

THIRD EDITION 2025

SMACNA GREATER CHICAGO

METAL PRESS

ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE



THIRD EDITION 2025

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

FROM INNOVATION TO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, WE'RE STRENGTHENING OUR INDUSTRY'S FUTURE.

Fall is officially in full swing, and with it comes a collective sigh of relief as we leave the hustle of summer in the rearview mirror.

The summer season brought plenty of activity. Many of our members were involved in mega projects, exploring new ways to integrate AI and keeping pace with a steady stream of bidding opportunities. Despite economic uncertainties around tariffs early in the year, the city is now starting to boom with tenant improvement projects. With remote and hybrid work fueling demand for adaptable, engaging workspaces, our contractors are more than equipped to handle these evolving needs.

As our industry continues to face the challenge of finding labor, we're proud to join national initiatives designed to grow the workforce. Two of our members, DeKalb Mechanical and Sheet Metal Werks, participated as host camps in the Heavy Metal Summer Experience. These camps give local teens the opportunity to work alongside our most respected union craft professionals, with the goal of helping them envision their future in a high-paying, rewarding career. See page 24 for a full camp recap. We also celebrate Local 265's recent apprentice graduates. The future of our industry is bright!

As I close out my term as SMACNA Greater Chicago President, I want to thank each of you for your support. I'm honored to pass the torch to Tom Coonan during our Annual Holiday Dinner Dance on December 6. Tom's dedication, expertise and strong industry relationships will serve our membership well in the coming years.



JEFF LUKITSH
Westside Mechanical, Inc.

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27 2026 PARTNERS IN PROGRESS CONFERENCE

UPCOMING LUNCH & LEARNS

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

OCTOBER

10.30.25

Lunch and Learn

Part 2: Goodbye Legal Pad,
Hello OneNote

NOVEMBER

11.20.25

Lunch and Learn

Part 1: Outlook's
Overlooked Features

DECEMBER

12.18.25

Lunch and Learn

Part 2: Outlook's
Overlooked Features

JANUARY

01.08.26

Lunch and Learn

Part 1: Excel Level 1

01.15.26

Lunch and Learn

Part 2: Excel Level 1

IN BRIEF

In September, SMART Local 265 celebrated the graduation of its 2025 Apprenticeship Class, honoring their hard work, dedication and achievements as they advance in the skilled trades.

EVENT RECAP

SHAPING THE INDUSTRY: LOCAL 265 APPRENTICES GRADUATE

9.5.25 | DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS

On September 5, SMART Local 265 celebrated the graduation of the Apprenticeship Class of 2025! The ceremony honored the hard work, dedication and achievements of these talented individuals as they complete a critical chapter in their training and step into the next stage of their careers in the skilled trades.

At SMACNA Greater Chicago, we are proud to support programs that develop

the next generation of sheet metal professionals. These graduates not only demonstrated technical skill, but also the perseverance, commitment and professionalism that make our industry strong.

Congratulations! We're thrilled to see this group represent SMART Local 265 as they continue to grow and elevate the sheet metal industry.





SHEET METAL GRADUATES

Steven Biedrom
Benjamin Gelsvik
Austin Gibson
Collin Johnson
Nicholas Johnson
Aaron Kapper
Dylan Kohley
Zachary Lehman
Richard Lozano
Mathew Maldonado
Joseph McNulty
William B. Meier
Jason Pontrelli
Jacob Reece
Patrick Shioli
Thomas Syron Jr.
Nicholas Taylor

SERVICE GRADUATES

Daniel Davidson
Christopher Dusek
Christopher Jones
Mark Krausz
Jacob Kroll
Zachary Kroll
Jack Miller
Vincent Morini
Adan Perez
Henry Peters
Matthew Seavers

LOCAL 219 GRADUATES

Cain Hill
Alejandro Huertero
Carter Kleckler
Dylan Plum
Nicholas Urban

■ SAVE THE DATE



FEED MY STARVING CHILDREN VOLUNTEER EVENT

11.20.25 | 2 - 3:45p.m.

***FEED MY STARVING CHILDREN
AURORA, ILLINOIS***

COCKTAILS AND SMALL BITES 4 - 6p.m.

***EMPIRE BURGERS + BREW
NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS***

The SMACNA Greater Chicago YES Committee has partnered with Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) to pack food for underprivileged children worldwide. This food-packing event aims to make a tangible difference in the lives of those in need. YES believes this initiative aligns with the values of our organization and provides a unique opportunity for members to come together and make a positive impact.

Food packing takes place from 2-3:45 p.m. at 555 Exchange Court in Aurora. Once that's wrapped up, we'll head to Empire Burgers + Brew at 48 W. Chicago in Naperville for small bites, cocktails and conversation.



Join us again!

smacnagreaterchicago.org/yes



■ IN BRIEF

SMACNA Greater Chicago members received key industry updates from SMACNA's Eli Howard during the September Membership Meeting, covering testing, standards and emerging technologies. Among the highlights were architectural sheet metal gutter testing for code compliance, a new Technical Resources Bulletin and the development of a Laser Welding Best Practices Guide.

■ THREE BIG THINGS

INDUSTRY UPDATES DESIGNED TO BENEFIT YOU

ELI HOWARD, SMACNA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL SERVICES

Eli Howard, SMACNA's Executive Director of Technical Services, joined us as the featured speaker during our regular Membership Meeting on September 9. His presentation highlighted key industry updates designed to benefit SMACNA members, including recent testing programs for architectural sheet metal and duct construction, upcoming revisions and translations for standards, AI usage in industry applications and more.

We followed up with Howard after the meeting to zero in on three major issues members should keep an eye on.

1

ARCHITECTURAL SHEET METAL TESTING

SMACNA is currently conducting architectural gutter testing on copper, aluminum, stainless steel and galvanized systems to ensure compliance with the International Building Code's ANSI/SPRI GT-1 requirements. Covering both commercial and residential applications, this testing is a critical step to confirm that SMACNA standards align with national building code requirements. For contractors, this means added confidence that the methods and materials they rely on are not only industry best practices but also code-compliant — helping deliver safe, durable and reliable installations to clients.

2

TECHINCAL RESOURCES BULLETIN

SMACNA is preparing to issue a new Technical Resources Bulletin (TRB) to clarify the revised detail of the T25a and T25b corner pieces with fasteners. The update will specify that a carriage bolt — along with screws, lags or equivalent fasteners — is an acceptable option. This clarification comes in response to questions from code inspectors and is expected to be released this fall. This bulletin will provide SMACNA members with clear guidance and flexibility in fastening methods, making compliance easier and installations more straightforward in the field.

3

LASER WELDING GUIDE

SMACNA is also developing a Laser Welding Best Practices Guide. By standardizing setup and application, the guide will help contractors adopt this versatile and efficient technology on their own shop floors and deliver cleaner welds, less distortion and greater precision across all projects. For customers, it means high-quality products delivered faster and with more reliability. This guide will focus solely on practical application, with a separate safety resource in the works for later publication.



Questions on specific technical issues?
Contact Eli Howard at ehoward@smacna.org



ABOUT AERO PERFORMANCE GROUP

Using monitor-based commissioning and high-tech data analytics, Aero Performance Group analyzes building systems to identify inefficiencies and enhance performance. Their work delivers significant energy savings and carbon emission reductions for clients.

MEMBER FEATURE

DATA-DRIVEN BUILDING OPTIMIZATION:

AERO PERFORMANCE GROUP'S HIGH-TECH APPROACH

When Aero Performance Group Vice President Nick Muscolino walks through downtown Chicago, he sees more than iconic architecture. He sees projects his company left its mark on by improving energy efficiency, reducing carbon emissions and saving six-figure sums of money.

"I like the performance aspect of the job," Nick says. "The fact that I've gotten to be a part of a lot of major projects throughout the city over the past 20 years—there's definitely a sense of pride, where I can go downtown and be like, 'oh, I worked on that building, that building, that building.'"

Aero Performance Group was founded as Aero Testing and Balancing in 1967 as an arm of the Chicagoland Sheet Metal contractor Climatedp. For more than 40 years, the company provided HVAC testing and balancing services to the greater Chicago area. After Climatedp sold Aero to the Hill Group in 2012, the company began expanding services.

"In around 2017 we saw there's a whole other side to what we're doing," Nick explains. "Testing and balancing is all about quality assurance, system performance and building performance. So, we brought in energy components and a commissioning component to the group."

This strategic pivot led to a mini rebrand as Aero Building Solutions. The company rebranded again last year to Aero Performance Group, reflecting the total building performance solutions it offers.

Aero Performance Group officially became a SMACNA member last year. Today, with 55 employees spread between field and office teams, Aero Performance Group is on a mission to deliver smart, dynamic solutions that elevate the efficiency of every facility they touch. What sets the company apart is their comprehensive, technology-enhanced approach to building optimization.

"We have hands-on field technicians, professional engineers and commissioning engineers, and we layer in technology and data analytics," Nick notes. "So, we do like a three-prong approach for a customer."

Aero's monitor-based commissioning services (MBCx) represent the cutting edge of building performance optimization. Since 2015, Aero has been plugging into buildings' automation systems, gathering 15-minute interval snapshots of entire facilities. They take that data, analyze it, identify inefficiencies and report back to customers.



CASE STUDY SAMPLE:
CHICAGO HOSPITAL



3.07 MILLION KWH

Energy Savings



5,239 TONS

CO2 Emissions Reduction



\$539,785

Annual Cost Savings

"We get to view into every last valve, sensor, actuator — every parameter built into that building automation system," Nick says.

"We can provide customers with guidance on what to improve and when to improve it, suggest operational tweaks that will enhance their energy efficiency, and really help with predictive maintenance. We can tell customers, 'go take a look at this because it's on the edge,' and they can fix it ahead time, before it becomes an issue."

Aero's data-driven approach yields impressive results, achieving remarkable energy savings for MBCx clients across Chicago. 110 N.

Wacker Dr. saw an energy use reduction of 2,441,976 kilowatt-hours for a verified annual cost savings of \$275,887 and an equivalent emissions reduction of 1,820 tons of CO2. 353 N. Clark St. achieved a reduction of 2,680,402 kilowatt-hours with \$170,243 in annual savings and an equivalent emissions

reduction of 1,900 tons of CO2. Chicago Hospital saw an energy use reduction of 3,067,507 kilowatt-hours for a verified annual cost savings of \$539,785 and an equivalent emissions reduction of 5,239 tons of CO2. Those are big numbers with big impact.

The company's scope is equally impressive, touching over 1,300 jobs annually across major healthcare facilities, large-scale data centers, K-12 schools, commercial high-rises, restaurants and more. This diversity requires a broad skill set.

"... A BYPRODUCT OF WHAT WE DO — THAT ENERGY SAVINGS — IS LOWER CARBON FOOTPRINTS. THAT REALLY AFFECTS THE COMMUNITY, AND IT AFFECTS THE WORLD AROUND US."

NICK MUSCOLINO

Vice President, Aero Performance Group

about everything," Nick says. "You need to know the service side of the business, you need to know construction, design and project management."

"Working in a company like this, you do need to know a little bit

(Continued on Page 8)



View more Aero Performance work
insights.aeropg.com/case-studies

MEMBER FEATURE

DATA-DRIVEN BUILDING OPTIMIZATION: AERO PERFORMANCE GROUP'S HIGH-TECH APPROACH *(Continued from Page 9)*

The knowledge base at Aero has also recently expanded with the company's acquisition of CEPro, a premier provider of critical environment solutions, specializing in healthcare, clean rooms, laboratories and pharmaceutical facilities.

"Clean rooms and other critical environments have a lot of very stringent standards they need to adhere to," Nick explains. "We're able to help with design, build, compliance testing and repairing those systems."



Obviously, Aero Performance Group's work relies on compiling and analyzing massive amounts of data. Processing this huge amount of information efficiently requires leaning on advanced technology, including AI-driven data analytics. That tech is crucial, but Nick emphasizes that the human element remains central to Aero's success.

"There's no replacing the hands-on aspect of it," he says. "You can do so much with data. Data is great, and AI is great — there's an AI portion of the data we do, but in the end it's all about the people and understanding how a building operates and understanding that when you make changes it will affect the occupants. You don't just want to arbitrarily make changes based on what data tells you without having a conversation and understanding what the benefits will be."

While Aero Performance Group excels at the technical aspects of building optimization, Nick takes pride in the broader impact of their work. The energy savings achieved through their monitor-based commissioning and optimization services translate directly into reduced carbon footprints and environmental benefits for the communities they serve.

"We fix things. We are very mechanical, and we get things done. But a byproduct of what we do — that energy savings — is lower carbon footprints," he notes. "That really affects the community, and it affects the world around us."

In an industry where building performance standards continue to rise and energy efficiency becomes increasingly critical, Aero Performance Group's comprehensive approach offers a roadmap for success — one that honors traditional expertise while embracing the technologies of tomorrow.



■ IN BRIEF

Succession planning isn't just about selling your business, it's about making sure your company and legacy continue long after you step away. By preparing emotionally, operationally and financially, contractors can create a smooth exit that protects their team, their business and their peace of mind.



SUCCESSION PLANNING: *ENSURING YOUR COMPANY'S FUTURE*



For contractors, running a successful business isn't just about today, it's about securing the long-term health and continuity of your company. Succession planning is a critical phase to prepare your business for the future, even after you step away.

Recently, Exit Consulting Group presented a webinar for SMACNA members titled Exit Readiness: How Prepared Are You and Your Business? CEO Andrea Steinbrenner began with some hard-hitting statistics: Studies show over 70% of businesses on the market fail to sell

within a year, and 75% of owners regret their exit decision within 12 months. Only about 10% of contractors report a truly successful transition.

Those numbers are eye-opening for many, especially as nearly half of our industry's leaders are expected to retire in the next decade. Without a clear plan, companies risk leadership gaps, disrupted operations and lost value.

But here's the good news: With some careful thought and planning, you can take control of your exit and shape the future of your business on your own terms.

THE EMOTIONAL SIDE OF EXITING

"The emotional impact is huge," Steinbrenner said. "It's super important to spend time on the 'soft side' of your exit before you even get to the transaction."

Taking time to reflect on your personal goals and where you see yourself in your future is just as important as preparing the financial and operational details.

(Continued on Page 12)



CORE ELEMENTS OF A STRONG EXIT STRATEGY



OWNER READINESS

- What motivates your exit — financial security, legacy, continued involvement?
- Are you emotionally and financially prepared for life after the business?
- What will bring you fulfillment in your next chapter?



BUSINESS READINESS

- Can the company operate without your daily involvement?
- Who manages key functions like payroll, cash flow or client relationships?
- Would the business remain profitable if you stepped away for a month?



MARKET READINESS

- Review strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis)
- Understand after-tax proceeds to set realistic financial expectations.
- Consider whether an inside buyer (family, key employee, ESOP) or outside buyer (strategic or private) is the right fit.

At the end of the day, succession planning is about more than dollars and deals. It's about people and the future they'll inherit. Taking time to plan now will help create peace of mind for yourself, your family and your team so you can step away with confidence when the time comes, knowing your legacy will continue to stand strong.

AT A GLANCE:

NEXT STEPS

1

START EARLY

Even if retirement is years away, planning early gives you better options and more flexibility.

2

WEIGH YOUR OPTIONS

Explore your options, including family takeover, ESOP, a third-party sale or internal leadership handoff.

3

IDENTIFY YOUR SUCCESSORS AND THEIR ROLE

Be clear who should take the reins and what skills or training they may need.

4

COMMUNICATE

Keep key family and/or team members informed to maintain confidence and stability throughout the process.

5

PLAN FOR CURVEBALLS

Life happens, and it doesn't always go to plan. Have a contingency plan prepared in the event of an emergency or involuntary exit scenario.

IN BRIEF

SMART Local 265 celebrated the grand opening of its new Union Hall and Training Center in Downers Grove with a ribbon cutting, facility tours and member picnic. The state-of-the-art facility will serve as a hub for training, education and community engagement, reinforcing the union's commitment to the future of the skilled trades.

EVENT RECAP

LOCAL 265 CELEBRATES GRAND OPENING

9.13.25 | DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS

In September, SMART Local 265 celebrated a major milestone with the grand opening and ribbon cutting of its new Union Hall and Training Center in Downers Grove, Illinois. Members, families and community leaders gathered to mark this significant investment in the future of skilled trades and union solidarity.

Special guests included Past Local 265 President John Daniel, U.S. Representative Sean Casten and SMACNA Greater Chicago Board Members Pat Hudgens (Elgin Sheet Metal Co.) and Mike Catanzaro (AMS Industries Inc.).

The new facility stands as a powerful symbol of opportunity and craftsmanship. It will serve as a hub for training, education and community engagement, further reinforcing SMART Local 265's commitment to supporting its members and advancing the skilled trades.





ABOUT TRANE

Trane has been an HVAC household name for a long time, and that's based on the company's 150-year legacy of innovation. The company's Chicago office offers an impressive array of advanced commercial HVAC solutions — like AI-powered building controls — and the training programs and technical support necessary to help contractors and owners attain modern building performance goals.

■ ASSOCIATE MEMBER FEATURE

TRANE CHICAGO: ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION IN COMMERCIAL HVAC



Whether you're in the HVAC industry or not, you're familiar with Trane. The nearly 150-year-old company is a household name thanks to a long history of innovation in heating and cooling. Today, Trane Technologies employs more than 40,000 people in 100-plus countries. Over 200 of those employees work in Trane's Chicago sales office, which specializes in commercial HVAC systems and solutions. And the work they're doing in Illinois is paving a pathway toward increased efficiency, decreased emissions and large sums of money saved in the commercial building sector.

Trane's Chicago team offers a comprehensive portfolio encompassing HVAC equipment, building automation systems, controls, digital and traditional services, parts, turnkey solutions, asset management services and energy services. The team takes a holistic approach to their work,

recognizing buildings as integrated systems rather than collections of independent components.

"We strive to embody the company's vision by delivering our diverse offerings to customers across a wide range of industries, serving as a trusted collaborator and innovator," Trane Chicago Sales Engineer Tyler Szekely said.

Szekely initially joined Trane Chicago as a sales engineering intern in the summer of 2021. When he finished his mechanical engineering degree at Ohio State in 2022, Szekely returned to the company's Chicago branch as a full-time sales engineer. For the past three years, he's supported consulting engineers and mechanical contractors throughout all phases of mechanical system design, procurement and installation.



***“WE STRIVE TO EMBODY THE COMPANY’S VISION BY
DELIVERING OUR DIVERSE OFFERINGS TO CUSTOMERS ACROSS
A WIDE RANGE OF INDUSTRIES, SERVING AS A TRUSTED
COLLABORATOR AND INNOVATOR.”***

TYLER SZEKELY | *Trane Chicago Sales Engineer*

These aren’t the only helpful services Trane Chicago offers. Szekely highlights a comprehensive range of training and educational programs on the proper, safe and efficient installation of HVAC systems as something he’s proud of. These programs include local and regional in-person trainings, online courses, webinars, self-paced modules and customized programs tailored for specific projects. After all, technology is nothing if you don’t know how to use it!

Maybe that last sentence hit a little too close to home? With the advent of smart building controls and AI, the HVAC industry is in the middle of a technology boom. Szekely says his office is seeing growing interest in integrated, sustainable building system approaches, and they’re ready to meet that with a growing offering of innovative solutions.

“For example, our storage source heat pump, a fully electric heat recovery system, leverages thermal energy storage (ice tanks) and advanced heat pump technology for efficient low-ambient operation, enabling clients to benefit from local utility rebates and federal

tax incentives,” Szekely said. “Additionally, owners are utilizing Trane controls and digital service offerings to gain valuable insights that enhance system reliability, maximize uptime, support financial decision-making and validate their investments on projects.”

These tools are changing how HVAC systems function within buildings, shifting them from passive infrastructure to active components of building performance. And the next level of sophistication promises to offer increased data-based insight, functional control and efficiency.

Trane recently announced AI Control and ARIA, which apply artificial intelligence to building optimization and energy management.

“These AI innovations will help us achieve our vision of unlocking next-generation building performance, delivering both immediate and long-term benefits for our customers and the planet,” Szekely said.

Trane’s current collaboration with Northern Illinois University on energy-saving infrastructure upgrades to its DeKalb campus illustrates this approach in practice.

The upgrades include new high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, smart HVAC building controls, thermal energy storage for cooling, the installation of solar photovoltaic panels and systems, building weatherization improvements and more. With everything up and running, NIU’s DeKalb campus is projected to see an energy consumption reduction of over 26%, and an 11% reduction of emissions — which supports NIU’s 2030 sustainability and climate action plan. Projects like this show how energy savings and emissions reduction goals can be addressed through infrastructure planning and technology implementation.

From the company’s founding in 1913 to its emerging work with AI-powered building management systems, Trane has stood out as an innovator in HVAC technology. For contractors navigating the technical complexities of modern building systems and the practical realities of installation and service, Trane’s experience and comprehensive approach provides valuable solutions and resources in an increasingly complex market.



Learn more about Trane
trane.com

IN BRIEF

SMACNA Greater Chicago's 2025 Annual Golf Outing was a sold-out success, bringing 128+ golfers together at Stonebridge Country Club for a day of friendly competition and networking. Highlights included a popular adidas pop-up shop, lunch buffet and contest prizes.



EVENT SPONSORS

Cleats Manufacturing Co., Inc.
MK Industries, Inc.
Morgan Lewis
Nehlsen Creative Marketing
Sheet Metal Werks
Synergy Mechanical, Inc.

HOLE SPONSORS

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Local Union 265
MK Industries, Inc.
Morgan Lewis
Nehlsen Creative Marketing
Nelson Insulation
Ochoa Mechanical Group
Patriot Cartage
Sheet Metal Connectors, Inc.
Sheet Metal Werks
Synergy Mechanical, Inc.
Tal-Mar Custom Metal
Fabricators, Inc.
Youngren's Heating & Cooling

EVENT RECAP

2025 ANNUAL GOLF OUTING

08.04.25 | AURORA, ILLINOIS

What a day on the green! SMACNA Greater Chicago's 2025 Annual Golf Outing on August 4 was a hole-in-one as 128+ golfers teed off with us at Stonebridge Country Club. The sold-out event couldn't have asked for better weather, with friendly competition, great shots and plenty of laughs filling the day.

Adding to the fun, an adidas pop-up shop gave golfers the chance to stock up on new swag — including gloves, hats, shirts, shoes and bags — while a delicious lunch buffet kept everyone fueled.

A huge thank-you to our incredible sponsors and participants who made this event possible. We couldn't have done it without you!

HOLE CONTEST WINNERS

Low Gross

ALLEN O'BRIEN (Men)
CHARLOTTE FLESHER (Women)

Low Net

BOB WIESBROOK (Men)
KRYSTI CHIN (Women)

Closest to the Pin

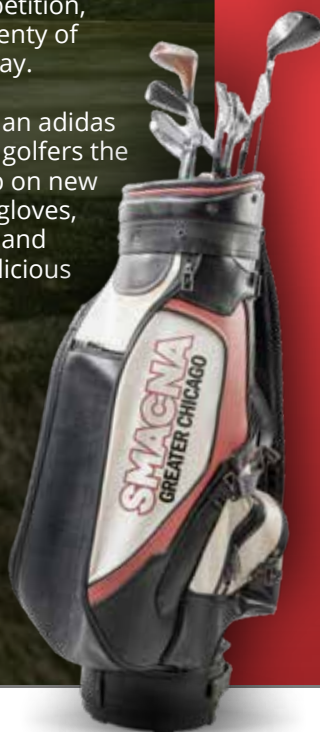
MIKE CRNKOVICH (Men)
MEGAN KOBELT (Women)

Longest Drive

CODY VOGLER (Men)
ALISON WARN (Women)

Longest Putt

NATE DUPREY





See all event photos!
bit.ly/3IMYZuw

IN BRIEF

Industry Night 2025 brought together 160 SMACNA Greater Chicago members at Joe's Live in Rosemont for an evening of networking, music and cocktails. It was another fun and memorable event!



EVENT RECAP

160+ MEMBERS CONNECT DURING INDUSTRY NIGHT 2025

09.25.25 | ROSEMONT, ILLINOIS



Industry Night 2025 was one for the books! On September 25, 160 SMACNA Greater Chicago members packed Joe's Live in Rosemont for an evening of music, cocktails and plenty of laughs and networking. Many new faces joined our exhibitor lineup this year, bringing fresh energy and excitement to one of our most popular annual events.

Adding to the fun, we had a drawing to give away three \$500 Visa gift cards. Congratulations to our winners:

- Mike Rottman, Amber Mechanical
- Kshitij Sharma, AT Mechanical
- John Young, Porter Pipe

Guests also enjoyed exclusive giveaways — a branded power bank and custom decorated cookies that were almost too good to eat ... almost!

Thanks to everyone who came out to make this year's Industry Night such a fun, memorable evening. We can't wait to do it all again next year!



View the full album
bit.ly/4gP03KY

■ IN BRIEF

AI tools are transforming email communication by saving time, reducing errors and keeping messages professional. From Microsoft Copilot and ChatGPT to Superhuman and Grammarly, these platforms help contractors streamline inbox management and improve clarity — but they still require human judgement to ensure accuracy and appropriateness.

■ TECHNOLOGY

AI TOOLS FOR BETTER EMAILS

We've all been there: An email hits your inbox and you think, "Did a real person write this?"

Clear communication is essential in any industry, but especially in construction where complex details, schedules and approvals can make or break a project. AI-powered tools can help you draft emails faster, keep them professional and reduce mistakes — as long as you review them before hitting "send."

Best Practices for AI Implementation

1. ALWAYS REVIEW BEFORE SENDING

If you take nothing else away from this article, please remember this: AI enhances your capabilities but doesn't replace your professional judgement. Always review AI-generated content for accuracy and appropriateness.

2. INTEGRATE, DON'T OVERHAUL

Start with tools that fit your current systems.

3. TRAIN YOUR TEAM

The quality of AI output depends significantly on how well users understand how to interact with these systems.

WHY IT MATTERS ...

The AI construction market is projected to grow from \$2.29 billion in 2025 to \$7.21 billion by 2029. Early adopters gain an edge by saving time on routine communication and staying ahead in a tech-driven industry.

Bottom line: AI won't replace your experience, but it can help you manage your inbox, refine your emails and free up time to focus on what you do best — building.



MICROSOFT® COPILOT

Microsoft 365 Copilot represents one of the most accessible AI solutions for construction professionals — it's already integrated into Microsoft Office applications. It can draft professional emails directly in Outlook, summarize long contracts or meeting transcripts and build reports in Excel in a fraction of the time.

If you have a stack of notes from a walkthrough, Copilot can turn them into clear, actionable summaries that save time and prevent miscommunication.



CHATGPT

When most people think of AI, they think of ChatGPT. This platform is flexible and widely used because it can turn rough notes into professional-sounding emails quickly. You can draft client-ready proposals from bullet points, write clear explanations for change orders that maintain client relationships and create step-by-step training materials. The key is providing context. Instead of saying, "Write an email," try: "Draft a professional note explaining that rain delayed the installation of a rooftop unit, but reassure the client we're still on track."



SUPERHUMAN

Superhuman is designed for professionals with high-volume inboxes. It can summarize long email threads, prioritize urgent messages and suggest smart replies for routine updates. Contractors who get dozens of emails a day can use it to quickly identify what needs attention and respond without getting buried, making it easier to stay on top of client approvals, vendor questions and team updates.



GRAMMARLY BUSINESS

Grammarly is still one of the easiest writing assistants to start using, and it goes beyond simple grammar checks. It can help your emails sound professional but approachable, simplify complex technical language and deliver consistent messaging across your whole team. It integrates seamlessly with Outlook, Gmail, Word and most browsers, so you don't need to change how you already work.

IN BRIEF

On July 12, SMACNA Greater Chicago members set sail aboard the Chicago Odyssey for a fun summer brunch cruise with amazing views and good company. It was a great way to relax, catch up with friends and enjoy the city from the water.

EVENT RECAP

MEMBERS ENJOY CITY VIEWS FROM THE RIVER

07.12.25 | CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



On July 12, more than 100 SMACNA Greater Chicago members set sail aboard the Chicago Odyssey for a memorable summer outing. The Architecture Brunch Cruise was the perfect way to relax, connect and enjoy a beautiful day together on the water!

Guests mingled with fellow members while taking in panoramic views of Chicago's most iconic landmarks along the river. A delicious spread of brunch favorites, hors d'oeuvres and refreshing drinks added to the festive atmosphere.

Thank you to everyone who joined us and made the day such a success. We look forward to our next social networking event!



Interested in future events?
smacnagreaterchicago.org/calendar

■ *SAVE THE DATE*



2025 HOLIDAY DINNER & DANCE

12.06.25

NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

COCKTAILS | 6:30PM
DINNER | 7:30PM

We're returning to the stunning Hotel Arista Naperville for our 2025 Holiday Dinner & Dance — why mess with a good thing? This year-end celebration is the perfect opportunity to dress up, unwind and share delicious food, cocktails and conversation with friends and industry peers. This year's event also includes the installation of officers, a highlight you won't want to miss. After the official business wraps up, a live band will kick out the groove for a night of dancing!

Formal invitations have been mailed.
Please RSVP by November 21.



IN BRIEF

This summer, SMACNA Greater Chicago members DeKalb Mechanical and Sheet Metal Werks hosted Heavy Metal Summer Experience camps, giving local teens hands-on exposure to welding, pipefitting, jobsite tours and more. With incredible student participation and strong support from volunteers and industry partners, both camps helped students build skills and envision a future in the skilled trades.

HEAVY METAL

SUMMER EXPERIENCE

EVENT RECAP

CHICAGO HMSE CAMPS INSPIRE THE FUTURE

DEKALB MECHANICAL
& SHEET METAL WERKS

SMACNA Greater Chicago is proud to support the growth of the Heavy Metal Summer Experience (HMSE) — a national program that introduces high school students to opportunities in the skilled trades through real-world, hands-on learning. This summer, two of our member contractors, Sheet Metal Werks and DeKalb Mechanical, opened their shop doors to local teens, giving them an inside look at the many career paths our industry offers.



DEKALB MECHANICAL: LARGEST HMSE CAMP IN THE NATION

With 31 students enrolled, DeKalb Mechanical hosted the largest camp in the country this year. Company President Kurt Mattson credited strong preparation, a committed team of volunteers and incredible local support for the camp's success.

Over the two-week session, students rotated through a variety of projects — welding oversized dice, bending conduit, pipe brazing and more. They also had the chance to operate scissor lifts and watch a crane pick in action, experiences that brought the trades to life in a memorable way.

"The Heavy Metal camp is an excellent way to introduce teens to their potential future," Mattson said. "It takes the right contractor with the right mindset, and with good students it can be extremely valuable. I would urge other SMACNA contractors to get involved, even if it's just by donating material to the program. It's a game changer for these teens."

**"THE HEAVY METAL CAMP IS AN
EXCELLENT WAY TO INTRODUCE TEENS
TO THEIR POTENTIAL FUTURE."**

KURT MATTSON

President, DeKalb Mechanical



Video recap of this camp
bit.ly/412lcZC

SHEET METAL Werks: BUILDING ON EXPERIENCE

For the second year in a row, Sheet Metal Werks hosted a two-week HMSE camp, using lessons from last year to refine the program. With support from industry vendors and partners — including SMART Local 73, Porter Pipe & Supply, Premier Mechanical, Madon Sheet Metal, Automatic Mechanical, Sun Mechanical and International Test & Balance — students explored welding, pipefitting and even toured facilities and active jobsites.

"Programs like HMSE are invaluable for exposing the next generation to the trades and showing them just how many opportunities are out there," said Calvin Natick, Field Marketing Associate at Porter Pipe & Supply. "We're proud to be involved and look forward to continuing to support the initiative."

At graduation, Sheet Metal Werks leaders shared powerful messages with students. President John Crne reminded students that success in any career comes down to three things: be on time, have a good attitude and maintain a strong work ethic.

For CFO Sue Ryan, the program's impact was deeply personal. "If you take one kid and change their life, there's not much that's more rewarding than that," she said. "I truly am blessed to be a part of this and see the actual transformation in an 18-year-old's career trajectory and know that we were a part of that. That's what it's all about."

Thanks to the commitment of our members, industry partners and volunteers, our industry is earning the recognition it deserves, while helping students gain new skills and a clearer vision for their future.



*Video recap of
this camp*

bit.ly/412lcZC

IN BRIEF

Continued learning is essential to strengthening SMACNA Greater Chicago member companies and our industry as a whole. Our lineup of education programming this fall gives our contractors the opportunity to sharpen leadership, negotiation, project management and customer service skills — all designed to boost efficiency, profitability and long-term success.

EDUCATION

UPCOMING MEMBER EDUCATION OFFERINGS



Continued learning is essential to strengthening SMACNA Greater Chicago member companies and our industry as a whole. Our lineup of education programming this fall gives our contractors the opportunity to sharpen leadership, negotiation, project management and customer service skills — all designed to boost efficiency, profitability and long-term success.

Best Leadership Practices for Project Managers

11.06.25

Register by 10.30

Strong leadership is key to managing successful construction project teams. Join industry expert Troy Aichele (Aichele & Associates, LLC) for an engaging workshop on effective leadership practices. Attendees will explore positive leadership styles, learn how to recognize ineffective tendencies and discover strategies to build trust, improve team effectiveness and grow as a leader.



Register now!

World-Class Negotiating

11.13.25

Register by 11.06

Join fellow members for an interactive workshop that considers all aspects of negotiating. Presented by Darryl Harris of The Carroll-Keller Group, attendees will learn how to prepare and formulate strategies, overcome potential challenges and apply proven principles to make any negotiating transaction more productive for all involved.



Register now!

Field Based Project Management

12.04.25

Register by 11.26

The Field Based Project Management course, taught by Kevin Dougherty, is designed to equip attendees with practical tools to help improve efficiency and profitability. Participants will learn the basics of project management, including pre-planning, kickoff and jobsite meetings, scheduling and project review, while gaining strategies for better leadership, communication, conflict resolution and more.



Register now!

World-Class Customer Service

12.11.25

Register by 12.04

Darryl Harris is back at it, with a highly interactive workshop focusing on the essential skills needed to create and support "World-Class Customer Service." Attendees will learn how to make a strong first impression, practice active listening and effectively manage conflicts, expectations and negotiations for positive outcomes.



Register now!

RECOGNIZING FUTURE LEADERS SMACNA'S SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



SMACNA's College of Fellows Scholarship Program has announced its 2025 scholarships to help recognize talented youth and future leaders within the SMACNA extended family. Congratulations to Alexis Walz of New Lenox, Illinois, who was selected as this year's recipient of the Marty and Vic Comforte Endowed Scholarship!

Alexis will receive \$3,000 per year for a total of four years of undergraduate study. Previously, Kylie Scott was awarded the honor.

The SMACNA College of Fellows Scholarship Program is open to eligible students within the SMACNA extended family, including SMACNA contractors and their employees, SMACNA Fellows, employees of local SMACNA chapters and National SMACNA, SMACNA National Associate Members and members and families of any of these groups. Though it is hoped that a career in a field related to the sheet metal industry will be considered, applicants may pursue any course of study.

■ **SAVE THE DATE**



2026 PARTNERS IN PROGRESS CONFERENCE

02.16.25 – 02.18.25

**WALT DISNEY WORLD
SWAN AND DOLPHIN RESORT
ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

Mark your calendars for the 2026 Partners in Progress Conference, set for February 16-18 at the Walt Disney World Swan & Dolphin in Orlando. This is your opportunity to connect with contractors, chapter executives, JATC coordinators and other industry peers, hear powerful keynote presentations from a former NASA astronaut and a champion Paralympian, and bring back insights to drive growth and help elevate our chapter. Early-bird member pricing of \$825 runs until December 15.



Learn more and register!
pinp.org/conferences/pinp26/

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