



CELEBRATING
65 YEARS

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Const. cos. running on overload but still counting their blessings

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No matter what industry you're in, it's always important to talk to your customers. They provide insight into market conditions and business realities that don't always show up emails, text messages, or official industry data.

So that's what the Associated Subcontractors of Massachusetts (ASM) planned to do in late June: meet with small groups of members across the state to gain a greater insight on how ASM can help them build their success, and where we should devote our resources.

Across the board, the reaction was the same: "Thanks for wanting to speak with us, but we are so busy we just don't have time to meet. Maybe we can try again after Labor Day?" While disappointed these face-to-face meeting didn't pan out, we can't be disappointed in the reason! Being up to their necks in project work is hardly a bad thing!

Fortunately, too, contractors here have been spared some of the challenges faced in other regional markets:

In San Francisco, the extreme drought has compelled local officials to mandate that buildings more than 250,000 s/f will be required to maintain alternate water sources, such as rainwater or "graywater" for toilet flushing and irrigation use.

In New York City, the rush to capitalize on soaring property values led to an increase in complaints about shoddy construction on some recent condominium and apartment complexes, giving developers and construction companies a bad name, and giving rise to numerous lawsuits.

While we don't have to worry about long-term droughts, and the quality of our construction is well above average, that isn't to say that Massachusetts' subcontractors don't have their own challenges. Topping the list here is finding the skilled labor to keep so many new projects going; and equally important - training a new generation of foremen and project managers who started during the recession and don't yet have the depth of experience necessary to efficiently manage today's complex projects and aggressive schedules. Then there's the challenge of dealing with plans that are constantly changing with the click of a button - and the constant re-pricing of the work; not to mention the challenge of getting paid fairly and timely for work that is increasingly done through changes orders, or on a T & M basis. Ultimately, it's the challenge of making a profit at the end of the day - which at times, seems elusive.

Despite all, however, it's no time to complain. If you told us back in 2009 that our members would now be so busy they couldn't take the time to meet with us, we'd have been hard pressed to believe it - but it's a problem we would have signed up for in a New York minute. And hopefully, there is no going back!

Richard Fisher is president of the Associated Subcontractors of Mass., Boston.

