AGC Creating the Next Generation of Construction Leaders

Scholarships, Career Days, Student Chapter / CLC Growth and Industry Partnerships Help Develop Future Workforce
Partnership of AGC CEF, ACE Mentor Program of America, Inc. Making Strides

By Erin Volk

The statewide partnership between AGC CEF and ACE Mentor Program picked up major steam in 2012 with the accomplishment of several joint projects and events.

Launched in 2011, the overarching goal of this partnership is to more effectively engage, mentor and shepherd students through the construction industry workforce pipeline. With the programs and services of both organizations working together, they are able to serve students from high school through college or other post secondary training to their careers, and the end result of these joint efforts is better prepared and more effective industry professionals.

In June 2012 the partnership hosted a scholarship mixer in Irvine, CA, where over 70 AGC members, local ACE mentors and other industry colleagues gathered to celebrate the progress of partnership. The event included the kick-off of a new statewide scholarship program for outstanding ACE Students, administered by the AGC Construction Education Foundation. During the mixer Joana Perdomo, an outstanding student who participated in the Los Angeles affiliate of ACE Mentor, was officially awarded the first scholarship, in the amount of $1,000. She recently began her engineering degree program at Harvey Mudd College in the fall of 2012.

Junior Mentors

Another success of the partnership is the developing connections between local AGC student chapters and local ACE programs. Many AGC student chapter members (college students) are now volunteering as “junior mentors” to the ACE students.

The winning team from summer camp is pictured with their doghouse project, “the Bone-a-fide Bungalow.”
The CSU Fresno AGC Student Chapter recently signed up 35 new junior mentors to assist with the San Joaquin ACE program. The CSU Chico AGC Student Chapter has taken this idea one step further and is working to start a new ACE Mentor Program in the North Valley area, the first time an ACE program has existed north of Yuba City, CA. Student leaders from CSU Long Beach Student Chapter helped to coordinate and run the 2012 ACE Summer Camp.

In July 2012, AGC CEF was the Presenting Partner for the 2012 ACE Mentor Program Summer Camp. The camp brought nearly 30 ACE high school students from across California to the CSU Long Beach campus for a very busy week filled with jobsite visits and field trips, including a job tour at LAX and a behind-the-scenes engineering tour at Disneyland.

The campers also completed a design-build project. AGC student chapter members from CSU Sacramento and Long Beach served as camp counselors and lead five teams of ACE high school students through an RFP and building process which culminated in five outstanding dog houses. After a training on how to give effective presentations by AGC CEF Director Erin Volk, ACE student teams presented their dog house projects to a panel of industry judges, and a winning team was selected – named the Bon-a-fide Bungalow. All of the dog houses were donated to the local SPCA.

As camp wrapped up, several ACE students expressed their newfound appreciation for the construction industry and wanted to know if their college of choice had an AGC student chapter they could join! AGC CEF would like to extend another thank you to the CSU Long Beach AGC Student Chapter for hosting this event and for all their hard work at camp.

Standout Sponsors
Major thanks go also to the AGC member companies who supported and participated in the ACE Mentor Program Summer Camp, including: Teichert Construction, Dynalectric/KDC Systems, an EMCOR Company, Griffith Company, Global Leadership Alliance, Valley Crest Landscape, and SKANSKA USA Civil West.

The 2013 ACE Summer Camp location has been selected, and it will be held on the San Jose State University campus and hosted by their AGC Student Chapter. Stay tuned for more on this!

For more information on the AGC CEF & ACE Statewide partnership or the 2013 ACE Summer Camp please contact Erin Volk, Director of the AGC CEF at volke@agc-ca.org or Stephanie Ercolini, Director, Regional Programs (West) for ACE Mentor Program of America, Inc. at Sercolini@acementor.org.
Q&A: Clark Construction Project Engineer Ricardo Zendejas Sees Value of Mentorship from Both Sides of Table

By Carol Eaton

When Ricardo Zendejas was a senior attending one of the largest public high schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) system, he decided to join the ACE Mentor Program on the advice of a teacher who recognized his potential.

It’s a decision he has never regretted.

Participating in the program put Zendejas in contact with a variety of engineering and construction professionals, helped him determine which direction he wanted to pursue in college and in his career, and set him on a solid course to establish and achieve his goals.

Now eight years later, with two college degrees under his belt and more than two years since he joined AGC-member company Clark Construction as a project engineer, Zendejas continues to be firmly connected to the ACE Mentor Program, which in partnership with AGC Construction Education Foundation (CEF) is working to bring students like Zendejas into the construction industry workforce pipeline.

Currently, he serves as the lead ACE mentor at Lennox Academy in the Los Angeles area. And each day, he is rediscovering just how important and rewarding “giving back” can be.

Zendejas is a prime example of how someone with talent, perseverance and the determination to succeed, supported and encouraged by a strong mentor program that provides guidance and career advice, can achieve his or her goals despite obstacles and challenges they may face along the way.

California Constructor recently talked with Zendejas about his own journey and why he sees mentorship as a vital component in the pipeline to developing the next generation of construction industry leaders.

California Constructor: Had you known that you wanted to get into engineering or construction before that point?

Ricardo Zendejas: I knew I was interested in engineering or some sort of math-related industry. But the program definitely had a big influence and played a big role in my pursuit of civil engineering, because I was better able to understand what a civil engineer did, and what a construction manager did. And then I was able to ask questions about different types of engineering.

California Constructor: Were you always planning to attend college, and what was your experience there?

Ricardo Zendejas: I am the first generation (in my family) to attend college, so it was kind of difficult for me to figure out...
what kind of engineering was best suited for me. I started at Cal Poly Pomona. I was there for two years and did very well, and then decided to apply and got a transfer to UCLA. I finished my degree there with a BS in civil engineering. When I got to UCLA, I saw that my (former ACE) mentorship company was building a project nearby, so I called them to see if they needed any interns during the year. I interned with them for two years, then graduated in 2008. After that I applied for graduate school, and got my master’s at Stanford University in civil engineering with an emphasis in design construction integration.

**California Constructor:** You were very active at Stanford in helping increase the activities of the AGC student chapter, right?

**Ricardo Zendejas:** During my second year at Stanford I was president of AGC Student Chapter. It was already established, but the budget we were working with was slim to none. So in 2009/2010, I helped put together their first construction golf tournament at the Stanford golf course. It gave us the opportunity to meet industry professionals and at same time raise money for our student chapter. That was successful; this year they had their third annual tournament.

**California Constructor:** Where did you go next?

**Ricardo Zendejas:** After graduating from Stanford, I accepted an offer to go work for Clark Construction where I’ve been for a little over two years as a project engineer. I started off on a LAUSD project, South LA High School #3. That was a rewarding experience, being able to build a school for the school district that I was a part of growing up. I’m currently working on a project at the Hall of Justice in LA.

**California Constructor:** So how did you get re-involved with the ACE program while working at Clark Construction?

**Ricardo Zendejas:** Clark is a very active company, and a big supporter of ACE. During my first year at Clark they asked if I would like to run the ACE Mentor Program at Lennox Academy. I helped put together a full team, which includes an architecture firm, CSDA Architects; structural firm, Thornton Tomasetti; and Clark Construction. ACE National provides an RFP, and throughout the year we meet with the students and help them develop the project. Basically they get to see how each one of the industries impacts the way a project is delivered. At the end of the year, we put together a PowerPoint presentation, 3-D model, and poster and present it.

**California Constructor:** You’ve been on both sides of mentorship equation now. What do you see as the major benefits that mentorship offers in terms of bringing students into the industry, and what are the biggest rewards for you personally?

**Ricardo Zendejas:** I think if you can make a difference to one of those kids that’s there being a part of the group, to help them know they want to go to college, help them make that decision, it’s just totally rewarding. A lot of these students come from lower income families. It’s difficult for them to make those decisions on their own. They are very curious. There are about 10 different mentors (at Lennox). Each one of us went to different universities and studied different things. So we encourage them to ask any questions about our industries - what the work hours are, what salary they can expect, etc. - so they are well informed once they graduate.

**California Constructor:** What caused you to seek out leadership roles at every turn in your life, and what role did your family play in it?

**Ricardo Zendejas:** Just trying to better myself every step of the way, push the envelope. Every move I made was with some sort of objective.

I have one sister, who is a school teacher. Both my parents are immigrants, with grade school educations. But they gave me all the right tools as far as staying honest, having a good work ethic, and staying humble. I couldn’t ask for any more. There were just a lot of little right things that led up to getting to where I am now. And ACE, and AGC, were both a piece of the puzzle.

**California Constructor:** What do you think it ultimately takes to be successful, to make your way through that workforce pipeline, especially for kids who grow up in environments that may not have as much access to or emphasis on college and career opportunities?

**Ricardo Zendejas:** It’s a network. Like any network, once you’re a part of it, it’s as easy as calling one of your old mentors to see if there are any internship opportunities. And if you were an active participant, you went to the meetings and participated, the mentor is going to remember you. Companies are always looking for good interns. So I think that being part of the ACE mentorship program, at such an early age, you’re already building these networks that most college students don’t even have. You’re able to interact one-on-one with the same group of mentors for a year working on a project together.

**California Constructor:** What advice would you offer for kids looking for a way into an industry such as engineering or construction? What is the key to gaining a foothold?

**Ricardo Zendejas:** The advice I can give is to just stay active in different groups. Join groups, organizations, anything that can help you better socialize in college. Ask questions. I joined a large fraternity, ASCE and AGC in college. I became very actively involved taking leadership roles, and just tried to step out of my comfort zone as much as possible. So don’t be afraid to challenge yourself. And try to give back to your community, organizations and the people that helped you along the way.