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CONSTRUCTION GUIDE

The future of construction is female... plus, learn how local construction industry leaders are facing mental health head on.

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The Changing Face of Construction: The Future is Female

By Lauren Hanan, Director of Marketing and Communications, GBCA

Forget the old stereotype that the world of construction is just for men. As up-and-coming construction leaders throughout Greater Philadelphia highlight, the industry is doing an about-face – and the future is female. Not only are construction firms focused on recruiting women at all levels, females are also assuming more leadership roles, and the number of women-owned construction firms has nearly doubled since 2007.

In addition to the entrepreneurs shattering the so-called concrete ceiling, several young women in the region are taking the reins as they help lead their family-owned construction companies – some of the top firms in the area – and drive forward the industry at large. While building runs in their blood, these members of the General Building Contractors Association (GBCA) offer a fresh perspective on the changing face of construction.



Angelina Perryman,
VP of Administration,
Perryman Building &
Construction

“The construction industry has grown significantly in the last few years, opening the door for opportunities of all

types, from the trades to project management and business ownership. However, you cannot make an impact unless someone sees your value.

“I am proud to be a part of Perryman Construction, where leadership acknowledges my skillset as a woman, both young and diverse. Because of the firm’s belief in my value, I have been able to introduce a pipeline of women to the construction industry through MyWIC (Mentoring Young Women in Construction Camp), serving as past president of NAWIC (National Association of Women in Construction) Philadelphia and serving as a founding member of the DEI Committee of NAWIC at a national level.

“I look forward to continuing to impact the pipeline of talent and improving the Philadelphia community, one project at a time.”



Melissa Boulden,
VP of Project
Development/Director
of Engineering, Mid-
Atlantic Steel

“There are a growing number of highly motivated, driven women out there working hard to make

a mark in this industry and demonstrate their value.

“I think as more young women see other women thriving in construction, engineering and architecture, there will be a growing number of women who see these occupations as viable career paths. As the local construction industry continues to make a strong push for diversity/minority business inclusion and more opportunities present themselves for leadership and growth, we will see more women pursuing construction-related fields in Philadelphia and the surrounding areas.

“Personally, I want to be able to point out ‘signature’ work to my children and let them know their mom was part of the team that built these buildings and helped shape the skyline.”



Angelique Hunter,
Marketing Director,
Smith Flooring Inc.

“Women don’t only bring more diversity; we also offer a different gender perspective to the way we work every day. I’ve found that

in Philadelphia, females in the construction industry not only make great strides in leadership but also teach and pull forth women who deserve recognition. This leadership and influence are moving some of the biggest projects in Philadelphia and changing our neighborhoods forever.

“Smith Flooring Inc. is a great place to work and learn. However, I am also focused on growing and building my own personal legacy through my work with NAWIC Philadelphia (past president), serving as a standing member on the

City of Philadelphia’s Economic Opportunity Plan oversight committee and being an active member of GBCA. GBCA has opened many doors to learn and grow in the industry.”



Christina Pasquariello,
Assistant Project
Manager, P. Agnes

“Females are impacting the construction industry just by continuing to be a part of it. It’s not always easy being a woman in

this field. There are challenges we face on a daily basis, but the respect level has come a long way.

“Growing up my grandmother always told me she wanted to work for her father (Pellegrino Agnes, founder of P. Agnes) but she knew women would not be respected back then. She was proud that I’m doing what she always dreamed of.

“Now I strive to be an example for other young women across the region who want to make an impact. Over time, I think we will see women taking the lead at many of the larger firms, not only in construction but in every industry.”



Mary Kate Radomski,
Operations Manager,
Frank V. Radomski &
Sons, Inc.

“Construction is tough, and you have to have a thick skin to survive in this industry. But showing your

colleagues that every single person on a jobsite is of equal importance is incredibly crucial.

“I also think it’s important for women to empower other women. From networking to educational events, GBCA has allowed me to make connections and meet some of my most important mentors. Emily Bittenbender is a huge name in Philadelphia construction, and I’ve always found her to be incredibly inspiring. Because of GBCA, I was able to get to know Emily, and now not only consider her to be a mentor, but a friend. Whether you are competitors or not, we are all in this together.”

Philadelphia construction leaders double down on mental health and substance abuse awareness, resources

By Lauren Hanan, Director of Marketing and Communications, GBCA

It's no secret that mental health conditions and substance abuse rates have risen significantly throughout the U.S. What's much less visible is the severity of these issues within the construction industry. One in five construction professionals struggle with a mental health condition, the rate of substance abuse among this population is nearly double the national average and the sector has the second-highest suicide rate among all industries.

Facing formidable statistics like these, the General Building Contractors Association (GBCA), Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters (EASRCC) and Philadelphia Building & Construction Trades Council (BTC) are joining forces to fight what has been coined the silent epidemic – and build a healthier industry.

Shattering the stigma

One of the major hurdles deterring construction professionals from getting the help they need is a deeply rooted stigma surrounding mental health and substance abuse.

“Construction is largely a male-dominated industry, and men are generally less likely to talk about their emotions to begin with,” explains Morghan Terry, LMFT, CEAP, clinical director at MHC, a leader in behavioral workplace health care and a GBCA partner. “On top of that, construction workers typically pride themselves on having a tough exterior. The common perception is that having a behavioral health concern would be seen as a weakness.”

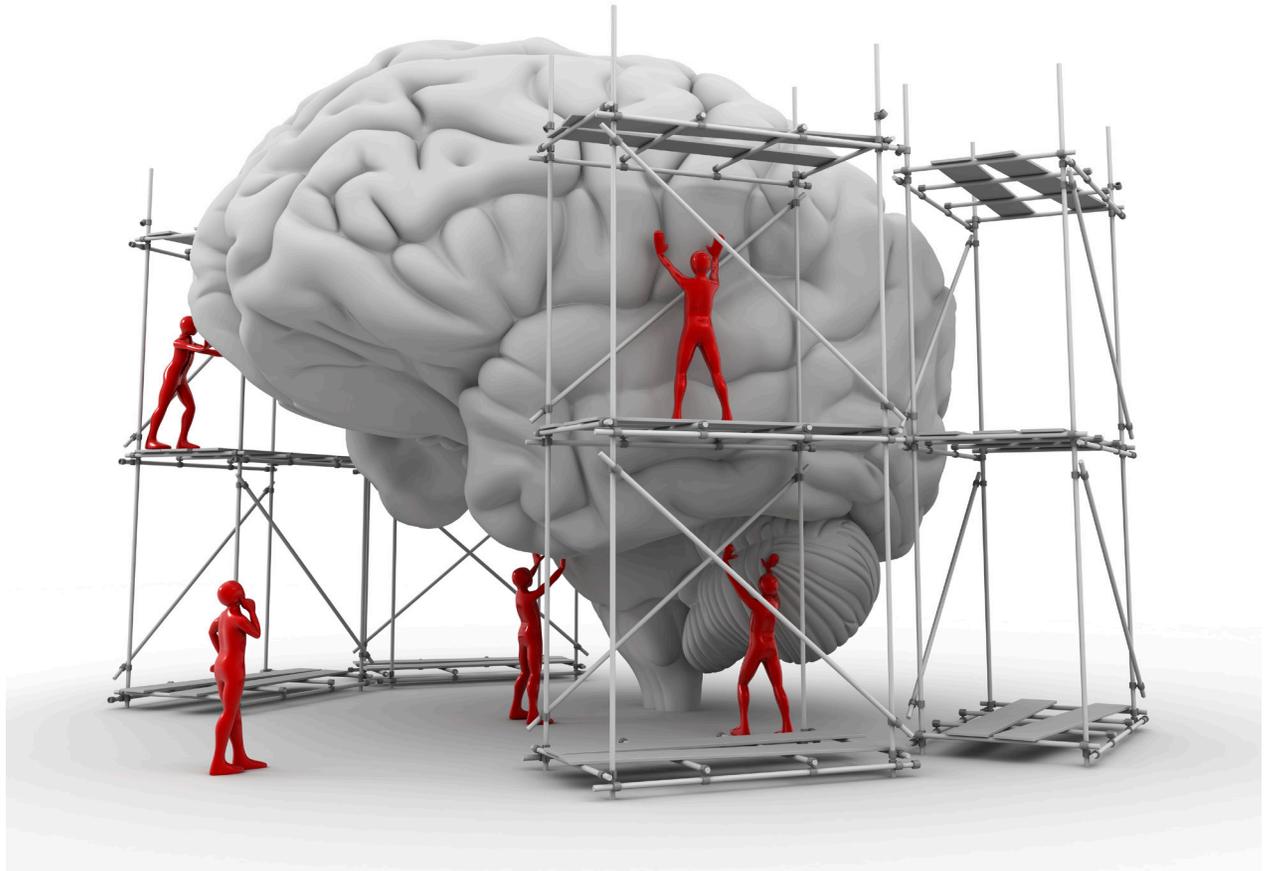
She says the stigma around substance abuse in the industry is even stronger.

“The stigma is 100 percent real, and it's exacerbated in the world of construction,” adds Joseph Obuchowicz, CEBS, Fund Director for the Carpenters Benefit Funds of Philadelphia. “I always tell this story that before COVID, we would host in-person seminars showcasing all of our benefits partners. When you looked around the room, people were at every table, except for the behavioral health table. No one wanted to be associated with that.”

This stigma is exactly why GBCA, EASRCC and BTC are guiding the industry to rethink the way substance abuse and mental health are viewed.

“Conditions like depression, anxiety and addiction too often take a back seat to injuries you can actually see. In reality, behavioral health is just as important as physical health,” says Angela Hendrix, GBCA's director of training and workforce development. “Shifting the industry culture starts with taking the issues that are seen as taboo and turning them into frequent topics of conversation.”

Putting a spotlight on mental health and substance abuse was the idea behind a recent safety “stand down” that halted construction work at one of Gilbane Building Company's job sites in Philadelphia.



GETTY IMAGES

The pause enabled leaders to talk directly to employees about the importance of mental health and substance abuse awareness. It's one of many examples of how the industry is taking action.

Education, awareness and accessibility

The crux of this industry-wide effort is a series of Toolbox Talks that cover alcohol abuse, suicide, empathy and substance abuse. Not only do these resources help facilitate these conversations, they also educate individuals on how to spot warning signs, provide action steps and offer pathways for accessing help.

“Not knowing how, where or when to ask for help can be a major barrier in seeking treatment,” says Terry. “It's not uncommon for counselors like us to get phone calls from construction professionals in their 50s who finally take the first step to reach out. Sometimes they just didn't know who to call. In other cases, they put off asking for help for so long that they eventually find themselves in an all-out crisis.”

Now, with QR codes on work T-shirts and hard hat stickers that direct workers to the most up-to-date information and assistance related to mental health, substance abuse and suicide prevention, help is never more than a scan or click away.

“Education and accessibility are key,” says Obuchowicz. He also notes that for all the uncertainty COVID-19 has brought, it has also provided a silver lining in the form of telehealth.

“Telehealth has absolutely made treatment more accessible for construction workers,” says Laura Manion, LPC, a senior care manager at MHC. “They can take appointments from their car during lunch or whenever they can. From a clinical perspective, virtual therapy is just as effective as in-person visits, and the convenience helps ensure no one misses a beat.”

Manion adds that it can be challenging to navigate the behavioral health care system, which is why the campaign resources were designed to be simple and easy to digest.

“The fundamental premise of this work is that we all have mental health, just like we all have physical health,” she notes. “Taking the complexity out of behavioral health makes it more comfortable to address and easier for people to request help when they need it.”

As far as enacting change, Terry adds, “Any time leaders in the industry join together to increase awareness and education, it sends a really powerful message.”

To learn more, visit <https://gbc.com/services/safety/mental-health-substance-abuse-awareness/>.

As one of America's oldest trade associations, established in 1891, General Building Contractors Association (GBCA) advances the union commercial, industrial, and institutional construction industry in the Philadelphia region.