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## Milwaukee area projects need trained work force

Ed Hayden

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Providing skilled craftworkers for the future is the biggest challenge facing Milwaukee area contractors. The power plant construction will provide numerous construction job opportunities. This is a double-edged sword. The power companies have chosen to let the construction managers on these projects self perform the work.

In order to do this, the construction managers will have to either hire from the existing trained work force, many of them who are currently working for area contractors, or bring in the boomers. In the language of the trades, boomers are construction workers who follow the work around the country. The problem with using boomers on a project is that employment opportunities are lost for local citizens and a significant amount of the payroll on the project will leave the area.

The many area firms that will have no part in construction of the power plants are understandably concerned that the power plants will use their work force, leaving them without the skilled craftworkers they need to meet quality on time commitments to their customers. This is a possibility unless the industry acts quickly.

We can employ local people and let the boomers go elsewhere without endangering the local contractor's ability to survive and prosper during power plant construction.

The answer exists in the industry's finely tuned joint-apprenticeship committees. We have the ability to train skilled craftworkers and to upgrade the skills of our existing work force. We can take individuals who want a career in construction and already have some of the necessary skills and complete their craftworker education.

The future of construction is bright. There are many other large projects on the boards, and yes, PabstCity will go ahead in some form. There will be job opportunities at living wages for many.

It takes time to train a craftworker, but it also takes time to gear up for constructing a power plant. If we start training today, all of the interests in the industry can be served, and there will be long-term opportunities for local citizens. The key is to start today.

*Ed Hayden is co-chairman of Building Advantage and the Construction Labor Management Council of Southeast Wisconsin Inc.*