

Hiring the Next Generation

AGC MEMBERS SHARE STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S CONSTRUCTION WORKFORCE

BY NICK FORTUNA



When recruiters from Crane Industry Services (CIS), an AGC Georgia member, show up to a job fair, they know that their company's booth will be among the most popular at the event. That's because several dozen young jobseekers typically signed up the day before for a 10-minute session on one of the company's construction equipment simulators, giving them a realistic snapshot of life at a jobsite.

Amid a stubborn labor shortage, recruiting and retaining workers is serious business, but that isn't stopping CIS from appealing to the kid inside all of us. Ray Rice, business development manager for Villa Rica, Ga.-based CIS, says portable simulators help the company to connect with a generation of job applicants that grew up playing video games and feels at ease with technology.

As baby boomers continue to retire, a trend rapidly accelerated by the pandemic, engaging the next generation of professionals is critical to the future of the construction industry, Rice says. Computer simulators have proven to be an especially effective outreach tool, drawing such an "overwhelming response" at job fairs that the company had to begin booking sessions in advance, he says.

"Otherwise, we'll have folks lined up around the booth a couple of times," Rice says. "At the end of the 10 minutes, we often have to politely kick them off so the next person can start."

Appealing to tech-savvy jobseekers is just one of the ways construction firms are building the industry's workforce of the future. Other strategies include reaching out to a wider pool of candidates, offering workplace flexibility and providing enhanced wellness resources. Here are some approaches that are working for AGC members.

TECHNOLOGY TO THE RESCUE

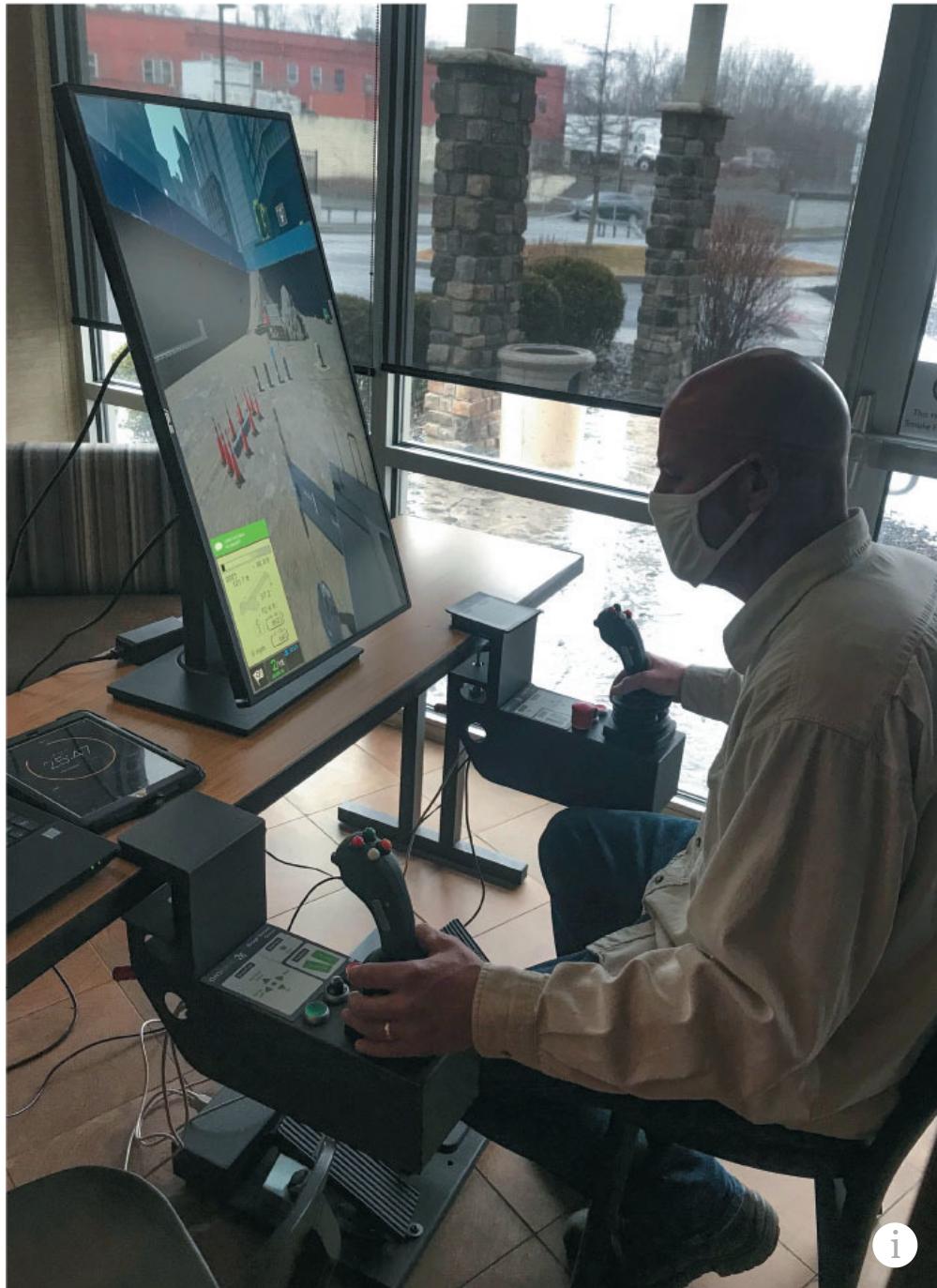
Rice says CIS has several types of construction equipment simulators, with the most sophisticated costing as much as \$350,000, but the portable unit is fairly basic. Users sit at a desk and operate joysticks and foot pedals while looking at a 32-inch monitor. The simulator recreates the real-world feel of operating tower cranes, industrial cranes and earth-moving equipment, proving to job applicants that construction professionals are anything but unskilled.

"It's been a very valuable recruiting tool," Rice says. "This is exactly the kind of tool that this generation is looking for."

CIS's more advanced simulators also have been wise investments, Rice says. Given the high cost of construction machinery, companies need to keep their equipment in the field and often can't afford to devote it to training, he says. Simulators eliminate fuel

consumption and wear and tear on equipment, which reduces training costs, and they improve retention by allowing ambitious workers to broaden their skill sets, he says.

"These simulators are exact replicas of the original equipment manufacturers' machines, so they operate in the exact same way as a real piece of equipment," Rice says. "They're an important component of our workforce development strategy."



CASTING A WIDER NET

Estrella Parker, chief people officer at Cupertino Electric, an AGC of California member, says the San Jose, California-based company had always sought to have a diverse workforce, but until recently, it hadn't formalized a strategy for diversity and inclusion that included specific goals and metrics. She joined the company last year to spearhead that effort with help from an outside consultant.

One new initiative has involved teaming up with Mogul, a New York City-based startup that offers a talent-acquisition platform, diversity recruiting services, inclusive networking events, educational events and online social communities. Mogul's software includes filters that allow recruiters to access more than 430 million diverse candidate profiles and sort them according to demographics such as gender, ethnicity and veteran status.

"Our algorithms offer a more robust and diverse talent pipeline for our clients, which span all industries," says Tiffany Pham, Mogul's chief executive and founder.

The service helps to ensure that companies are recruiting from a broad talent pool, including communities that traditionally have been underrepresented in the construction industry.

BUILDING INCLUSIVE CULTURES & COMPANY SUCCESS

In a recent episode of AGC of America's ConstructorCast, participants talk about transforming mindsets and behaviors to help organizations sustain inclusive cultures, adapting skills to build strong relationships and navigate difficult conversations and relying on training and resources that translate learning to action. Listen now: <https://bit.ly/3rVkZrP>.

"It's important to share the great opportunities we have on some of the nation's largest and most advanced construction projects with candidates from all walks of life," Parker says. "Mogul's platform offers us access to more skilled, diverse talent that will help us meet our diversity, equity and inclusion goals."

Rice says companies that ignore issues such as diversity and inclusion risk alienating the next generation of construction professionals and putting themselves at a competitive disadvantage. He said it's becoming increasingly common for job applicants to ask about CIS's policies on LGBTQ+ issues and diversity, and how the company views its role in the community.

In the Atlanta area, many young people in underserved communities aren't aware of the rewarding and well-paying careers available in the construction industry, so CIS is working to spread that message, Rice says. This year, the company is planning to hold three job fairs at police stations in partnership with law enforcement agencies, which also have struggled to add women and racial minorities to their ranks.

Rice says the job fairs will serve a dual purpose: They will expose disadvantaged young people to career paths that they may not have considered in the past, and they will foster a dialogue and positive interaction between police officers and urban youths. He said if the job fairs are successful, CIS will explore holding similar events in other markets.

"The idea is to get those two communities to talk, and at the same time, we look to benefit by introducing the skilled trades to young people and talking about opportunities in the industry," Rice says.

CULTURE OF CARE

The Culture of CARE is an initiative created in partnership between the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) and the AGC of Washington to advance the construction industry as the industry of choice for diverse and talented workers by building inclusive work environments in construction firms nationwide. To take steps toward creating a diverse, safe, welcoming and inclusive construction industry, visit <https://buildculture.org/>.

WELLNESS AND FLEXIBILITY

The so-called Great Resignation is a clear signal that workers are stressed out and need employers to focus more on their well-being. Toward that end, McCarthy Building

Companies Inc., a member of multiple AGC chapters, has implemented several initiatives, including increasing the amount it will reimburse employees for unanticipated dependent care costs, according to Shaun Sleeth, president of the Northern Pacific region.

That's an important benefit as employees deal with school and daycare closures due to COVID-19, he says. Employees with family obligations also are demanding workplace flexibility, so McCarthy worked with its managers to place each job function into two categories — portable and non-portable. As a result, employees have a clear idea of when they may work from home and when they must show up to the office or jobsite.

Last year, McCarthy launched a campaign to tackle mental-health issues as part of its Build for Life health and wellness program. The effort, which expands upon the company's digital and telemedicine offerings, was designed to increase awareness and acceptance of mental-health problems and treatment options, eliminating the stigma surrounding the topic, Sleeth says.

McCarthy's intranet now gives employees on-demand access to enhanced materials and resources covering topics such as mental health and suicide prevention. On jobsites, McCarthy is posting signage and distributing hard-hat stickers to all employees with contact information for mental-health resources.

"Mental health has always been part of McCarthy's overall wellness strategy, but the pandemic underscored the need to make mental-health awareness and acceptance a central focus, especially on jobsites," Sleeth says.

McCarthy's wellness program encourages an overall healthy lifestyle — physical, mental and financial — and provides resources such as medical screenings, nutrition courses, online wellness education and lifestyle coaching. Employees can earn "vitality points" based on their participation and can redeem them for gift cards and fitness devices, Sleeth says.

Similarly, Parker says Cupertino Electric has expanded the mental-health support it offers workers. As part of its wellness program, employees now get free access to Ginger, a smartphone app that provides emotional and mental support wherever and whenever they need it.

The app gives users 24/7 access to knowledgeable professionals who can help them work through issues such as anxiety, depression or problems with work, relationships or sleep. Users can get coaching via text message or participate in self-guided activities through the app. Coaches can help users make a plan to address their issues and then check in with them to hold them accountable.

"We're very conscious of making sure that when we talk about employees' health and safety, we're not just talking about injuries," Parker says. "We also want to include that psychological safety component, which we feel is very important, so there's been a concerted effort and emphasis on that."

NATIONAL CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY WORKFORCE SUMMIT

In October 2021, AGC's inaugural National Construction Industry Workforce Summit kicked off the association's Construction HR & Training Professionals Conference, held in St. Louis, Missouri. In the day-long summit, construction and workforce development professionals learned about successful programs that are helping recruit, develop and retain high-quality construction professionals. Attendees also worked together to address specific workforce challenges, like crafting a message for caregivers that construction careers are the right choice for their children and attracting more women into the industry. Stay tuned for details on this year's summit at www.agc.org.