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Chairman's message: Optimism amid stressful times - by Vera Vadeboncoeur

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Vera Vadeboncoeur

It's an honor to serve as chairperson of ABC Massachusetts for 2023, and to be the first woman to chair our chapter. It's a particular honor to do so when five of the commonwealth's six constitutional offices are held by women.

With a lingering pandemic, a new administration on Beacon Hill and the strange combination of an ongoing labor shortage and a slowing economy, these are certainly interesting times! Despite some of these stress-inducing realities, I remain optimistic. Part of the reason is because of all the progress we made last year under John Cruz's kind and thoughtful leadership. We all owe him a debt of gratitude for his hard work.

We also thank governor Baker for support of construction and the emphasis he put on promoting vocational and technical careers. We now look forward to working with governor Maura Healey to continue these important efforts to bring new talent into our industry.

One of the things we accomplished last year was executing on a construction diversity and apprenticeship expansion grant from the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. The funding is aimed at attracting more diversity within our construction industry.

Part of the grant funded a diversity survey of ABC companies and their employees. In the first half of this year, we will produce a summary of the survey findings together with recommendations for how our member companies can expand the pool from which they draw talent by attracting a more diverse range of employees.

More good news comes in the form of a state skills capital grant of nearly \$490,000 that was awarded to the Gould Construction Institute in December. The funding will allow Gould to purchase technology and equipment, including construction simulator learning systems, to update its plumbing, HVAC, and construction craft laborer industry certification training programs.

These are two of the three major state grants ABC or GCI has won in the last few years, and both will enhance our efforts to attract the new talent we need to bring into the construction industry.

Yet another reason for optimism is the initial success of Gould's daytime electrical training pilot. You don't need me to tell you how fast our industry is changing, and the old model of apprentices working all day, commuting to school and sitting in class for three hours may not be the recipe for addressing our labor shortage. The daytime model brings in students when they are fresh and more able to learn, and we plan to expand it to other trades.

Thank you again for allowing me to serve as your chairman, and here's to a healthy and prosperous year ahead!

Vera Vadeboncoeur is the 2023 ABC MA chair and is controller at Fernandes Masonry, Inc., New Bedford, Mass.

