticipated rate of progress.

"We are finding people from all age groups and backgrounds," he said. "I've gone through a number of résumés, and the recruits come from a wide range of backgrounds, including the trucking industry, fast food industry, hospitality industry and those who are unemployed."

"The people who graduate from this program have shown a commitment to go to class every day and do their work. They have demonstrated a certain level of competence and willingness to go to work."

"With the GREAT campaign, we can deliver to contractors people who are motivated, want to learn and who have put out that extra motivation."

## Educating the students and parents

To educate students about the many benefits of a career in industry, several companies have started partnering with local schools. According to Dr. Frazier Wilson, social investment manager for Shell Oil Co., partnerships are vital to overcoming the work force challenge.

To help introduce students to careers in industry, Shell started hosting teacher externships to expose teachers to the industry and the skill requirements needed. In addition, Shell recently launched a Web site to educate students and teachers about the energy industry.

"Encouraging students in middle and high school to study math and science is critical to the future of the energy industry," said John Hofmeister, president of Shell Oil Co. "Developing these skills early will help prepare students for a future career in a technology-driven industry."

"Opportunities are out there," Wilson said. "We just have to make sure students are aware."

When it comes to recruiting the future work force, industry and its partners are looking at both males and females. Recently, the Gulf Coast Process Technology Alliance (GCPTA) invited 11th and 12th grade female students to partici-

pate in an all-girls summer camp designed to familiarize them with career opportunities, particularly in the field of process technology.

"The camps have been one of the most successful ways GCPTA can deliver the message of career awareness to high school students," Harry Wood, director of public affairs for GCPTA, said.

Just like the rest of the nation, the demand for skilled craftspeople in Louisiana is overwhelming. To help meet that need, the Louisiana Board of Regents has implemented a variety of tactics to recruit students into industry.

According to Jim Henderson, senior vice president, work force training and development for the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, 17 "articulation agreements" have been struck between Louisiana technical colleges and school districts. These agreements allow high school students to receive credit for high school classes that are similar to some introductory classes at the technical colleges.

"We have to start early to get students oriented into the mind frame that technical education is a pathway to a quality life," Henderson said.

Louisiana is also reaching young people through the state's ePortal system, a state-of-the-art online career, college and work planning guide available through the Louisiana Board of Regents. Starting in the sixth grade, ePortal incorporates a robust set of tools and education modules to help students make informed decisions regarding their academic career.

Employers have the opportunity to join the ePortal system and market their organization to both parents and students.


"We want to connect students to you as early as the sixth, seventh and eighth grade," Dr. Lisa Smith-Vosper, associate commissioner for work force education and training, Louisiana Board of Regents, said. "We all have to collaborate to get on the same page. It has to be 'all hands on deck' between education and work force development."

Although it is important to educate students, industry is also starting to realize the importance of educating parents about the careers available.

"It is important to educate parents on what's out there," Eddie Rispono, chair of the Louisiana Craft Workforce Development Board, said. "Parents need to know what job requirements are needed so they can encourage their children."


While there is plenty of talent out there for employers to use, the most important thing is to make sure the work force is ready for the job ahead.

"I don't know if there are any magic answers," Bill Johnson, east region reliability manager for Lyondell, said, "but you've got to find good people, take care of them and make sure they get trained." □



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