

FIRST EDITION 2025

SMACNA GREATER CHICAGO

METAL PRESS

ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

GT MECHANICAL

O'Malley
INSULATION
CONTRACTOR

WM
WESTSIDE MECHANICAL GROUP

FIRST EDITION 2025

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

MEMBERS URGED TO EMBRACE AI TECHNOLOGIES.

Already, 2025 is shaping up to be a year that promises to challenge the construction industry and push us to new heights. One topic that seems to be everywhere is the rise of artificial intelligence (see page 24 for a full article). Many of the software solutions and tech platforms we use in our day-to-day have AI capabilities, all designed to make our businesses safer and more efficient. From project management and estimating, to automation and collaboration, there are so many different uses for AI. This is the way of the future, and I encourage all members to find ways to integrate this game-changing technology now so you don't risk getting left behind!

On the subject of growth and change, SMACNA Greater Chicago is always looking for new opportunities and fresh content to bring to our existing lineup of educational offerings. If there's a specific topic or engaging speaker you'd like to hear from, let our staff or Board know! Keeping our members on the leading edge and continuing the elevate the industry is a top priority.

A general consensus within our market is that contractors continue to remain busy. Politics aside, our new administration is likely to spur plenty of new work in American infrastructure and construction, including a number of energy projects and mega-projects. The Midwest is a prime location for data centers to be built, and with the recent \$500 billion investment announcement, we're excited to see what the next few years hold.

Finally, please join us in congratulating Lou Ochoa of Ochoa Mechanical Group as the newest addition to the SMACNA Greater Chicago Board of Directors! Lou brings a wealth of experience and valued perspective to the group, and we're thrilled to have his participation.

JEFF LUKITSH
Westside Mechanical, Inc.

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UPCOMING EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

All Winter and Spring Lunch and Learn classes take place on Tuesdays from 11 a.m. – noon. Email Laurie to register at laurie@smacnagreaterchicago.org.

MARCH

03.18.25

Bluebeam Pop-up
Part 2: The Treasure Chest of Bluebeam, Tool Chests

03.20.25

Leadership Workshop
Leading Through Change

APRIL

04.2.25

Embracing the Power of Generational Communication and DiSC Workshop

04.15.25

Part 1: Excel Custom Lists and Formulas

04.16.25

Leadership Workshop
Influencing Without Authority

04.23.25

Estimating Workshop with Blueprint Reading

04.29.25

Part 2: Excel Custom Lists and Formulas

MAY

05.06.25

Part 1: Word Tips for Non-Word Users

05.07.25

Leadership Workshop
Effective Presentation Skills

05.20.25

Part 2: Word Tips for Non-Word Users

IN BRIEF

In January, SMACNA held the first of what will be a quarterly panel discussing the current political climate, featuring Aaron Hilger, Stan Kolbe and Denise Murphy McGraw. The group gave insight on what contractors should keep in mind as we navigate Trump's return to the White House.

THREE BIG THINGS

HOW TRUMP 2.0 COULD AFFECT CONSTRUCTION

AARON HILGER, STAN KOLBE AND DENISE MURPHY MCGRAW

At the time of this publication, President Trump's second administration is little more than one month into office and continuing to make moves in the confirmation process to secure cabinet picks. In January, SMACNA held the first of what will be a quarterly panel discussing the current political climate, featuring Aaron Hilger, Stan Kolbe and Denise Murphy McGraw. The group gave insight on what contractors should keep in mind as we navigate Trump's return to the White House.

1

SLOWING OF NATIONAL LABOR FORCE GROWTH

According to Kolbe, our industry is likely to continue experiencing a shortage of skilled labor throughout the current administration. With Trump's first term as a guide, the possibility is high that restrictive immigration measures and policies would result in slower labor force growth and higher labor costs. Hilger also expressed his disappointment at the failure to come up with a sound immigration structure designed to allow American infrastructure to grow.

However, due to the extensive training required for union apprentices, Kolbe said "SMACNA produces the superstars of construction." While we don't have a crystal ball to predict the next four years, we do know continued recruitment should remain a priority for our industry. There's also optimism that, due to increased infrastructure spending and CHIPS-funded projects, man-hours for our workforce will continue to expand.

2

PRIORITIZING INDOOR AIR QUALITY

McGraw referenced indoor air quality as the No. 1 initiative at the state level, noting there's still much work to be done aligning the overall goals of local and federal government.

Recently, SMACNA, ASHRAE, the U.S. Green Building Council and other organizations have joined in support of legislation (H.R. 9131) designed to help prevent or reduce exposure to indoor contaminants and support the development of technical assistance, guidelines and best practices to improve IAQ in facilities. SMACNA and SMART also support the AIRBORNE Act (H.R. 9000), which provides \$1 per square foot tax credit, not exceeding the cost of conducting the assessment, to incentivize non-residential building owners to assess their IAQ and upgrade their ventilation and air filtration systems.

Regardless of the political climate in Washington, D.C., SMACNA and our allies will continue advancing tax incentives and protecting existing infrastructure investments for the betterment of our communities.

3

CONGRESS AND CABINET SELECTIONS

With only a three-seat majority in the Senate, there will be "limited opportunities to make significant legislation happen," Kolbe said. He also noted we're coming off a challenging Congress that passed the lowest number of bills in recent history but remains optimistic for the coming term.

Hilger, Kolbe and McGraw made note that there are a number of logical cabinet picks that should be good for the overall industry. In particular, they were excited for potential Labor Secretary pick Lori Chavez-DeRemer. One of the most pro-union Republicans to recently serve in Congress, she has walked the aisle with many SMACNA members and has a long line of policies that align with SMACNA initiatives.



ABOUT WESTSIDE MECHANICAL

A team from Westside Mechanical recently wrapped up expansion work at the William E. Dugan Training Center in Wilmington, Illinois. The 342,000-square-foot center was upgraded to double the indoor training area and better meet the operational needs of Local 150.



PROJECT FEATURE

WSM WORKS ON NEW LOCAL 150 EXPANSION

WILMINGTON, ILLINOIS

A team from Westside Mechanical recently wrapped up expansion work at the William E. Dugan Training Center in Wilmington, Illinois. The 342,000-square-foot center was upgraded to house an indoor training area, 30 classrooms, a construction material testing lab, state-of-the-art welding facility, 200 pieces of heavy equipment and more. The \$2 million project took approximately 9 months to complete.

PROJECT COST

\$2M

EMPLOYEES

6-8

COMPLETION TIME

9 MONTHS

SCOPE OF WORK

The WSM team provided the engineering, design and drawings to upgrade the existing training areas for diesel heavy equipment and road paving heavy equipment. They were able to double the training area by adding 79,000 square feet. Input from the general contractor and Local 150 personnel was imperative to refine the design and meet their operational needs.

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

According to John Shaw, WSM Vice President – Sales Engineer, a basic concern with this particular project was the smoky atmosphere when diesel and gas equipment would run indoors during cold weather. The WSM team designed the system to provide conditioned heated makeup air as required (variable) and exhaust fans to increase air changes to maintain low smoke, CO and NO levels. A full building automation system with detailed control sequence to control temperature and ventilation rate was included, with CO/NO detectors.

PHOTOS



IN BRIEF

Matt Gugala, SMART Local 265 Business Manager, headlined our November 12 membership meeting. His presentation detailed new additions and changes to the apprenticeship program for the betterment of contractors, along with a genuine desire to cultivate a stronger labor-management partnership.

EVENT RECAP

MEMBERSHIP MEETING

11.12.24 | OAK BROOK, ILLINOIS

Matt Gugala, SMART Local 265 Business Manager, joined a full house at Gibsons Oak Brook as the featured presenter during our November 12 membership meeting. Gugala's new leadership role follows the departure of John Daniel, who has become the new SMART General Secretary-Treasurer.

Gugala began with a brief introduction of his background as a field worker before joining Local 265 nearly 25 years ago.

"Two-thirds of my time in the industry has been field experience. I come with that

perspective — to make sure we always have the contractor in mind," Gugala said.

Throughout his presentation, Gugala repeated the importance and genuine desire of labor and management working together, establishing open communication channels and finding common ground.

Though he wasn't able to attend the meeting, Martin Sulc from Air Design Systems received the company's new member plaque this fall while attending a separate event. We're thrilled to have Air Design's participation!



LOCAL 265 HAPPENINGS

Purchase of new building in Downers Grove that'll house a new training center, union hall and funds department.

Plans to implement more "practice how you play" training simulating real jobsite experience.

Revamped apprenticeship testing to be more like the military's ASVAB test designed to better measure strengths and anticipate potential success in the industry.

Exploration of apprentice portability to "help move the industry forward in a way that better helps every contractor."



LOUIS OCHOA JOINS THE BOARD

Join us in welcoming the newest addition to the SMACNA Greater Chicago Board of Directors: Louis Ochoa of Ochoa Mechanical Group.

"I'M SUPER EXCITED TO LEARN FROM THE TALENT CURRENTLY ON THE BOARD AND TO PROVIDE INSIGHT WHEREVER I CAN."

LOU OCHOA

Louis Ochoa began his career in the industry as a senior project manager with Midwest Mechanical Construction. Through nearly 40 years, he's held several positions with other companies, including Executive Vice President of Westside Mechanical, before founding Ochoa Mechanical Group in 2018.

SAVE THE DATE



FINANCIAL ESSENTIALS FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

03.27.25 | 4-7PM

PINSTRIPES OAK BROOK, ILLINOIS

Taking control of your finances is a powerful step in securing your future, and having a solid grasp of your personal finances can make all the difference in achieving your long-term goals. Join J.P. Morgan Executive Director Kelly Spengler and banker Caroline O'Brien as they discuss how mastering key concepts like budgeting, saving and investing will help set yourself up for lasting success.

The presentation will be followed by bocce ball and networking over complimentary drinks and appetizers.



Register by **MARCH 20**
SMACNAGreaterChicago.org/YES

IN BRIEF

On December 7, SMACNA Greater Chicago members gathered at Hotel Arista to celebrate the holiday season and toast our collective accomplishments.

EVENT RECAP

2024 HOLIDAY DINNER & DANCE

12.07.24 | NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS



As each year winds down, we look forward to celebrating the holiday season during our Holiday Dinner & Dance. Our last festive party of the year took place at the stunning Hotel Arista on December 7, where SMACNA Greater Chicago members gathered to mingle and toast our collective achievements.

New this year was a 360 photo booth, a unique, interactive photo experience for guests to create their own memories of the event. It was a hit! After dinner, attendees danced the night away to a live band.

Thanks to everyone who attended! We're proud of everything we've accomplished together and anticipate another successful year of innovating solutions to our industry's most challenging issues.



View the full album
bit.ly/412lcZC



ABOUT GT MECHANICAL

GT Mechanical was founded in 1991. For more than 30 years, the company has been a family-owned enterprise with an outstanding reputation in the HVAC industry in the Chicagoland and Northwest Indiana areas.



MEMBER FEATURE

30+ YEARS OF HVAC SOLUTIONS

Tim Uher was a Local 597 pipefitter by trade, but there was something incomplete about working for other contractors in his early career. Always a hard worker, he began putting his energy toward starting his own company.

In 1991, GT Mechanical became a reality, revolving around a simple promise to Tim's customers: "If I can't fix it, I'm not going to charge you."

"That's how he started growing the business," said Greg Uher, Tim's brother and President of GT Mechanical Projects & Design. "He's very good with customers and very good at fixing HVAC systems and understanding how they should work."

The company's early years focused on service work, with Tim building a reputation for delivering exceptional service, products and solutions for commercial, institutional and light industrial clients. After a decade of success, customer demand drove the company's expansion into construction. In 2001, Greg joined the company to oversee the Projects & Design division, transforming GT Mechanical into a full-service operation specializing in plan and spec and design/build processes.

"We take a holistic approach to the project," Greg said. "Whenever we get involved, it's not just figuring out how to get to a certain number, it's how do we

solve a problem and ultimately make the end user happy with the system they end up with."

Today, GT Mechanical employs approximately 60 people, with staff split between office and field operations. The company maintains strong union relationships, becoming signatory to Local 265 in the early 2000s. The business remains deeply family-oriented, with multiple generations working together, including Tim's daughter Sam, who now runs the service division.

The "GT" name itself predates the business, when Tim and Greg's father, a career estimator, created a custom-designed product for a customer as a freelance opportunity. He needed to bill the client under a company name, so used his sons' initials. Tim officially adopted the name when he founded the company, building on a legacy of innovation and problem-solving.

That appetite for innovation, Greg says, is what sets the GT Mechanical team apart from others in the industry. He cited a recent project in the city involving a shrine that had decayed over time and needed extensive restoration in addition to an upgraded HVAC system. GT's reputation for understanding complex systems and thriving in the face of a challenge made them the ideal partner to find a creative solution.

FEATURED WORK



Holy Trinity



Humboldt Park Health Wellness Center



Humboldt Park Health Wellness Center

Another high-profile project currently underway is the Humboldt Park Health Wellness Center, state-of-the-art, 45,000-square-foot facility designed to serve as a hub for wellness, culture and community. The center will provide incomparable facilities, services and programming while showcasing local artists' work throughout its multi-level space.

"HVAC is one of the most noticeable things in a building because the occupants are either comfortable or they're uncomfortable," Greg said. "It's not glamorous, but it's definitely noticeable, so we really try to make sure the end user gets what they're expecting."

In terms of technological innovation, GT Mechanical aims to stay on the forefront with tools that make their workforce safer and more efficient. Recently, they've invested in

their first exoskeleton to help with lifting and to prevent injuries. This wearable technology is designed to support and enhance the physical attributes of the wearer, allowing them to more easily complete repetitive tasks with less strain or lift heavier loads.

"It's been around for a while, but it's become more affordable. We do a lot of work where your arms are over your head, which creates wear and tear, so we're looking for ways to reduce injuries and fatigue and make it better for the employee," Greg said.

"WE TAKE A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO THE PROJECT. IT'S NOT JUST FIGURING OUT HOW TO GET TO A CERTAIN NUMBER, IT'S HOW DO WE SOLVE A PROBLEM AND ULTIMATELY MAKE THE END USER HAPPY."

GREG UHER
President, Projects & Design

The company's success stems from its customer-first mentality. As Greg summarized their business philosophy, "You've got to be profitable, but at the same time, you've got to do it right the first time." This commitment to quality continues to drive GT Mechanical forward as they serve the Chicagoland area's HVAC needs.



View more GT Mechanical work
gtmechanical.com/our-work

IN BRIEF

The strength of SMACNA Greater Chicago lies in the expertise and energy that each of our valued members brings to our association. Join us in welcoming our newest members!

NEW TO THE ASSOCIATION

WELCOME TO SMACNA GREATER CHICAGO!

SMACNA Greater Chicago provides a common voice in legislative issues and labor relations for contractors involved with heating, ventilating, air conditioning, architectural sheet metal work, pollution control, materials handling, roofing, testing and balancing, and retrofitting. SMACNA Greater Chicago provides its members with the latest training, information, and services vital to maintaining their edge in the sheet metal industry.

Working alongside member contractors through educational programs and industry-specific committees, SMACNA Greater Chicago helps member contractors improve their businesses, while elevating the entire sheet metal industry.

CONTRACTOR COMPANIES

93

Our contractor companies receive the best training, information and services to help maintain their edge in the sheet metal industry.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

40

Our associate members offer the support and professionalism our contractor companies need to maximize success.

AIRDESIGNSYSTEMS
INNOVATION. QUALITY. SAFETY.

Willow Springs, Illinois

CONTRACTOR MEMBER

AIR DESIGN SYSTEMS, INC.

Since 1977, Air Design Systems, Inc. has been recognized as one of the most innovative and qualified sheet metal/HVAC contractors in the United States. Whether you are looking at a simple commercial remodel or a large project that requires design and assist aspects, Air Design Systems delivers the innovation, quality and safety that you need.

(630) 281-9258 | **MATT MELE:** mmele@airdesignsys.com

BULLDOG CARTAGE
PORTER FAMILY COMPANIES

Addison, Illinois

ASSOCIATE MEMBER

BULLDOG CARTAGE, LLC

Bulldog Cartage is a Porter Family company that offers premier specialized shipping, storage and handling, as well as unique job services to provide professional solutions to any logistical challenge. We strive to provide innovative solutions to bring value and professionalism to every project that we approach.

(630) 426-4000 | **DAN BROWN:** dbrown@bulldogcartage.com

NEFCO
UNITED WE BUILD

East Hartford, Connecticut

ASSOCIATE MEMBER

NEFCO

Since 1981, we've been known for extensive industry expertise, large local inventories, dependable jobsite delivery, turnkey engineering services, and specialty fabrication and assembly of construction materials. But we really stand for something bigger as the manufacturer's voice.

(800) 969-0285 | **MIKE GLEASON:** mike.gleason@nefcocorp.com



ABOUT O'MALLEY BROTHERS

Founded in 1931, O'Malley Brothers has seen three generations of family-owned leadership - and twin brothers John and James Reddington are poised to take over as the fourth generation. With nearly a century of service in the Chicagoland area, the brothers are excited for the next chapter of the business.



Marist Sports Complex

"IN LIFE, EVERYONE ALWAYS TALKS ABOUT BALANCE BUT YOU FORGET THAT BALANCE MEANS REALLY GOOD, UPLIFTING THINGS AND ALSO EQUALLY HARD THINGS AND HEARTBREAK. HOW WE RESPOND DURING THOSE TIMES IS A TESTAMENT TO CHARACTER."

JOHN REDDINGTON | O'Malley Brothers

ASSOCIATE MEMBER FEATURE

CREATING LASTING IMPRESSIONS:

OVERCOMING HARDSHIPS AND FOLLOWING OPPORTUNITIES



L-R: John, Jack, Dee Dee and James Reddington

In the 94 years since its founding in 1931, O'Malley Brothers, Inc. has seen three generations of family-owned leadership. Twin brothers and co-vice presidents John and James Reddington are poised to take over as the fourth generation, continuing the legacy of the company when their father, Jack, chooses to step down.

"We're knocking on the door of 100 years, and that's kind of exciting," John said. "For my brother and I, that transition means planning for the future, adapting and evolving. It's an exciting time in terms of where we are and where we're heading. And as for my parents, they've always been generous, kind, active and engaged, and I'd love to have them a part of it for as long as they want."

Nine decades is an accomplishment for any company be proud of; particularly when it involves overcoming obstacles. In the case of O'Malley Brothers, Jack suffered a severe and abrupt illness a few short years ago (he has since made a full recovery), causing the brothers to step into their leadership role quicker than anticipated. During the same time, they dealt with an internal embezzlement case. Ever the optimist, John viewed these obstacles as opportunities to continue developing and, ultimately, thrive.

"Hard times are some of the most important lessons," he said. "In life, everyone always talks about balance but you forget that balance means really good, uplifting things and also equally hard things and heartbreak. How we respond during those times is a testament to character."

The brothers found tremendous support in SMACNA Greater Chicago, particularly current association president Jeff Lukitsh and other leaders from local companies.

"My father had always had a great relationship with Jeff, and it's because and through him that we became a member," John said. "It's all about building relationships, and we've connected with some very supportive and helpful people. I look forward to being a part of the organization for a long time. SMACNA is a huge opportunity for us to evolve and build our company."

From the beginning, O'Malley has specialized in everything related to mechanical systems that involves insulation; specifically, duct insulation. On any given project, that could include everything from outside air, supply and return duct (fire protection) and all related piping components for these systems. They've worked on dozens of high-profile projects — many in partnership with SMACNA Greater Chicago members: the 109th floor of the Willis Tower, Art Institute of Chicago, Sawmill Garden, a 10,000 square foot rooftop duct job at Marist Sports Complex and specialty projects like the Western Avenue Pumping Station.

"One of the fun things about our industry is we work in some incredibly fascinating places, and there's such a process in how everything is done to reach the final product," John said. "Some of the stuff we do requires a unique skillset and the techs really get to show off their craft, trade and skill set."

As O'Malley Brothers nears one century of service in the Chicagoland area, the brothers are excited for the next chapter of the business. Their goals for the future include broadening their customer network and expanding their services, noting remediation services and energy efficiency solutions as possibilities.

At the end of the day, connections are key, whether it's continuing to develop their close relationships with all their employees or cultivate their existing client relationships.

"A lot of people put a lot of work to build this and I'm proud of who they are and what they've accomplished, and it's a privilege to be part of," John said.

IN BRIEF

The 2025 Safety & Health Conference took place January 13-16 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Designed to foster collaboration and offer best practices and resources, the event drew hundreds of safety professionals from throughout the industry, including SMACNA Greater Chicago members.

EVENT RECAP

SAFETY & HEALTH CONFERENCE

01.13.25 - 01.16.25 | FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA



Fleet risk management was discussed

The 2025 Safety & Health Conference — an event in partnership with SMACNA, MCAA and TAUC — took place January 13-16 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Designed to foster collaboration and offer best practices and resources, the event drew hundreds of safety professionals from throughout the industry.

Jennifer Koss, Controller at GT Mechanical Projects & Design, was one of the attendees from our membership who reported on the success of the conference. Overall, the

format this year wasn't as conducive to networking with peers as in the past, but she thought the breakout sessions were high quality.

"The AI session was fascinating," Koss said. "It is certainly the way of the future. I thought the training videos the instructor created for his company were excellent, and he did a great job presenting."

She elaborated on the use of artificial intelligence as it pertains to safety, noting the instructor showcased entire safety compliance videos that

"THE AI SESSION WAS FASCINATING. IT IS CERTAINLY THE WAY OF THE FUTURE."

JENNIFER KOSS

were created by loading a script into a software program and choosing an AI avatar and voice to narrate. The best part is that content can be customized based on the company or topic rather than reusing generic content.

Another session Koss attended was a themed escape room experience where participants used mobile devices to access a video based on a real safety incident along with witness statements to complete an accident investigation.

"When we completed one step, the next step opened for us until we found the root cause of the incident," she said. "I learned a great approach to completing an investigation. I was lacking in that department, so it's a great tool and resource for me moving forward."

Fleet risk management was another topic Koss enjoyed, and one that certainly applies to most SMACNA Greater Chicago members. Minimizing risk can include driver training, vehicle maintenance, loading practices and more to help ensure compliance and the safety of all drivers and company assets.

SAVE THE DATE

SOLD OUT



2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE
04.24.25 - 04.27.25
NASSAU, BAHAMAS

Drink in the beauty of a Caribbean paradise during SMACNA Greater Chicago's 2025 Annual Conference! This year's event is set in Nassau, Bahamas, at The Cove Atlantis — a secluded haven where guests can relax, rejuvenate and create unforgettable memories.

In addition to an informative business meeting, conference attendees will be able to choose from a variety of activities, excursions and dining experiences to elevate their stay on this vibrant island.

IN BRIEF

With Women in Construction (WIC) Week set for March 2-8, we wanted to highlight the strength of women within SMACNA Greater Chicago. We caught up with Danielle Wilson, a Local 265 journeywoman, for a glimpse into her everyday life on the job.

Q&A SESSION

CONSTRUCTING CHANGE

DANIELLE WILSON, LOCAL UNION 265 JOURNEYWOMAN



Danielle Wilson

Recent years have begun to see a positive shift in the role of women in construction. Making up 11% of the overall industry, women are being promoted to leadership roles in both the office and field. They're also following more opportunities to become owners of their own construction businesses. And according to The Institute for Women's Policy Research, female representation in the trades is the highest it's been in two decades.

With Women in Construction (WIC) Week set for March 2-8, we wanted to highlight the strength of women within SMACNA Greater Chicago. We caught up with Danielle Wilson, a Local 265 journeywoman, for a glimpse into her everyday life on the job.

Q HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN THE INDUSTRY?

A My dream was actually to be a surgeon, but I ended up becoming a young mom and trying to do college and beauty school to make money. Also, once I started to work in a hospital, I realized I was too emotional. I come from a family where all the males are blue collar workers, and I have two brothers-in-law who are tanners. They kept telling me to apply and the apprenticeship was going to go quick — and they were right. It did. I got started as a pre-apprentice in 2016/2017.

Q WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED/OVERCOME AS A WOMAN IN A MALE-DOMINATED FIELD?

A As a woman in construction, you have to kind of stand your ground and get that thick skin — and I had to learn how to get it quick. But especially being a mom in this industry, a big challenge is daycare. You have to have tools in hand at 6 a.m., and that's after an hour-and-a-half drive to get to work in the city. Plus, you have to be there 30 minutes before, so it's a struggle. There's a lot of single dads out there, too, and you can't keep telling your company you're going to be late or your kids don't have school. Daycare is something my union has been looking into more and more this last year.

Also, tanners have the least amount of women in the trade, so they'd never had a woman come through that was pregnant. When I got pregnant, my biggest fear was that I was going to get laid off so I waited to say anything until I started showing. When I called my union president, he was excited for me. It was right away the leadership sat down and discussed maternity leave and voted on it. It was huge. My brothers I have — they're family.

Q WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHER WOMEN OR STUDENTS LOOKING TO ENTER THE TRADES?

A It's OK to come into the industry and not know anything. You learn on the job! Your journeymen are your best teachers. I was as green as they came; I'd never heard of sheet metal until my brothers-in-law, and I'd never held snips. Now, I'm my company's sheet metal welder. Even if this particular trade isn't for you, there are so many others. You could be a plumber or electrician. Just find something you like and stick with it.

IN BRIEF

The first measurable snow of the season didn't stop our members from turning hunger into hope at the Feed My Starving Children meal packing volunteer event in November! This was such a wonderful team building event that we hope to make it an annual volunteering opportunity.

"IT WAS AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE TO PACK 31,000 MEALS FOR THOSE IN NEED."

Laurie Leonard
SMACNA Greater Chicago



EVENT RECAP

MEMBERS GATHER TO GIVE BACK

11.21.24 | AURORA, ILLINOIS



Members packed 144 boxes supplying 85 kids a meal for a year

Weather around the holidays is unpredictable, so we got a little nervous when the forecast called for the first snow of the season on November 21 — the date of our group volunteering activity. The snow came — but it didn't stop our members from turning hunger into hope at the Feed My Starving Children meal packing event in Aurora.

By the end of our session, our team of 30 rockstars packed an astonishing 31,104 meals, making a tangible difference in the lives of those in need.



SAVE THE DATE



CEA NATIONAL ISSUES CONFERENCE

05.05.25 - 05.07.25
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Members are encouraged to participate in the 2025 CEA National Issues Conference, set for May 5-7 at the Royal Sonesta Washington DC Capitol Hill. Presented in partnership with SMACNA, MCAA and TAUC, this event will focus on key regulatory and legislative issues affecting the union construction industry. Don't miss the opportunity to meet with Congressional regulators and representatives for the latest information that impacts your business!



Register today!
<https://bit.ly/3CwK4Sj>

IN BRIEF

If you've used voice assistants like Siri and Alexa, you've used technology powered by artificial intelligence. AI isn't new, but it has grown exponentially in recent years — and has the power to transform the construction industry in ways that will help our businesses become more efficient and productive.

TECHNOLOGY

THE RISE OF AI IN CONSTRUCTION



Artificial intelligence isn't a new concept. In fact, you probably don't even realize how much it's already integrated into your daily life. For example, if you've ever used Google Maps, you've seen AI at work. You've probably interacted with a chatbot to confirm or track an order; that's AI, too. And with 8.4 billion voice assistants like Siri and Alexa in use in 2024, it's all but guaranteed an AI-backed helper has joined you at home or on the go.

AI already powers our lives in so many ways — it makes sense to start exploring how it can help our businesses become more efficient.

In October, Stratus CEO Jake Olsen joined SMACNA members from across the county for an informative presentation titled "AI for Construction" during the 2024 Annual Convention. Members found his workshop to be eye-opening — so much so that Olsen joined us for an encore presentation during our SMACNA Greater Chicago January 2025 Board Retreat. His session was jam-packed with real-world insights and tools that are helping shape the technology landscape for today's contractors.

"WE'VE BEEN LOOKING INTO HOW TO UPLOAD DRAWINGS INTO CHATGPT AND ARE USING AI FOR QUICK ANSWERS AND SUMMARIES TO PULL ACCURATE EQUIPMENT QUANTITIES FOR A MORE EFFICIENT BIDDING PROCESS."

MIKE SUGGS | Synergy Mechanical

MICROSOFT® COPILOT

Copilot is Microsoft's generative AI, and it can be used within Office apps, Windows and more. In the construction industry, this tool can assist with faster document creation and summarization, provide automated review and suggestions for better document quality, and offer custom GPTs for improved contract review and project management.



CHATGPT

ChatGPT has the potential to support your business in a number of ways, from creating company announcements and writing job descriptions, to summarizing lengthy documents and editing for grammar or spelling. It can also analyze large data sets and provide insights.



AUTOMATED MEETING NOTES

Sometimes, you have to step out of a meeting to take a call. But using AI powered notetaking tools can allow you to go back and review all the high points — including what you might have missed. Some popular AI notetakers on the market today include Fireflies.ai and Fathom.



Now, let's address the elephant in the room: Will AI replace people when we're already experiencing a shortage of skilled labor? In short, no. Instead, AI has the potential to help this shortage. For example, if a project manager can effectively use AI to help with RFIs, change orders and more routine tasks, their time will be freed

up to take on more projects. Also, AI isn't perfect. It still takes a human's eyes to review the output and make necessary changes to ensure accurate data.

"I'm not looking to replace people using AI, but now I can take on more volume with the same amount of people and have them focus

on other tasks to help expand the company," said Jeff Lukitsh, President of Westside Mechanical.

At the end of the day, AI can't build a high-rise or data center (yet, anyway), but it certainly can augment our processes and people in charge to help make our jobs more efficient.

IN BRIEF

In October 2024, a group of 57 SMACNA Greater Chicago members and guests traveled to California for the SMACNA Annual Convention. In addition to learning about the future of AI in construction, we had a fantastic Chapter Night at the former Dinah Shore Estate in Palm Springs, and Joe Passannante joined the SMACNA National Board of Directors.

EVENT RECAP

SMACNA ANNUAL CONVENTION

10.27.24 - 10.30.24 | PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA

In October 2024, a group of 57 SMACNA Greater Chicago members and guests traveled to Palm Desert, California, for the SMACNA Annual Convention. As always, this industry event mixed incredible educational sessions and the popular Product Show with plenty of networking opportunities.

One of the most anticipated sessions of the convention was the "AI for Construction" workshop, which gave an overview of the artificial intelligence landscape along with real-world examples of tools contractors can use today (see a full article on this topic on page XX). Member

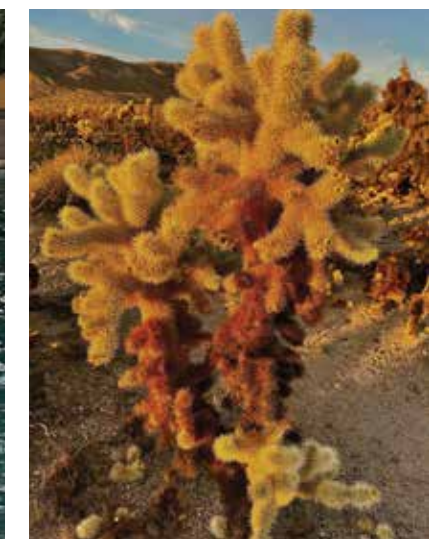
Devon Madon, VP of Madon Sheet Metal, also presented a well-attended session on imposter syndrome. We're hopeful she'll join our lineup of future speakers for YES events and share her expertise with rising leaders in our association.

For our Chapter Night, we dined at the beautiful 432 Hermosa — an iconic Palm Springs estate originally designed for celebrity Dinah Shore. Today, the property has received a modern makeover by Hollywood legend Leonardo DiCaprio. Our group enjoyed entertainment by a DiCaprio look-alike and synchronized swimmers, along

with incredible drinks and fabulous food — all set on 1.3 lush acres with a gorgeous view of the San Jacinto Mountains.

Finally, join us in congratulating Past President Joe Passannante on his nomination to the SMACNA National Board of Directors! He and three other industry leaders officially took office following the adjournment of the Annual Convention.

The 2025 Annual Convention will take place October 26-29 in Maui, Hawaii. Registration will open later this spring. Stay tuned for details!



To see all upcoming events
bit.ly/4b5yFpc

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