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Safely powering a bright future amidst a pandemic - by Kristen Gowin and Alan Scharfe

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As the construction industry enters 2021, NECA Boston Chapter views the upcoming year with an ever-present sense of optimism coupled with a strong dose of reality. That said, 2020 was a year that will have lasting impacts on all businesses in every market sector, including the construction industry. Industry leaders in all aspects of construction will meet that adversity with foresight,

innovation, and the ability to adapt.

At the Forefront of Jobsite and Workplace Safety

Though the forecast for 2021 can best be described as uncertain, NECA and our contractors have started the year just as vigilant as we did last year, running our businesses and jobsites with strict attention to safety protocols and procedures that our organization has helped spearhead. As the COVID vaccines are providing the hope of a return to some form of normalcy by the end of the second quarter, jobsite environments and the health of workforces are more at risk now than ever. Consistency throughout the construction, and the industry, is critical, with a total focus on best safety practices employed at each site.

Building upon the preventative measures established by the union construction labor-management partnership in spring 2020, NECA proudly joins in the Construction Stops COVID initiative, an industry model for COVID-19 safety and prevention introduced by the Greater Boston Building Trades Unions, City of Boston Mayor Walsh, and City of Cambridge Mayor Siddiqui, in collaboration with global and local public health experts at Partners in Health and Harbor Health Services. Industry-only testing sites will be set up in areas with a high concentration of construction sites in Charlestown, Cambridge and the Seaport, speeding access to testing, tracing, and treatment, which is critical to keeping our workforces and communities safe. Special thanks also goes to Turner Construction, John Moriarty & Associates, and Suffolk Construction for their collaboration and sponsorship of Construction Stops COVID.

Commercial Real Estate Impact

The long-term impact of the pandemic on Greater Boston's construction market will be seen only over the course of time. The reality is that the changing office environment and increase in 'remote work' practices will affect long-term decisions related to development, design, and construction. In the short term, there is a delay in decision-making, especially in the commercial real estate market.

Pharmaceutical & Life Science Market Remains Robust

The pharmaceutical and life science market throughout our region, however, remains active and robust. Educational and healthcare institutions presently seem more reluctant to initiate new projects during these unsettled times. However, Greater Boston's prominence as a world-leader in education and healthcare, holds with it the promise that once there is a return to normalcy, investments in planned projects at our major colleges, universities and hospitals will once again be approved for development.

Technological Advancements, Wellness & Trends in Energy Efficiency

An ever-increasing focus on both commercial and residential buildings meeting wellness, health and safety standards are assured, as are trends in energy efficiency and sustainability.

Projects that are proceeding continue to include the design and installation of a spectrum of new technologies. NECA contractors are poised to continue to provide total energy solutions to the most complex and diverse projects, deploying the latest systems integrated technologies on their projects and performing on fast-track, design build and other alternative construction delivery models.

A Diverse and Skilled Workforce

Technological advancements require the electrical industry to train and manage a workforce up-to-date with ever-evolving technologies. NECA, in tandem with our construction partners at IBEW, is proud to have a diverse, highly-skilled workforce, adept in the installation of today's electrical products and systems, and on the cutting-edge of new technologies.

Our association is dedicated and focused on continuing to build diversity and inclusion in our workforce, as well as offering equity and equal opportunities in all aspects of electrical construction, from electricians in the field to management.

Prepared to Meet the Challenge

NECA Boston and our contractors are uniquely well prepared to meet the many challenges that are facing the electrical construction industry today, in the midst of the pandemic, and as we hopefully emerge from it later in 2021. That preparedness includes ongoing, unparalleled training and continuing education programs that result in:

- the most qualified electrical construction teams working on diverse projects throughout our region;
- safety training and safety procedures that set the industry standard;
- and project management and productivity management that are geared to optimize the efficiency and productivity of all projects, including new construction, service, maintenance and systems integration.

It is through a realistic though ever-optimistic lens that NECA Boston views the many challenges and uncertainties that lie ahead and promises to meet them with the unwavering commitment to safety, excellence, innovation, and collaboration that are hallmarks of our organization and our contractors. Above all, NECA will continue to work closely with our IBEW union partners to protect our workforces and communities, while safely meeting the expectations of the owners, developers and managers who entrust us with their facilities and projects. That commitment will help ensure a bright future for projects throughout Greater Boston and Eastern New England in 2021 and beyond.

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