

# **SPECIAL Report**



NATIONAL ROOFING CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

01/99

## **ADDRESSING WORK FORCE ISSUES**

This report is intended to bring you up to date on all the things NRCA has been doing on your behalf to improve our industry's work force and to encourage you to take advantage of some of the new opportunities that now are available as a result of those efforts.

### **1. Gallup Study of the Work Force**

Last year, the Roofing Industry Alliance for Progress, part of the National Roofing Foundation (NRF), commissioned the Gallup Organization to conduct a comprehensive study of the roofing industry's work force to learn more about the people who work for our members and better understand why people stay and why they leave. Gallup conducted about 1,000 telephone interviews with current and former workers at all levels of roofing companies. Gallup came to several conclusions, most notably the following two:

- Workers who enter the trade expect that there will be a natural career path, that they will learn a trade and have a skill that always is in demand.
- On the whole, contractors do a terrible job with new workers during their first month on the job. In fact, 40 percent of those who stayed said they had serious thoughts about quitting during that first month.

We strongly recommend that you read this report in its entirety; it contains straightforward recommendations that can help any contractor. (Contact our marketing services department.)

### **2. Worker Training Program**

Based in part on the results of the Gallup study, NRCA embarked last year on the development of a structured national worker training program. The program, composed of 31 different modules, will be produced during a three-year period. Each module includes a student workbook, instructor manual, instructional video and other audiovisual materials. Each module will be available in English and Spanish. The project will cost about \$1.5 million; about half the cost was borne by NRF so that the modules can be made available to the industry at affordable prices. The first module is completed; four more will be finished by our convention next month; the rest will be completed at a rate of about one per month. We have had discussions with the International Roofers Union and some state licensing boards about incorporating these modules into ongoing training and making them a part of required training.

### **3. National Roofing Training Institute**

Working with the South Texas Community College in McAllen, Texas, and several local business groups there, NRCA has created the National Roofing Training Institute to provide entry-level training to the large unemployed population in South Texas and to find work for them with NRCA members throughout the United States.

The program is being funded in part by NRCA, NRF and grants from the federal government and state of Texas. Students will complete a three-week, apprentice-level training program; it includes basic safety training, language training and training in vocational skills.

The first pilot program will begin on Jan. 25. Assuming it is successful, the program will be expanded. The community college has the capability of training as many as 100 students per month. Those who complete the program will be placed with NRCA members, who must agree to hire them, under terms of the federal grant, before they begin training. Members who are interested should call NRCA for program details.

One program goal is to have it be a model for community colleges in other parts of the United States. We now have a good three-week curriculum developed along with the necessary training materials. And we've gotten superb cooperation from our friends in the manufacturing community, most notably Olympic Fasteners, Garlock Equipment Co. and Reeves Roofing Equipment Co., to support the effort.

### **4. The Welfare to Work Partnership**

NRCA has worked closely with the Welfare to Work Partnership, a private organization whose objective is to find meaningful employment for welfare recipients, without displacing current workers. Some 400 NRCA members have joined the partnership, at no cost, and have access to information concerning local "service providers" -- private and public agencies that train and help place welfare recipients.

The key to this approach appears to be the local service providers. Some members have had great success; others have not. Recently, the Welfare to Work Partnership announced a new program, sponsored by IBM, whereby Partnership members will have access to a Website-based list of all training agencies, including information about people available for hire.

Information on the Welfare to Work Partnership also is available from NRCA.

### **5. Center for Employment Training**

The Center for Employment Training (CET) is a privately owned training organization with more than 30 offices throughout the United States that receives a good deal of its funding from

government grants. CET has agreed to work with NRCA to develop a pilot training program for roofing workers in its Reno, Nev., office; we hope the program can be expanded nationwide through the CET network.

## **6. Goodwill Industries**

Goodwill Industries has 186 training centers in all parts of the United States; part of its mission is to train and find work for the unemployed. NRCA has provided Goodwill with information about the availability of roofing jobs, and we are working with Goodwill to pilot a roofing training program. In addition, Fred Grandy, Goodwill president and former member of Congress, will be addressing the NRCA Board of Directors in Phoenix, Ariz., next month.

## **7. Immigration**

NRCA has been securing information through the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) about possibly recruiting temporary workers. Individuals willing to work temporarily in the United States (for less than a year) can apply for an H2B visa. To participate in the program, an employing contractor must be able to provide documentation that there is a shortage of workers in the contractor's community.

NRCA also will be working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other business organizations to attempt to modify current immigration laws to allow more skilled roofing workers access to the U.S. job market. The laws recently were relaxed, but only for "technical" jobs, primarily in the computer industry.

## **8. Best Practices Study**

We also know that many NRCA members are successful finding and keeping good workers. Through the NRF (thanks to support from CNA Insurance) we have embarked on a best practices study of members in the areas of worker recruiting, training and retention. The objective is to document what the best contractors are doing in these areas, with the intent of putting the best practices into wider use. The study should be completed within the year.

## **9. Image of the Industry**

NRCA will continue to work, through public relations programs, for example, to improve the industry's image because it appears to be an obstacle to attracting good workers. A new campaign will begin this year. In addition, we are looking for a national philanthropic organization to partner with to help tell the story of the good things that the members of our industry do routinely.

## **10. National Jobs Referral Program**

Last year, we launched a national jobs referral program with a simple aim: put people looking for good jobs in touch with NRCA members who have them. Through a series of radio spots and newspaper stories, we directed prospective workers to call 1-888-ROOF321 to be given the names of prospective employers in their area. (The names are NRCA members who signed up at no cost for the service.) To date, more than 1,000 people have been referred to NRCA members.

### **In Conclusion**

We know there is much more to be done and each of these programs alone, while important and necessary, can't solve our work force problems.

Even more important, we need to have members get more actively engaged in addressing the issue at local levels and participate in the programs we are developing. If we are to succeed in the long term, we will need the active involvement of members throughout the United States, operating at the local, state and national levels.

And finally, remember to let us know what you're doing. We're especially interested in your success stories so we can share them with others. We also hope you'll feel free to call us if any of these 10 programs have piqued your interest.



*The voice of professional  
roofing contractors.*

January 1999

Dear Member:

Finding, training and keeping a qualified work force continues to be the top concern of NRCA members and, therefore, one of the top NRCA priorities for the coming year.

In fact, the issue has been on our priority list for the past several years, and, like you, we realize there are no easy solutions to this difficult and long-term problem.

The problem, we believe, has several root causes. The image of our industry, indeed of the entire construction industry, needs improvement if we are going to attract capable workers. Wages, especially at the entry level, may not be sufficient to attract good workers when we consider the options presented to a typical 18-year-old high school graduate. There is no national standard for training in our industry. Many union apprenticeship programs are quite good, but they are not universally good, and the union represents only about 10 percent of the industry's work force.

Finally, demographics are working against us. There will be increasingly fewer young, U.S.-born males entering the work force, and young U.S. males historically have composed the bulk of the construction industry's work force.

We believe that a problem this complex and of this magnitude must be addressed on several different levels, and we must try innovative approaches if we are to succeed. The Special Report that is enclosed describes a number of initiatives developed by NRCA and the National Roofing Foundation. We hope you will become an active participant in many of these and that you will share your experiences with us as you deal with this most challenging issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Good". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

William A. Good, CAE  
Executive Vice President