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CMAA promotes leadership and collaboration for success in construction

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Today's construction owners face an increasingly challenging environment. Costs are rising, critical materials are often in short supply, and an adequate supply of skilled workers can never be taken for granted.

The industry has never had a more urgent need for true leadership and collaboration, and these values are precisely the guiding principles of the Construction Management Association of America. CMAA's mission is to promote professionalism and excellence in the management of the construction process. Nationally, CMAA now has more than 4,000 members, including both individual practitioners and companies, and both service providers and construction owners.

The association's ranks have been growing rapidly -- membership was well below 1,000 only six years ago. Staff and programs have expanded impressively, and CMAA now maintains a very active continuing professional education program, along with a foundation that awards scholarships and conducts important industry research. CMAA also recognizes excellence through an annual Project Achievement Awards program.

The New England chapter, of which I am president, has about 160 members. We hold monthly breakfast meetings at Wentworth Institute of Technology, often featuring a notable guest speaker. Our speakers this year have included Jay Cashman on the South Coast Offshore Wind project, Richard Lehmann on the Fenway Park renovations and senator Steven Baddour on Massachusetts transportation issues. Our annual awards luncheon is a well attended event and we awarded twelve projects special recognition for excellence in construction management. We also granted over \$15,000 in scholarships to deserving construction management students.

Perhaps CMAA's most important and valuable nationwide program is the Certified Construction Manager (CCM) credential. CCM was the first (and remains the only) construction industry certification program to be accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). This accreditation means that the processes and procedures of the CCM program adhere to an international standard of excellence.

For owners, ANSI's recognition of CCM means they can rely on this designation to identify experienced and well qualified professional construction managers. To earn the CCM, a candidate must satisfy certain education and experience requirements (which emphasize "responsible, in-charge" experience in the real world of construction) and pass a rigorous full-day examination.

CCM is a hard credential to earn. For that very reason, it is gaining ever-wider recognition in the construction industry. More and more RFPs specify that additional weight will be given to proposals offering the services of CCMs. Major public-sector builders like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the General Services Administration are not only recognizing CCMs among their prospective contractors but also encouraging their own staff members to obtain the certificate.

Managing a respected certification program puts CMAA in the best possible position to define Standards of Practice and Best Practices for our profession, and the association has been pursuing this responsibility vigorously. We have adopted a national Code of Ethics and a set of standard definitions for terms commonly used but not fully understood in the construction industry.

One area with a particularly acute need for clear understanding and agreement on fundamental definitions and standards is Program Management (PM). PM means the practice of professional construction management applied from inception to completion, to a capital improvement program of one or more projects.

Comprehensive construction management services are used to integrate the different facets of the construction process - planning, design, procurement, construction and commissioning - for the purpose of providing standardized technical and management expertise on each project.

In recent months we have seen a surge in media attention to PM, most of which has focused on troubled projects and reflected a fundamental lack of understanding of this function. Our 2006 survey of owners found that "the most important driver of cost for capital construction programs is how the program is managed."

The importance of Program Management is recognized, but Best Practices, ethical principles and other critical elements are not at all clear. Nor is there agreement on what the PM's role should be in program definition, planning, managing and driving team decisions and managing the design of individual projects within a program.

This is a gap CMAA has set out to fill through a systematic and comprehensive effort.

To enhance the value professional CMs can bring to every project and program, the association has also taken the lead in areas like exploring emerging technologies. We have staged major educational efforts focusing on such topics as Building Information Management (BIM), Virtual Design and Construction (VCD) and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design).

We have also conducted intensive workshops in specialty areas like school construction, recognizing both the enormous volume of work America needs to achieve in this area and the pressing need of school administrators for responsive and expert help in managing these programs. Construction is a challenging business today. True collaboration requires that every participant put the project first, and true leadership requires in-depth knowledge, experience, and a commitment to the owner's success.

Delivering these values is what CMAA is all about.

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