

The Birmingham News

State in program to boost industry image

Tuesday, December 04, 2007

ROY L. WILLIAMS
News staff writer

A national group has picked Alabama to participate in a pilot program in a planned national marketing campaign that could cost between \$30 million and \$50 million over five years to boost the image of the construction industry.

The move could help recruitment efforts in an industry that officials say has lost its appeal with young people.

The Construction Users Roundtable, a Kentucky-based industry group, outlined the plan in a meeting held last week at the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama in Birmingham. The plan would create a Construction Workforce Development Center in Alabama, according to Jeff Masters of Associated Builders & Contractors, who attended the meeting. The goal is to start the center by mid-2008.

The program has two priorities - first, launching a campaign to recruit individuals by marketing the construction industry as a great career opportunity, and second, promoting training programs to ensure those recruiting dollars are invested wisely, according to the plan outlined by Daniel Groves, a Construction Users Roundtable consultant.

The plan says the center would not focus on establishing management (craft) training programs. It will, however, evaluate training programs that recruit individuals, investing marketing dollars in programs that meet recognized best practices.

Masters said the proposal could be a big boost to Alabama construction firms who have had to rely heavily on immigrant workers due to a shortage of Alabama young people entering the construction field.

"We have been trying to bring users to the table since I joined ABC 33 years ago," Masters said. "Our biggest challenge has been trying to get young people who are good with their hands to consider going into construction instead of college. A marketing program like this helping us to put out a positive image of our industry could be huge in our recruitment efforts."

The Construction Users Roundtable consists of major corporations doing business in Alabama, including Southern Co., the Tennessee Valley Authority and Honda Manufacturing of America.

Dan (Tom) Vaughn, president of construction for Birmingham-based BE&K, said having Alabama chosen to kick off the national program is a coup.

"It helps our efforts to let these young people know there are great career opportunities available in construction," he said. "Pay has gone up dramatically in recent years due to demand."

Efforts to reach Groves of the Construction Users Roundtable were unsuccessful Monday. In his proposal, Groves said the group is applying for a Department of Labor grant and raising money from corporate partners and foundations, as well as state and federal sources.

Vaughn, whose company is a member of the Construction Users Roundtable, said the group has already gotten some funding lined up.

rwilliams@bhamnews.com / 205.325.2471

© 2007 The Birmingham News

<http://www.al.com/business/birminghamnews/index.ssf?/base/business/119676002549670.xml&coll=2>