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ASM president's message: Workplace safety, opioid epidemic, OSHA topics, golf tournament and scholarship winners

September 20, 2019 - Construction Design & Engineering

ASM Annual Scholarship recipients, shown (from left) are: Fracesca Berkza, sponsored by Eastern Insurance; Marley Gonsalves, sponsored by Harry Grodsky & Co.; Zachary Mayer, sponsored by Wayne J. Griffin Electric; and Madelyn Thrasher, sponsored by Wayne J. Griffin Electric.

September usually means back to school and back to work. But for construction, these days it seems there really never was a slowdown or a break this summer. Unemployment remains low and the construction outlook remains positive although, depending on what economist you listen to, it may be showing signs of slowing. Unfortunately, no one has a crystal ball so any significant slowdown will have to wait for now.

There are many aspects to construction- estimating, bidding, contract negotiation, insurance coverage, workforce training, to name a few. But none of these matters unless worker safety is a priority on the job. So many construction companies do an outstanding job prioritizing safety, but there is always more that can be done.

Importance of Workplace Safety

According to OSHA data, there were 32 OSHA covered workplace fatalities in Region 1 (New England) through the third quarter of FY19, three more than the same period of FY18. The majority of those are in the construction industry and specifically trade contractors or subcontractors. The fatalities fall into two categories: falls and "struck by" (worker struck by a vehicle or object) fatalities. Fall fatalities involve workers falling from a roof, ladder, and scaffolding.

The good news is that there are a lot of forces in action attempting to prevent workplace fatalities and injuries. For one, ASM's Safety Roundtable regularly meets for educational and training sessions. Topics covered earlier this year included trench safety, accident investigation, sling and rigging safety, and the new aerial lift standards. This fall we have four meetings planned on additional topics.

OSHA Provides Tools for Employers

Beyond ASM's Safety Roundtable, OSHA makes a somewhat little-known tool available to construction companies. OSHA's On-Site Consultation Program offers free and confidential safety and occupational health advice to small and medium-sized companies. OSHA notes that the consultation program is completely separate from the OSHA inspection effort, and employers can find out about potential hazards at their workplace, improve programs that are already in place, and even qualify for a one-year exemption from routine OSHA inspections. No citations or penalties are issued, and the employer's only obligation is to correct serious job safety and health hazards.

In addition, OSHA's area offices provide advice, education, and assistance to businesses (particularly small employers), trade associations, local labor affiliates, and other stakeholders who request help with occupational safety and health issues.

Opioids in Construction Remain a Significant Issue

Unfortunately, workplace accidents are not alone in their impact on the safety and wellbeing of workers in the construction industry. The opioid epidemic continues, and its impact is felt in construction as our industry accounts for approximately 25% of the roughly 2,000 annual deaths in Massachusetts. ASM hopes to help reverse this trend by making the tools members need. Our next two Safety Roundtable programs will focus on this issue- Reasonable Suspicion training to identify drug or alcohol abuse in the workplace and Narcan administration. Part of addressing the problem opioids in construction starts with recognizing the issue and knowing where to turn. ASM will continue to keep this issue at the top of our agenda for members year-round by working with the legislature regulators on legislation and regulations, collaborating with other stakeholders in developing best practices for employers, and providing education to our members.

ASM Scholarships Awarded at Annual Golf Tournament

On a positive note, great weather and 275 golfers combined for a great day at the International Golf Course in July for the 24th annual ASM golf tournament. Raising funds for our scholarship program is a key mission of our annual tournament. This year, five very well deserving students, whose parents work for ASM member companies, were awarded scholarships to help offset their college tuition bills. Thanks to all our sponsors and members who helped make the day possible.

ASM Celebrating the Construction Industry at our Biennial Gala

Finally, on November 7th we will gather with our membership at our biennial gala at the Granite Links Golf Course in Quincy. About 300 members and industry partners will get together to celebrate the industry where we will honor and recognize our members' service and commitment to the association. We will also welcome ASM's new president and board of directors. Mark your calendar- we are always looking to expand our participation and sponsorship of this for this signature event.

Michael McDonagh is the CEO of the Associated Subcontractors of Mass., Boston.

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