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Chairman's message: ABC's workforce is worth the investment

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ABC-Mass. Chapter

The results of our national parent organization's annual Workforce Development Survey reveal that ABC member companies all around the country are facing the same workforce challenges that we in Mass. are, and that they too are ramping up efforts to recruit, educate, train and retain their employees.

More than 90% of the companies responding to the survey reported a worker shortage. To address that shortage, ABC members invested \$1.6 billion to educate their employees in 2018, up by a stunning 45% in a single year.

Nearly one million ABC employees nationwide received craft, leadership and safety training last year. Member companies invested an average of \$117,679, or 8.3% of payroll, on workforce development and education. Nearly half of that was invested in safety training.

Efforts to recruit from a wider demographic are paying dividends. For example, the survey found that 12% of craft professionals were women, compared with 3% in 2013.

Companies will need to continue recruiting from a larger pool, as an additional 500,000 construction workers will need to be added to the existing 8.2 million tradesmen and women working in the industry to meet the current backlog of construction projects.

At ABC Mass., we're complementing national efforts with programs tailored to the needs of our local members. More than 200 apprentices from 40 companies are enrolled in our Merit Apprenticeship Program. Member companies are investing about \$3,000 annually into each of those apprentices, and this doesn't include the wide range of other workforce development programs in which we invest.

We're also working on the recruitment side. Gould Construction Institute president Julie Kelliher and

ABC MA director of workforce development Steve Sullivan have teamed up to visit vocational-technical and comprehensive high schools, college and career fairs, and gatherings of associations that include those who advise young people on career and higher education opportunities. As a result of the outreach, schools have now begun to reach out to us to come and present to their students.

Julie and Steve have a good story to tell. Construction offers interesting and lucrative career opportunities that usually come without the crushing student loans that so often make it impossible for young people to buy a home or car or start a family.

At ABC, we believe the more young people know about what the construction industry has to offer, the more they will explore a career in it. Educating them is the surest way to keep up with the talent demands of a booming industry.

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