

Building a strong future in Wisconsin

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Lately, the labor market in Wisconsin has been a hot news item. We've seen reports about the likelihood of a labor shortage on the horizon for Wisconsin. Whether you are a taxpayer or an employer looking for talent, this is challenging news. If you're job hunting, it's nice to imagine employers competing for you, but a shortage of labor would mean that growth for our industries would occur somewhere else – meaning those dollars that are needed in our state would be invested elsewhere. Our residents need income and our businesses need a trained work force to compete for success.

We know from experience that this trend is not easily or quickly solved. The factors that cause boom and bust economic shifts are typically beyond our control.

Officials in our state have been studying the problem for the past decade and theories for cause and solutions are multiple and varied. What we all can do, however, is prepare as best as possible and take steps to minimize the effects. Individual acquisition of skills at any level is a necessity today.

Leadership in the construction industry has been watching employment figures closely for years and has already begun taking steps to combat the problem. In the second quarter of 2005 alone, 2,700 construction jobs were added here at home. While rising interest rates have slowed the runaway growth of new construction, the future in Wisconsin looks good for construction.

To meet the projected need for skilled workers and be ready for the future, a number of programs are in place:

- We are partnering with Wisconsin's Big Step program, which is working diligently to help prequalify all interested persons for careers in the construction industry.
- We are educating and promoting the construction industry as a great career path with a future, suitable for people from diverse walks of life.
- We are working to ensure that careers in construction remain a choice that can sustain and support family needs in our communities.
- We continue to improve our apprenticeship and continuing education programs so tomorrow's work force will be skilled, reliable and able to compete in an evolving industry.

We are working to ensure the construction industry is prepared to meet the needs of tomorrow's customers so Wisconsin's communities remain strong today, tomorrow and for future generations.

John Topp is the executive director of the Construction Labor Management Council of Southeast Wisconsin Inc. and the Building Advantage initiative.