

## I've made up my mind – don't confuse me with the facts

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To educate and encourage southeastern Wisconsin students about a career in the construction trade, Building Advantage and the Allied Construction Employers Association proactively distribute information. The easy-to-follow CD and accompanying collateral material detail the myriad construction crafts, specific job responsibilities, required skills, compensation and necessary steps to enter the trade.

Much to my surprise, I recently received a curt letter from a North Shore grade school requesting that the institution be removed from the mailing list. "... We are a kindergarten-to-eighth-grade school," it said.

While I obviously realize seven-year olds, for example, aren't making career decisions yet, they should be exposed to the many choices available. How will children learn about becoming a firefighter, doctor, dentist or baker if they aren't taught about these trades from early on in their schooling. This information is the foundation upon which their course work is chosen and practical skills are obtained later in life during summer jobs, internship opportunities and advanced classes in high school; every career, including construction craft workers, has prerequisites.

The average age of a construction craft apprentice is 28. This means it took an apprentice 10 years after high school, and in many cases after earning a college degree, to choose a career. It could be inferred by this that educators are not starting discussions about career planning early enough in the educational process.

Construction is a growing industry with many job opportunities. According to government figures, the construction industry will need 774,000 (an average of about 15,500 per state) new workers each year between now and 2012 to compensate for those leaving the industry as well as for new construction growth.

I suspect what the individual who wrote the aforementioned letter really meant is that the school isn't interested in having its students consider a career that does not require a college degree. There is still a mindset in education that college is for everyone in spite of the often-quoted statistic:

- 50 percent of those who start college complete the schooling.
- 50 percent who earn a college degree are employed in a job that doesn't require a college degree one.

Our trade and educators must do a better job in providing students information about the many career opportunities available.

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