They go by many names — apprentice, greenhorn, novice, recruit, student and trainee — the next generation of the workforce. A common denominator to their ultimate success is a willing, tenured master to help identify, release and channel their passion and raw talent into a successful career. NAWIC chapters across the United States are active participants in forging the construction industry’s future workforce by doing just that — mentoring.

How do mentoring programs get started? The Cleveland, Ohio, Chapter may be able to provide an answer to the question. In 2008, Gilbane Building Company (GBC), a construction management firm, was awarded a project with the University Hospitals (UH) in Cleveland. As part of the project, UH/GBC sought a community outreach project and education program.

GBC has a national partnership with the ACE Mentor Program. ACE is a high school mentoring program focusing on careers in the design/build industry. The mission of the organization is to engage, excite and enlighten high-school students to pursue careers in the design/build construction industry through mentoring; and to support their continued advancement in the industry through scholarships and grants. With no roots in Northeast Ohio, it was a natural fit.

Courtney Behm, GBC employee and NAWIC Cleveland, Ohio, Chapter member, was selected to spearhead the formation of an ACE program in Northeast Ohio. As an ambassador for GBC and ACE, she reached out to other firms involved in the UH project and construction organizations like NAWIC.

Before long, two of Behm’s NAWIC chapter cohorts were on board—Tari Rivera, president of Regency Construction Services and 2006 Crystal Vision Award winner, as well as Amy Cheverine and her employer, Chas. E. Phipps Company.

_Pictured above: Students from John Hay High School in Cleveland participated in an architecture tour of University Circle, where they examined the design of local institutions such as the Cleveland Museum of Art (in background)._
With the foundation poured, now it was time to recruit mentors. The brand power of the companies backing the program was instrumental in drawing initial commitments to the 15-week program. However, once the mentors were able to see the impact they have on the students in the classroom, they were sold, and most have continued their commitment to the program. The chapter also responded through a $1,000 donation and many volunteers in the first year alone.

In the span of less than two years, more than 60 students (including 23 girls) have participated; 45 volunteers (33 percent NAWIC members) from 20 firms remain active in the on-going program. Seven mentees from the 2010 graduating class have split $10,000 in scholarships to pursue careers in design and construction disciplines.

This partnership has not only established a mentoring program for the youth, but it has also enhanced the unity of the construction community by working toward the common goal of building the future construction industry.

The Cleveland, Ohio, Chapter is merely one example of NAWIC’s commitment to ignite passion for construction work in youths. The youth education programs and competitions through NAWIC Education Foundation — Block Kids, Building Design, Garden Shed and CAD/Design Drafting are certainly well integrated in the core of NAWIC chapters. Over the last few years, week-long MAGIC™ and Rosie’s Camps have begun to take root as summer staples to give girls hands-on knowledge of construction basics and instill the many opportunities the industry offers.

Several chapters have established on-going relationships with specific technical high schools and universities. These relationships provide mentoring and support to construction education in their communities. The Gr. Gainesville, Southwest and Volusia County, Fla., Chapters have all established relationships with the PACE Center. PACE is a non-profit organization with multiple locations in Florida that provide girls and young women an opportunity for a better future through education, counseling, training and advocacy. The Lorain County, Ohio, Chapter works with the Lorain County JVS, a technical school for high-school students and adults, to encourage students in construction industry programs. In 2009, the Gr. New York/Long Island, N.Y., Chapter began a mentoring relationship with Queens High School for Construction Trades, Engineering and Architecture. The Louisville, Ky., Phoenix, Ariz., and Charlotte, N.C. Chapters work with the University of Louisville, Arizona State University, and University of North Carolina, respectively, to mentor students throughout their construction-related studies.

Meanwhile, other chapters are extending the trend by building bridges with educational institutions in their communities. The Northwest, Ind., Chapter began by hosting a round-table discussion at Purdue Calumet University’s Construction Science and Organizational Management Department. The No. 1 of Rhode Island Chapter took a similar approach at Roger Williams College. The Roanoke Valley, Va., Chapter presented NAWIC to students at Botetourt Technical Education Center and discussed how NAWIC can support them as they pursue their construction careers.

Before students get to universities, seeds to spark an interest in a construction career need to be planted. Career Days are a great way for chapters to impact youth when they are most receptive to the information. The Boston, Mass., Detroit, Mich., Granite State, N.H., Lansing, Mich., Richmond, Va., San Diego, Calif., St. Louis, Mo., and Wichita, Kan. Chapters all hosted career days to ignite passion about the construction industry in high school students seeking a career option.

Influencing youth outside of their regular school setting is another place to find NAWIC building futures. When not selling cookies, Girl Scouts seek to earn many of the more than 100 badges, which introduce them to a variety of useful life skills. Specific to the construction industry, Junior Girl Scouts may earn badges for Architecture, Do-It-Yourself and Ms.Fix-it. Girl Scout Cadettes and seniors may earn their Architecture and Environmental Design or Home Improvement badges. NAWIC chapters are pleased to seize the opportunity to help these girls earn their badges and introduce them to what could be their future career. Throughout the past year, Gr. East Bay, Calif., Grand Rapids, Mich., Honolulu, Hawaii, Indianapolis, Ind., Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minn., Philadelphia, Pa., Sacramento, Calif., San Diego, Calif., Southwest Missouri, Gr. Tidewater, Va., and Topeka, Kan. Chapters have all been instrumental in helping a number of Girl Scouts adding a badge to their collections.

No matter the method employed, NAWIC chapters are clearly dedicated to not only enhancing the success of women in construction, but also to inspiring and cultivating those who will build the next generation of the construction industry through on-going mentoring opportunities. NAWIC is building the future and leaving a legacy for generations to come.①

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