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RISING YOUNG PROFESSIONALS & ICONS OF CONSTRUCTION
The Wisconsin Building Trade Council (WBTC) was created in 2018 to act as a unifying voice for 40,000 union workers, to enrich and protect their livelihoods, families, and communities to build a brighter tomorrow.

We will act as the professional partner for businesses, developers, contractors, individuals, municipalities, and the State of Wisconsin to further the excellence and growth in the construction industry and in the local economy.
Welcome to The Daily Reporter’s Rising Young Professionals & Icons of Construction special publication. Our goal with this section and its accompanying virtual awards event is to celebrate a new generation of workers who are moving construction forward while also honoring leaders who have made the industry what it is today.

From workers in the field building tangible results to those advocating on behalf of the construction industry, our honorees include 20 Icons of Construction and 24 Rising Young Professionals. Together, they represent the past, present and future of the trades.

Our Rising Young Professional honorees are not only making a difference in the industry. Their contributions to standout projects throughout the state mean they all have a bright future.

Our Icons of Construction, meanwhile, show that dedication and perseverance can result in fulfilling careers. These 20 women and men have seen it all — from booms to recessions and everything in between. Throughout the many ups and down, their primary guides have been their ingenuity and dedication.

With the pandemic and the industry’s ever-present labor shortage, it is more critical than ever that we have strong leaders and a crop of talented and experienced workers leading the way into the future. The industry is dependent on it.

We congratulate and honor our 44 Rising Young Professionals & Icons of Construction and take comfort in knowing that the present and future of Wisconsin’s construction industry is in their capable hands.

Joe Yovino
Brand Leader/Group Editor
The Daily Reporter
Mike Abuls
CG Schmidt

Brad Austin
Corporate Contractors Inc.

Tom Baade
Catalyst Partners

Ron Becher
Jr. Colen (posthumous)

Jerry Bush
U.S. Vet General Contracting

Jason Fischl
U.S. Vet General Contracting

Ed Green
Miron Construction

Chad Griswold
RIMA

Stan Harmsen
Miron Construction

Dewey Hemba
GROEP

Henry Hurt
Hurt Electric

JJ Jacobson
Mortenson

Sam Lawrence
J.H. Findorff

Victoria Navarro
Advocate Aurora Health

Fred Noble
Bray Architects

Ray Postotnik
Payne + Dolan (Walbec Group)

Brandon Quinn
Lee Mechanical

Gerv Rose
Roman Electric

Lance Wagner
Batterman

Robb Wiersma
Oliver Construction

Mike Anthony
Mortenson

Jose Carbajal
Corporate Contractors Inc.

Aaron Combs
Corporate Contractors Inc.

Aric Daniels
Hunzinger Construction

Shawn Durkin
Hunzinger Construction

Ben Falls
CG Schmidt

Danny Fischer
AG Architecture

Adam Grahn
Lemberg Electric

Brian Griebl
VJS Construction

David Hennes
Mortenson

Allison Hill
CSOZ

Michael Hunzinger
Hunzinger Construction

Erik Ivers
J.H. Findorff

Amy Kopplin
Brothers Interiors

Alex Leitzke
Stevens Construction

Allison Mastel
Bray Architects

Emily Neal
Quorum Architects

Matt Ostovich
JM Brennan

Steven Richard
Scherer Construction

Connor Rice
Catalyst Construction

Erin Stephenson
DOZR

Colten Tiescher
Batterman

Jac Weitzel
Building and Const. Trades of South-Central WI

Collin Zuehlke
Miron Construction
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CULLEN THE TOUGH JOB EXPERTS
As executive vice president and chief operating officer of CG Schmidt, Mike Abuls works to ensure the company has innovative delivery methods and efficient business practices.

Aside from managing some of the state’s most complex projects, such as the Northwestern Mutual Tower and Commons, Abuls has served in leadership roles at the Associated General Contractors of Greater Milwaukee and has helped make the industry more diverse by working with small and disadvantaged contractors.

After earning an engineering degree from Purdue University, Abuls found a job in Chicago with a design-build real estate developer. He was quickly put to work on a 106,000-square-foot building in an office park.

“There was a lot of baptism by fire,” he said. “It was a successful project. It was my first soup-to-nuts experience.”

Abuls stayed in Chicago for another decade. Then he landed a job in Milwaukee under the developer Mark Irgens, who was running a division of the Oscar J. Boldt Co. called Boldt Development.

That role had him overseeing various local projects, including work at the Milwaukee Research Park.

Abuls made the move to CG Schmidt in 1999. Since then, he’s managed more than 50 million square feet worth of commercial, industrial and institutional projects.

Since taking an executive role at CG Schmidt in 2006, Abuls has worked to develop lean-construction and management techniques for the company’s quality and safety efforts. He’s also a proponent of alternative project-delivery methods, such as design-build. And Abuls has worked on the company’s internal diversity initiatives, ensuring CG Schmidt works closely with disadvantaged contractors in the Milwaukee area. Such efforts, he said, are essential to helping the industry reach a wide group of people.

“I think that a lot of people that are coming into the industry today are not necessarily coming in from the same place that they used to,” he said. “We’re going to have to reach out to communities and make opportunities to create family supporting jobs.”

— Nate Beck

Brad Austin started helping on jobsites when he was 9, working alongside his dad and earning a penny a nail before starting his career in earnest in 1976 as a carpenter.

Austin joined Corporate Contractors in Beloit in 1990 as a project manager and was promoted to president in 1996.

“Reflecting on those years there have been so many amazing relationships built and friends made, not to mention the number of remarkable projects I’ve been involved with,” he said. “I especially enjoy working with a team that creates and implements innovative solutions for a challenging new build or even those ideas that bring dirty old buildings back to life.”

Austin’s team noted that he is dedicated to fostering a supportive, high-performance setting in which associates continually develop their talents. The company’s programs offer help with professional, personal, spiritual, physical and financial wellness.

“It’s easy to love what you do when you enjoy those around you,” Austin said. “Whether it’s providing a family-first culture, spiritual support from our chaplain, financial education or personal coaching from our Dream Coaches, we’ve been able to impact their lives for the better and that’s what matters most.”

Austin served as 2007 chairman for the Associated Builders and Contractors of Wisconsin. He is a past chairman of the Downtown Beloit Association and is an active member of various industry and community organizations.

Austin said that helping to develop the next generation of construction industry professionals is more important than ever.

“It’s more critical now for companies to get involved with youth to help inspire and grow individuals who are excited to be part of the construction industry,” Austin said. “By providing mentoring opportunities, you’re able to help someone achieve their potential and grow into a fulfilling career, not just a job.”

— Melody Finnemore
With a $1 billion portfolio in successfully led and completed construction projects, Tom Baade may seem motivated simply by his desire to see new buildings go up.

But for Baade, vice president of project development at Catalyst Construction, there are countless other parts of the job that are just as important.

“I like seeing people be successful,” Baade said. “I like seeing people come up with creative solutions when there’s no clear answer. I like watching the owner get great big shiny eyes when they walk into their building for the first time. It helps you get out of bed in the morning.”

At the beginning of his professional career, Baade’s attitude about his work was much different. He started out as a carpenter and then worked as a laborer while going to college. He earned a degree in finance, trading his hard hat for a suit and a job as an investment analyst.

“I hated every minute inside wearing a tie,” Baade said.

He once again turned to schooling to help change careers. This time, he earned a degree in construction management and later a master’s degree in real estate design studies. Since then, he’s accumulated a portfolio of projects in the residential, institutional, health-care and corporate sectors.

“Tom’s tenure in construction and real estate spans coast-to-coast and includes a bevy of accomplishments and recognition that have made him a veritable titan of industry,” said Alyssa Young, business relations coordinator at Catalyst.

Baade’s wheelhouse at Catalyst is market-rate and mixed-income, multi-family projects. The total market value of his pre-development work exceeds $200 million. He’s currently working on The Ascent residential tower, the world’s tallest mass-timber structure. And his past projects include the Milwaukee Art Museum’s Calatrava addition and the Baumgartner Center for Dance in Milwaukee.

Each project, supply chain and team takes a huge amount of effort to coordinate, Baade said, and success can feel fleeting.

“You have a short time to meld that all together, but then the really awful part of our business is we basically scrap that (team) and go off and start all over again,” Baade said.

Baade stresses the importance of this part of the job to his students at the Milwaukee School of Engineering, where he’s a lecturer.

“I remind them constantly that as a successful project manager you’re motivating the team and getting a whole bunch of different people — some that don’t want to be there — together and headed in the right direction to accomplish something,” Baade said.

— Michaela Paukner
Although Ron Becher was the first person from outside the Cullen family to serve as president of JP Cullen, he had just as much pride in the company as he would have if it had borne his name.

Becher, who died in August after a short battle with leukemia, helped continue the Janesville-based contractor’s long trajectory of growth, overseeing the start of its health-care division and pushing it further into the field of industrial construction.

Little in Becher’s upbringing on a chicken farm and feed mill near the central Wisconsin village of Stratford would seem to have prepared him for a career running one of the largest general contractors in the state. But by the time he was of college age, it was clear his talents and proclivities would pull him in a different direction.

He attended UW-Platteville and then, after marrying his long-time sweetheart and graduating, took a job at the General Motors plant in Janesville. It was that time at GM that helped Becher familiarize himself with various industrial processes. And it was that knowledge and experience that made him of particular value to Cullen when the contractor came calling 18 years later.

Becher, who was by that time considered one of the top “body shop” men in North America, was placed in charge of starting Cullen’s industrial division. Under his guidance, it quickly became the fastest-growing division in the company.

The success caught the owners’ eyes. Promotions came quickly. Becher was named head of Cullen’s Janesville division in 2007 and company president in 2013.

Jeannie Cullen Schultz, now co-president of Cullen, said Becher’s rise came at a crucial time for the company. One generation of Cullens was retiring but the next generation was too young to take over the reins. Becher provided the sort of steady guiding hand that was needed.

“As the president of a 500-plus person company in the construction industry, you are under fire quite a bit,” she said. “He got put through the grinder and he always approached it with a cool and calm demeanor. He was never really rattled.”

Cullen Schultz particularly credited Becher for starting Cullen’s health-care division, which he put her in charge of. He also oversaw some of the company’s best-known projects, including the hulking Deep Space Amphitheater at Epic System’s campus in Verona.

“And just as important, he did it all as a modest leader who worked to make everyone in the company the very best they could be,” she said.

— Dan Shaw

Bush brings dedication, generations of knowledge to U.S. Vet

The unmatched work habits and knowledge displayed by Jerry Bush, general superintendent and safety manager at U.S. Vet General Contracting, make him a leader at his employer and in construction.

“The whole engine of supervision — from in the field to helping out with bidding in the office — it’s all held together by his cohesive attitude and dedication,” said Sarah Berry, executive assistant at U.S. Vet. Bush is a third-generation carpenter. He began his career as an apprentice under his father and worked his way up through the ranks at various construction companies. Since joining U.S. Vet in 2011, Bush has shown nothing but devotion to his job.

“I love my team,” Bush said. “We’re really a family.”

As a general superintendent and safety manager, Bush coordinates and schedules all activities in the field, supervises daily operations, and monitors and enforces jobsite safety. Some of his most memorable projects involve work that U.S. Vet has done for Veterans Administration medical centers in Wisconsin.

“Taking an old veterans hospital and turning it into something more modern to facilitate the needs of the new veterans, it’s very, very rewarding,” Bush said.

Bush enjoys taking a project from drawing to completion. He said he keeps an open mind when assessing solutions, talks to his colleagues about their methods and draws on his own experiences.

“I pull heavily on my almost 30 years in the field,” Bush said, “stuff that I’ve learned from other superintendents I’ve worked under — my dad and many, many other good mentors.”

Bush finds himself in the role of mentor at this point in his career — striving to pass on his experiences and work habits to his own apprentices.

“You don’t need to come in knowing everything,” Bush said. “You just need to come and work hard, have an open mind and listen to the guys who have been in the field a long time.”

— Michaela Paukner
Jason Fischl
U.S. Vet General Contracting

Fischl brings traits learned in Army to construction

Jason Fischl’s U.S. Army service has served him and U.S. Vet General Contracting’s clients exceptionally well. Fischl, senior project manager, joined the Army after high school and became part of the Honor Guard, a select group of soldiers who serve at military burials and inaugurations. He said the military instilled a sense of accountability, responsibility and preparedness that’s helped him excel in construction.

“The attention to detail the Honor Guard demanded of him, as well as the code of ethics and integrity instilled in him, continue to follow Fischl and serve him in all that he does,” said Matthew Bell, owner of U.S. Vet.

After his Army service, Fischl started working in construction as a laborer and made his way up through the ranks. As U.S. Vet’s senior project manager, he acts as both project manager and second-in-command for company-wide decision making.

His project-management resume includes the $175 million Camelback Mountain Resort in Pennsylvania, a $30 million waterpark in Nebraska and multi-million dollar projects for Veterans Administration hospitals and medical centers in Wisconsin.

“After a year or two of incredibly difficult work and long hours, seeing that finished product and people using it and enjoying it is pretty cool,” Fischl said.

His years of experience in various roles have helped him understand, develop and carry out processes that increase safety, efficiency and communication on every project — all while ensuring clients are satisfied.

“I never tell them we can’t do that or we’re not going to do that,” Fischl said. “You try to give them as much information as possible and then help them through the decision making.”

Fischel seeks to set a good example for his crew, especially for those just starting their careers in the trades.

“A big thing in our company is setting the example,” Fischl said. “Showing them that you’re willing to do that yourself, talking with them and making sure they’re aware of the expectations. All of our senior people are good at that.”

— Michaela Paukner

Ed Green
Miron Construction

Grass was never greener than at Miron for Green

Ed Green holds himself to a high standard.

That’s been the key to Green’s 43-year career at Miron Construction. Construction done right, he said, depends on a dedication to delivering a quality product. And in his decades of work, he’s worked not only to maintain the quality of his own work but also to improve that of those around him.

“It was instilled in me very early on, if you’re going to take the time to do something, do it right the first time,” Green said. “That has always stuck with me, and I’ve been able to succeed in each of my roles because I make sure my team is doing the best thing for the client and for Miron on every task we perform.”

In his time in construction, Green has overseen 715 projects as a superintendent at Miron — an average of about 17 a year. In all, that’s $2.6 billion worth of work, involving 16 million total square feet of space.

Before he joined Miron in 1978, Green had worked for a homebuilder out of high school, but figured construction wasn’t for him. His next job, a three-year stint in law enforcement, required him to work too many weekends and holidays, so he took a job at Miron.

Back then, the company employed 75 workers — far fewer than the 1,500 who work there today. The company did not own a forklift, and construction crews did everything by hand. Sometimes, Green said, workers would rig up makeshift devices — a pulley made from a bicycle wheel and rope, for instance — to lift heavy materials.

Green said he’s always enjoyed working at Miron. Although he has received offers to go elsewhere, he has stuck with the company. One thing that has helped is the fact that his sons have each been with the company for more than a decade.

He remembers former owner of Miron, Dave Voss Sr., telling him “if we don’t get it done today, we’ll get it done tomorrow.” Such an attitude demonstrates how the company has put its people first over the years, Green said.

Decades later, the fruits of Green’s labor are clear.

“That does mean something, to me and to the people I work with. You can say, “I’ve been a part of this impactful project,” Green said. “You’re able to see your decades of service to the industry physically represented around the community.”

— Nate Beck
A nyone who doubts that field trips and onsite visits can help young people choose a career needs to talk to Chad Griswold.

Griswold, a partner at RINKA, did have the advantage of growing up around people who had gone to architectural school. But it wasn’t until he went on a high school trip to the building housing UW-Milwaukee’s School of Architecture and Urban Planning that he really felt himself drawn to the design profession. “It was a fairly new facility,” Griswold said. “And I see all this energy in those studios in the people who were there. And they were actually doing this work. It hooked me.”

From that point, there was little doubt where Griswold would attend school. He obtained a master’s degree from the school of architecture and urban planning in 2003 and went to work for a small firm that worked primarily on residential projects.

That time saw him collaborating closely with trades workers. The respect he gained for them then has remained with him ever since. “All the people who are doing it every day in the field, you really have to learn as much as you can from them,” Griswold said.

His move to RINKA came when the firm was working on The Moderne, a 30-story high-rise apartment tower in Milwaukee. “It was a great opportunity to get in on the ground floor,” Griswold said.

Griswold is now working on two of RINKA’s biggest projects: Michel Corp.’s $100-million, 6-acre, mixed-use River development in Milwaukee’s Harbor District; and The Couture, a $128-million, mixed-use, residential high-rise along the city’s lakefront.

Griswold said two of his biggest goals are to bring more young people into the industry and help ensure they have the same opportunities he had.

David Stegeman, chief legal officer at Michels and senior vice president of mergers and acquisition and real estate, noted that Michels rarely works on vertical projects like the River. So Griswold’s guiding hand has been indispensable.

“As somebody without vertical experience, I’ve always felt Chad was there to explain things to make sure we were getting the cutting-edge architectural design,” Stegeman said.

— Dan Shaw
Stan Harmsen has been behind some of the biggest projects in northeast Wisconsin. The senior steel and precast estimator for Miron Construction has helped plan the construction of large structural systems for Lambeau Field, Appleton’s Fox Cities Performing Arts Center and Green Bay Packaging’s $500 million paper mill in the city, among many others.

Harmsen began by building garages in the 1970s and later moved into commercial projects in the 1980s, starting a 27-year stint at a now-defunct Waupun contractor. He moved to Miron when the company went out of business, taking on a host of even larger commercial projects.

“I definitely have the go-get-it type spirit,” Harmsen said. “Maybe I’m a little bit of an adrenaline junkie. I love not being afraid to take that next step.”

At Miron, Harmsen has relied on his decades of experience, as well as new technologies, to deliver quality projects. Keeping up with these innovation is fairly easy, he said, where you are willing and prepared to learn something new on every job.

Harmsen now relies on 3D models to represent a project before it takes shape. Fifteen years ago, he couldn’t have imagined that making use of 250-foot clear span girders would have been possible — much less commonplace on many large exposition centers.

Miron’s projects at Lambeau Field have likewise employed cutting-edge construction techniques, Harmsen said.

“Leaving a legacy is a big deal and, for me, buildings like that definitely do that,” he said.

Currently, Harmsen is working on several K-12 school projects and a new veterinary building at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

He’s also been striving over the past couple years to impart what he knows to the colleagues who will take over his job once he retires in the next year or so. In the meantime, though, Harmsen said he’s happy to continue working and taking on new projects.

“I still love coming to work every day,” he said.

— Nate Beck

Harmsen’s career goes well beyond all estimates

To our friends and colleagues, Ed Green, Stan Harmsen, and Collin Zuehlke, we extend our sincere congratulations on being 2021 Daily Reporter Icons of Construction and Rising Young Professional honorees! Together, we are Building Excellence.

LEARN MORE AT MIRON-CONSTRUCTION.COM
Anyone who lives or works in Milwaukee has likely benefited from the work of Dewey Hemba, senior structural engineer and principal at GRAEF. Hemba, who’s celebrating his 40th anniversary with GRAEF this June, is an expert in the inspection, repair and design of parking structures. He’s worked on rehabilitation and new construction projects throughout the city, state and country.

In Milwaukee especially, Hemba has had a hand in preserving some of the city’s landmarks and improving parking. He helped prevent a parking structure at Mitchell International Airport from having to be shut down in the 1980s and then returned in the early 2000s to build a 3,000-car addition to the garage. Hemba also took the lead on the new free-standing parking garage on the north side of Fiserv Forum.

One of his most memorable projects over the years has been the rehabilitation of four levels of parking under Milwaukee’s Allen-Bradley clock tower. The parking levels were deteriorating and, if left in disrepair, would have caused the entire building to be demolished.

“We did some long-term maintenance, and everything is working now and it has a projected long life,” Hemba said. “My project helped preserve that building.”

Hemba likes taking on the role of detective in projects that require forensic engineering. Rich Bub, former GRAEF CEO and one of Hemba’s first managers, saw early on how his love of learning made him an excellent investigator.

“I was impressed by his desire to understand what he was designing and how it worked, to the point that he took books and design aids home with him to study and become proficient on his own time,” Bub said. Hemba seeks to share the knowledge he’s gained over the years. His colleagues say he’s always happy to put his pencil down and help less-experienced engineers with functional design and repairs to parking structures.

“This is not something that is taught in school,” said Jason Gross, an engineer at GRAEF who’s been working with Hemba for 12 years. “It is an exceptionally rare specialty, and I am now training young engineers as Dewey taught me.”

Hemba said it’s being rewarding to help both his colleagues and clients solve problems. No matter what problem or project he’s on, cooperation is the key.

“One of the things that I’ve really taken from my career is that everything seems to work better when people work as a team,” Hemba said.

— Michaela Paukner

As Henry Hurt celebrates 25 years as owner and president of Hurt Electric in Wauwatosa, the best aspect of his job continues to be working with different people and having customers appreciate what his company does for them.

Hurt grew up with uncles who worked in the trades and learned even more from Big Step. When Hurt was involved with the organization, it was run by Vince Toran and Lerman Ellis, who had spoken to his industrial-arts class at West Division High School.

Hurt served an apprenticeship in the trade and worked for more than 10 years in the field, honing his talent at Staff Electric. He saw an opportunity to start his own MBE-certified electrical contracting company and now employs more than 40 skilled tradesmen.

A member of several industry-related committees, including Big Step, Hurt serves as the Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee’s chairman of the board.

“He has offered many opportunities to workers in Milwaukee, including myself, and is respected by all who are lucky enough to know him,” said Matt Pfeiffer, a project manager at Hurt Electric. “I can think of no one more worthy of this nomination.”

Hurt noted that he believes it’s important that experienced professionals share what they know with young workers in their industry.

“It’s a bit self-serving. You need workers to support the industry after you retire, for one. But we should support those who work with us and for us,” he said.

Hurt’s advice for young people is to ask necessary questions, plan ahead and try to be helpful.

“It will pay off for you and everyone else around you,” Hurt said. “Think about how you affect others in what you do or what you think you should do.”

— Melody Finnemore
No challenge too big, Jacobson builds on concrete reputation

“I traveled around the country for about the first 15 years I was with the company,” he said. “I worked on big power plants, hydroelectric dams, wastewater-treatment plants, doing lots of heavy concrete.”

He now finds himself having a hand in the planning of concrete and carpentry on the company’s projects. The work can involve everything from using virtual models for self-performed concrete lift drawings to coordinating formwork, material supplies and reinforcing and blocking.

“I love this work,” he said. “I never really wanted to do anything else, even when it meant being away from my home and being away from my wife.”

Before his latest career move, Jacobson had spent many years at Mortenson as a lead foreman. His employer’s size and geographic reach meant a lot of the projects he was assigned to were large — many costing well over $100 million.

The Fiserv Forum project, for instance, involved the construction of a 730,000-square-foot arena in a 30-acre mixed-use district in downtown Milwaukee. The work began with the excavation of 44,000 tons of dirt, followed by the drilling of bore holes for more than 1,000 55-foot-long steel piles.

Jacobson’s colleagues said it takes a lot of experience and dedication to carry off such responsibilities with success.

“I could have not done some of my projects without his specialized concrete knowledge,” said Steve Hordyk, Mortenson senior superintendent. “His understanding of complex concrete projects, and types of formworks and materials that are needed, make us the builders we are today.”

The sentiment was echoed by Hordyk’s colleague, Dan Woltz, a Mortenson superintendent.

“Architects, engineers, customers and team members all trust JJ and reach out to him,” Woltz said. “I don’t know of anyone who hasn’t come away feeling more educated or at ease after getting help from him.”

— Dan Shaw
When Sam Lawrence joined J.H. Findorff in the mid-’90s, few if any contractors had teams devoted to pre-construction services.

Most companies instead relied on an “eat what you kill” system that had job supervisors overseeing whatever projects they could land, taking them from the initial design phase all the way to completion. The trouble with that way of doing things, said Lawrence, was that it diluted expertise. By the time project supervisors had finished a large job — often a years-long endeavor — they had forgotten a lot of what they had learned at the beginning.

“It took a lot of time to reinvent the wheel every time,” Lawrence said.

It wasn’t many years after Lawrence joined Findorff that contractors throughout the industry came to push for increased specialization. Lawrence was recruited for Findorff’s first pre-construction team.

He found himself drawn to the work, which involves everything from price estimating to figuring out how materials should best be delivered to job sites. Although Lawrence has enjoyed using his hands ever since he was young, he never envisioned himself as a worker out in the field. So he eventually obtained a master’s degree in civil engineering from UW-Madison in 1995.

“I’ve always loved numbers and I’ve always been fascinated with analyzing information,” Lawrence said.

His colleagues give Lawrence a lot of credit for building Findorff’s pre-construction services department into what it is today.

“Sam’s leadership around Findorff’s preconstruction services has resulted in the company’s solid reputation for accurate estimates that ensure our client’s continued trust in our ability to build on time and on budget,” said Rich Lynch, Findorff chairman. Lawrence is now vice president of Findorff’s pre-construction department, which has 17 members. Over the years, he has worked on projects ranging from the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed First Unitarian Society of Madison, the American Family Children’s Hospital and UW Health at The American Center.

Throughout it all, Lawrence has taken the pride in seeing how satisfied owners are when a project turns out the way they expected.

“I love sitting down with them and reviewing their plans, and making sure they’ve thought them through,” he said. “And then we try to come with our best number so owners can make the decisions they need to make.”

— Dan Shaw

Victoria Navarro, regional director of planning, design and construction at Advocate Aurora Health, is working to reinvent the construction industry.

“Women’s leadership accomplishments and contributions continue to shape every aspect of our industry,” Navarro said. “It’s paramount for me to pave the way and serve as a mentor to youth who are exploring every point in the design and construction of the built world.”

As a woman of color in a male-dominated industry, she uses her position and her online platform to show people who might not be typically associated with construction the opportunities that the industry can provide. By doing so, she also teaches current leaders the benefits of bringing diverse perspectives to projects.

Navarro oversees and supports Advocate Aurora’s capital-construction projects in north and central Wisconsin. She uses the lean project-delivery approach on every one of her projects to avoid the sorts of problems that can plague the industry, she said.

“Lean construction is a comprehensive system of processes and behaviors that re-integrates our siloed industry into high-performing, success-oriented teams committed to collaboration, innovation, knowledge-sharing and interpersonal respect,” Navarro said.

JP Cullen and Zimmerman Architectural Studios started working with Navarro in 2019 on a renovation project at Sinai Medical Center in downtown Milwaukee. Integrated lean project delivery was new to both companies. With Navarro at the helm, it quickly became a standard way of working.

“She asked everyone to bring a positive mindset, bring new ideas to the table, be engaged and collaborative, and to fully participate,” said Shannon Metoxen, division manager of JP Cullen’s Milwaukee office. “She challenged us to think outside of the box and come up with creative solutions.”

“Victoria’s mentorship, coaching and genuine interest in fostering team growth established a culture of collaboration, open dialogue and trust,” said Troy Steege, vice president and senior project manager at Zimmerman.

Navarro shares her innovative approach as the founder and leader of the Milwaukee Lean Construction Institute Community of Practice and is one of the founders of She Builds, which supports women and youth programs in construction. She seeks to be an inspiration for others and a bridge into an industry that will benefit from having a diverse workforce.

“We can discuss and decide the future we want to live and work in,” Navarro said. “When we do it together we can have tremendous impact and engagement with the communities we serve.”

— Michaela Paukner
Like so many in construction, Fred Noble found his place in the industry not only through hard work but also by being in the right place at the right time. For much of the '70s, Noble worked in and around the Madison area in the homebuilding industry. By the end of the decade, though, skyrocketing interest rates had resulted in a huge slowdown in the construction of houses. Noble next joined a general contractor that did some work on school projects. His work on a school job in Elkhorn was what eventually led to his hiring by Bray Architects. “The superintendent at the school gave me a great review,” he said. “And I’ve been at Bray ever since.” Noble’s work as an onsite administrator and construction supervisor has him out in the field on most days, working directly with owners, general contractors, subcontractors and designers.

It might seem a strange career for someone who studied mechanical engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. But Nobel never had much interest in having a desk job. “I wanted to be in the field,” he said. “I was not looking to be a designer or anything like that. I like the people; there’s always different personalities. You pretty much get a new set of guys every job, but then you run into some of the old ones every one or two years.”

Andrew Weiland, business manager for the Oregon School District, has worked regularly with Noble over the years on school projects. Weiland said he has come to rely on Noble’s expertise so much that he has had it written into the district’s contracts with Bray that Noble must always be the project manager on the job. “He and I in fact worked together on first building I built, back in 2000,” Weiland said. As Noble approaches retirement, his 40-plus year career is in a sense coming full circle. One of his favorite projects came in 2010 when he helped with the construction of a new high school in Sun Prairie. Now he’s back in Sun Prairie, working on yet another high school. Noble said he’ll probably retire when that project is finished. But that doesn’t mean he’ll give up his craft. “I’m a handyman, and I come from a family with 10 kids,” he said. “So I’ll probably end up working even more.”

— Dan Shaw

You’d be hard-pressed to find a road in southeast Wisconsin that Ray Postotnik hasn’t worked on. Postotnik joined the road builder Payne + Dolan in 1974 during college as a laborer on an asphalt crew. His first job, he said, was operating a roller to repave the runway at what now is Mitchell International Airport. Initially, Postotnik thought he wanted to go into law enforcement. But a friend who was a business agent for the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 139 persuaded him to apply for an apprenticeship. He quickly found that he enjoyed working in construction, and saw an opportunity to grow in the industry. “I was kind of interested in building things and operating heavy machinery,” Postotnik said. “It was a lot of fun to run these pieces of equipment.”

Postotnik steadily rose through the ranks at Payne + Dolan. He went from being a project manager to eventually being the area manager overseeing its operations in southeast Wisconsin and northern Illinois, a position he said is kind of like “running your own business.” In that role, he’s in charge of Payne + Dolan’s office in Kenosha and manages most of the company’s large construction jobs in the area. Postotnik said he still remembers work Payne + Dolan performed at the Racine County Airport. The project called for resurfacing and grading the airport’s runway — during a summer with a lot of heavy rainfall. “That was a very interesting and hard job to build, but it was very rewarding after you got done,” he said. “But there were times when it felt like it was never going to get done.”

Recently, Postotnik has overseen the firm’s work on Foxconn’s project in Mount Pleasant and paving projects on Interstate 94 in Racine and Kenosha. Now, Postotnik said he’s motivated by his desire to develop the talents of young engineers at Payne + Dolan, many of whom come straight from college. “It’s really rewarding to watch them develop in their careers and do special things for Payne + Dolan,” he said.

— Nate Beck
Brandon Quinn learned to work with his hands by helping his grandfather in his mechanic’s shop and by doing carpentry projects in his grandfather’s basement.

Quinn took trades classes in high school and, during his senior year, took part in a construction co-op that involved classroom work in the mornings and work on jobsites in afternoons.

“I really wish they would bring those trade classes back,” Quinn said. “I truly feel the industry could use young, talented help and know it can start in high school. Giving young people options for their future is invaluable. Between the introduction my grandpa gave me and the classes in high school, that combination gave me a passion for construction. I was driven by the challenge of what could become of a drawing on a piece of paper.”

Now principal and chief operating officer at Lee Mechanical in Oak Creek, Quinn started his career with plumbing and steamfitters’ apprenticeships that provided essential knowledge and experience. It also showed him the importance of having people around him who could show him the way. He now tries to provide similar aid to newcomers to the industry.

“I think mentorships go both ways,” Quinn said. “I feel you learn as much from being a mentor as being mentored. There are pieces to be learned from every aspect of mentoring. I really try to mentor everyone around me. I want to see everyone meet their own personal and life goals.”

Quinn often tells young people that they will experience failures and setbacks, and it’s important to just keep trying and pushing forward.

“You will learn 10 times more from a single failure then you will from a successful endeavor,” he said. “Never let anyone take away your drive. If you are not driven by what you are doing then find something else. Life is too short to not have passion in what you are doing.”

— Melody Finnemore

Gervase Rose's parents, Roman and Cathryn, founded Roman Electric in Milwaukee in 1929. Graduating from Marquette University in 1957, Gervase quickly joined the family business. After Roman’s death in 1963, Rose took over as president and CEO, running the business with his mother and brothers, Greg and Tom. By 1997, Roman Electric was employing more than 450 electricians in southeast Wisconsin. In 2002, Rose handed the reins to two of his sons, Phil and Gabe. He served as CEO until just last year and continues in his role as chairman of the board. At 84, Rose still comes to work every day.

“I enjoy the social and business contact with our employees, customers and suppliers,” he said. “It is so rewarding to see my sons and fellow workers develop their skills and advance in their knowledge and ability to enhance our company, and to contribute to some social and religious charities.”

Rose has received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the University of Wisconsin Construction Club, The NECA Leadership Award and the Chancellors Award from St. Thomas More High School. In 1999, NECA inducted him into its National Academy of Electrical Contracting in recognition of his contributions to the electrical-contracting industry.

“Gerv has never asked for these accolades, nor would he tell you that he deserved them. He is much too humble to admit that he made this world better by paying it forward as a leader in his community and his industry. But that is exactly what he has done,” Phil and Gabe Rose said. “If you ask anyone who has been in the Milwaukee construction industry over the past 60 years, they have heard of Gerv Rose. We are proud to be his sons, and to continue to build the company he and his father built before us.”

— Melody Finnemore
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Lance Wagner has come full circle from his days as a civil engineering major at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and has been the recipient of invaluable advice from mentors.

Wagner started his career as an intern at R.H. Batterman in the early 1990s. After graduating, he worked at large firms in Milwaukee and Madison and served as a project leader at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

Although those experiences gave Wagner an opportunity to contribute to several big projects, he was impatient to get back to Batterman.

“Since reconnecting, I have worked to become a partner and I continue to eagerly anticipate the leadership challenges that each day brings,” Wagner said. “A particularly exciting role I enjoy includes interviewing college students and working with them as they progress through their careers.”

Wagner directs the Beloit company’s construction-management department and credits his mentors with teaching him the fundamentals of civil engineering, inspiring him to pursue bigger projects.

“My foundations in mentorship have motivated my ambitions to support my community at an early educational level. I have served as a mentor to elementary students in Janesville for over 10 years, and I have provided professional enrichment to high school students. As a mentor at Batterman, I help preserve the learning culture and work ethic that I loved in the early ’90s,” he said.

Wagner noted that a person’s team is their vehicle to success and that establishing a hardworking team promotes collaboration.

“Work hard every day, always be looking two stages ahead, and always have the final product in mind,” he said. “Listen to all advice, get many opinions, especially from the older and more experienced construction workers that have seen it all. Take it all in and make informed decisions. Think big.”

— Melody Finnemore

Robb Wierdsma
Oliver Construction

Wierdsma spent career carrying on family traditions

Just shy of three months after Germany surrendered, effectively ending WWII, Oliver, Robert and Tena Wierdsma founded Oliver Construction to “… engage in the general construction business; to erect, repair and construct any and all types of buildings.” With Bob and Oliver owning less than 1 percent of the shares at the time of incorporation, the company began as a woman-owned business enterprise.

Robb Wierdsma is the grandson of the company’s namesake, Oliver Wierdsma. He has been constructing buildings for some of the most established names in southeast Wisconsin for more than 40 years.

“It’s always been about the people before me. They’re the ones who taught me, and what I was taught I tried to pass on to others. I was lucky enough to ride along,” he said, adding he always appreciated being part of the building process.

Wierdsma often served as a mentor for employees and wanted to help develop the new generation of leaders. He said he also has learned much from his team, including about the technology that has helped modernize the company this past decade.

This year, Robb Wierdsma retired and ceded the managing partner role to his longtime partner and friend, Keith Farley, and junior partners Greg Halpin and Conor Farley. He said his greatest reward over his career has been the relationships he has developed with the Oliver Construction family, project owners and clients, contractors and employees — both past and present.

“Every client Robb has worked with can attest to his calm demeanor, extensive expertise and thoughtful approach to getting jobs done,” Halpin said. “They are principles passed down from Oliver to Robert to Robb and exemplified in his daily life over the last 40-plus years here with his work family. We are all better for having worked with him.”

— Melody Finnemore
I
t didn’t take long for Michael Anthony to
make a good impression at Mortenson.
Shortly after joining the company in
2014 as a mechanical, electrical, plumbing
superintendent, Anthony jumped right
into a complex health-care project —
the Froedtert & the Medical College of
Wisconsin Center for Advanced Care in
Wauwatosa. He served as project engineer
and worked with the finish trades to
complete the job.
“l’II always remember the comradery of
the CFAC project team as one of the best
parts of that project,” Anthony said.
In 2018, Anthony’s hard work on complex
MEP systems earned him the role of
assistant MEP project manager on the
Fiserv Forum. Home to the Milwaukee
Bucks, the 730,000-square-foot arena is the
cornerstone of the downtown’s new sports
and entertainment district.
Anthony said the hardest part of his job
is dealing with the complexity of the MEP
systems on a big project.
“These systems interact with all the other
parts of the building,” he said. “Because
of this there are many challenges to
coordinating all those interactions. There
are also challenges starting and testing
all of these different systems to provide a
functional building.
“These challenges are why I’m interested
in working primarily on MEP systems.”
When the pandemic hit last spring, it
added another layer of difficulty.
“Mask wearing, temperature logging
and finding creative ways to maintain
physical distance have created leadership
challenges above what is typical,” Anthony
said. “I think the fact that we have risen to
these challenges is another reason I like
working at Mortenson — the great people
that can rise to any challenge.”
Lauren Giannini, marketing coordinator
with Mortenson, said that Anthony has
proved “his mastery of industry knowledge
and brings a passion for advancing the
construction industry.”
Outside work Anthony enjoys hiking with
his fiancée, reading and brewing beer.
— Jimmy Nesbitt

Anthony doesn’t take long to make name for himself
Jose Carbajal
Corporate Contractors

Carbajal finds solutions to new problems every day

Jose Carbajal's attention to detail sets him apart from other young professionals in the construction industry, his colleagues say.

Carbajal, assistant project manager at Corporate Contractors in Beloit, joined the company in 2018 after receiving his Bachelor of Science degree in construction management at Western Illinois University. He has experience in a variety of projects, including commercial and institutional structures.

“In his role, he collaborates with the project team to provide critical insight and management, including estimating, project oversight, cost reporting, purchasing, ensuring schedule goals and safety compliance,” said Heather Dobson, director of business and workforce development at CCI.

“Jose is currently a major player in the construction of a new baseball stadium and continues to excel and grow in his role,” she said. “Not only is he involved with the construction but works closely with Hendricks CareerTek to develop a virtual job shadow experience to give students exposure to the trades and highlight career opportunities.”

Carbajal said the hardest part of his job is his need to solve new problems every day.

“Being able to think on the spot and provide solutions for problems that arise is important to keep our job moving smoothly,” he said.

Carbajal, who has lived in the Beloit area since he was 2, recalls seeing a lot of company trucks and CCI construction signs when he was growing up.

“I’ve always wanted to be a part of construction in Beloit as it provides new life into the community and creates an infrastructure to keep Beloit moving forward,” he said. “CCI is also actively seeking to be involved in the community, which to me makes me thankful for working for a company that truly cares and gives back to the community.”

Asked how the pandemic has affected his job, Carbajal said COVID-19 protocols have “added steps in our jobs as it has across the board. From added documentation, to increasing lead times and material pricing, these are just a few of the things that affect our schedule and budget.”

-- Jimmy Nesbitt

Aaron Combs
Corporate Contractors Inc.

Combs relishes endless variety at Corporate Contractors

Aaron Combs’ years of leadership experience have been a great asset to the construction team at Corporate Contractors.

Combs, a project manager at CCI, manages all aspects of projects, including communications, estimating, budget control, schedule adherence, quality and safety.

“He is focused and adept at clearly identifying project goals to fully meet the clients’ expectations,” said Heather Dobson, director of business and workforce development at CCI. “With the natural ability to think outside the box, Aaron brings solutions to the client that keep projects moving forward.

“He continues to seek out opportunities to learn and grow as a project manager and always has an open mind.”

Combs said that every new project is different than his previous ones.

“In health care, it is working in occupied spaces,” he said. “In design-build it becomes challenging in managing clients’ needs and wants versus their budget.”

Combs began his career in construction-material sales before joining CCI in 2015. At CCI, he began as an assistant project manager and was promoted to project manager in 2017.

“I had worked with CCI as a supplier for a few years,” Combs said. “I liked the people I came in contact with, and they seemed to love their jobs. Honestly, in the four to five years I worked with them, not one time did someone complain about their job.”

Combs also serves as a part-time youth pastor at Berean Baptist Church of Beloit, where he enjoys teaching and training young people to live for something greater than themselves.

“His passion for helping others is evident in the way he works with the youth and treats those around him, on and off the jobsite,” Dobson said.

Beyond helping the young, Combs said he always enjoys spending time with his family, hiking and being outdoors.

-- Jimmy Nesbitt
Aric Daniels began his career at Hunzinger Construction just over a year ago, but he’s already proved himself as an asset to the industry. Daniels, a project engineer, was a varsity athlete in high school and, after graduation, joined the Air Force. He was deployed twice to the Middle East, where he learned the heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration trade and served as an HVAC technician. He was hired by Hunzinger right before the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020. “My experience with the pandemic from a work aspect is unique to say the least,” Daniels said. “I started my career at Hunzinger a few weeks before the stay-at-home order. So not only did I make a career change, but I was adapting to the new normal.”

“Unfortunately, I was unable to fully experience the day-to-day operations of Hunzinger Construction pre-pandemic,” Daniels said. “However, we very quickly implemented COVID-19 protocols and we all hold each other accountable. For the past year we have been ensuring a safe work environment for our own workers, our clients and all our subcontractors.”

Since joining Hunzinger, Daniels has worked on several notable projects, including the Komatsu South Harbor Campus Project in Milwaukee’s Harbor district. “Aric has shown that no task is too big or too small to complete with care,” said Joan Zepecki, Hunzinger diversity and community outreach coordinator. “He is diligent and doesn’t shy away from chasing down subs for documents and submittals. He works efficiently and with attention to details.”

Daniels said that one of the hardest parts of his job is understanding that there is only so much he can accomplish in one day. “There has to be a healthy balance between professional and personal life,” he said. “My family is a very important part of my life, and I spend as much time with them as I can. However, I enjoy the grind and the process of the job — it’s what keeps me motivated.”

-- Jimmy Nesbitt

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Shawn Durkin  
Hunzinger Construction

At Hunzinger, Durkin now helping to build his environment

more than 20 years ago,” Durkin said. Years later, when an opportunity arose to join Hunzinger, Durkin jumped at it. He is now a construction technical services engineer at Hunzinger and has worked on several big projects for the company, including the Komatsu South Harbor Campus Project in Milwaukee’s Harbor District.

“My favorite part of my job is being able to use technology to assist our onsite workers and office, our trade partners and subcontractors, and our building owners in constructing, visualizing and understanding our projects,” Durkin said. “Anything that I can do to make someone else’s job a bit easier makes me happy.”

Although the pandemic has upended many workplaces, Durkin found his work was largely unaffected because it can mostly be done on a computer. “It has, however, helped to reinforce how vital technology is to communicate critical information,” he said. “As I’ve been transitioning to working from the jobsite once again, I’ve been able to still feel comfortable with social distancing, wearing masks and sanitizing my hands and work surfaces often.

“These small concessions are critical to assist our field personnel, our community and our first responders in any way we can and make sure that everyone is safe and healthy.”

Durkin’s colleague, Joan Zepecki, Hunzinger diversity and community outreach coordinator, said that Durkin is “thorough, smart and willing to learn and get better every day.”

Outside work, Durkin enjoys writing and recording music, and playing drums, guitar and piano. “I also am a hobbyist luthier and build electric guitars in my free time, as well as doing some small woodworking,” he said.

-- Jimmy Nesbitt

Ben Falls  
CG Schmidt

Falls perseveres, achieves amid pandemic

not only with the construction project, but with home environments,” he recalled. Like most other companies, CG Schmidt adapted new protocols and put response plans in place to keep workers safe.

“Overall, it changed the way we had to operate and conduct the project team moving forward,” Falls said. “I was thankful that I still had a job and was able to have boots on the ground and continue moving that current project forward through completion on schedule.”

Falls’ leadership during the pandemic is one reason why colleagues say he is a rising star in the construction industry.

“Ben Falls has been a valued employee of CG Schmidt for six years,” said Tovah Cohen, marketing coordinator for the company. “In this relatively short amount of time he has been promoted three levels. His most recent promotion to the construction manager position includes a dual role, which only one other person in the firm occupies.”

Falls said he enjoys working with a wide range of people who bring different ideas, viewpoints and talents to the table. Each project is different, he said, and has its own complexities and nuances.

“I also enjoy the gratification of being able to take a step back as the project wraps up, to reflect on what the project team had accomplished,” he said. “There’s a great sense of achievement with what we do in construction. Also, as I drive around the area with my family, I get to point out previously completed projects that I was a part of and get to tell my son, ‘Look what daddy built.’”

-- Jimmy Nesbitt
Danny Fischer has always enjoyed working with his hands. Fischer, project manager at AG Architecture, has been in love with the idea of building tangible objects from the time he was a boy. Architecture seemed like a natural fit. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Architecture & Urban Planning, he joined AG.

“Danny is always willing and able to do what needs to get done to maintain the integrity of the project and satisfy the client. He strives for professionalism in all aspects of the work he does,” said Ann D’Acquisto, AG team lead and senior associate, as well as a Daily Reporter Women in Construction honoree in 2020. “He is eager to continue to learn and takes his job very seriously. We are so lucky to have him as part of our AG family.”

From the beginning, Fischer’s colleagues at AG have supported his professional growth. “The people at AG and the work environment they foster make it a pleasure to continue my career with the firm,” said Fischer, who later returned to UW-Milwaukee and earned a Master of Architecture degree.

Fischer said the most enjoyable part of his job has been watching ideas and designs go from being mere drawings to constructed buildings. “It is very satisfying to walk through a finished building after months of working through the complex design and construction process,” he said.

Fischer has played a big role in learning how suburban senior-living projects can be made successful. He was also an essential team member on the award-winning St. Rita Square project on Milwaukee’s east side. “As Danny has gained more design and project management experience he has developed a level of confidence that is benefiting both the team and his clients,” said Eric Harrmann, AG’s chief design officer. “He is able to create and work with a design intent that meets a client’s goals while also ensuring it can be efficiently constructed.”

— Jimmy Nesbitt

Danny Fischer
AG Architecture

Fischer takes hands-on approach at AG Architecture

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— Jimmy Nesbitt
Adam Grahn
Lemberg Electric

Grahn helps guide Lemberg through rigors of pandemic

Adam Grahn is known throughout the construction industry for his attention to detail and organization. Grahn, a project manager in the construction division at Lemberg Electric, joined the company in 2016 and has been instrumental in many projects, including the Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital remodel, work at several Meijer and Fleet Farm sites and the new IKEA store in Oak Creek.

“Adam consistently produces successful projects. He represents the future of the company and the industry,” said Pat Antkowski, vice president of construction at Lemberg.

Kyle Witte, senior project manager at Lemberg, said that Grahn never hesitates to show initiative and is personable and independent.

“Adam has willingly taken on the role of teacher and mentor to the next group of assistant project managers in construction and throughout our other divisions as we strive to centralize our processes and procedures,” said Witte, who also supervises Grahn.

Since the pandemic hit in March 2020, Grahn has embraced digital resources — such as laptops, software and virtual meetings — that have allowed him to meet the ever-changing demands of his job.

“There are now much more online/virtual meetings being held,” he said. “I think that this is going to be more common going forward in the industry. At first it was extremely frustrating not being in a room with others and it seemed that meetings were not nearly as efficient as they are in person.

“After having virtual meetings for months now, I realized the positive of being able to go from meeting to meeting and not having that travel time between jobsites. I can be in multiple places from one hour to the next.”

Outside work, Grahn enjoys spending time with his wife, Emily, and their dog, Georgie.

“We enjoy getting outdoors and playing all kinds of sports — golf, volleyball, basketball — as well as going hiking and camping,” he said.

— Jimmy Nesbitt

Brian Griebl
VJS Construction

Griebl quick to tackle wide range of projects at VJS

Since joining VJS in 2015, Brian Griebl has been an essential part of the company’s Integrated Services department.

Griebl, a project architect, has distinguished himself through his commitment and dedication to VJS clients.

“Brian has multifaceted talents that allows him to envision all types of challenges and solutions to our development projects,” said Ryan Bedford, president of Bedford Development. “He can anticipate architectural problems before they arise and creates crafty solutions to provide me with a productive use of our time, therefore moving our projects ahead swiftly.”

Griebl said that the hardest part of his job “is knowing that there will always be more that I could do, more things I could try and ways it could be better. When striving for the perfect design this can be a difficult hurdle to overcome.”

He has been involved in several landmark projects, including the YMCA of Greater Waukesha; Cattleman Ranch Apartments in Sarasota, Florida; Mount Mary University Nurse Simulation Lab in Milwaukee; and Bank Five Nine in Oconomowoc.

“Without Brian, the VJS Integrated Services department would not be where it is today,” said Katie Kawczynski, partner and director of architecture at VJS. “His design capabilities, attention to detail, quality control in our drawing sets and overarching passion in helping our clients has helped push our Integrated Services to the next level.”

The pandemic has made a big difference in the way VJS communicates with clients, consultants, subcontractors and local government officials.

“I think as time goes on here, the ability to use programs such as Zoom and (Microsoft) Teams will continue to be a valuable asset long after the pandemic has passed to help connect us outside of physical face-to-face meetings,” Griebl said.

Outside work, Griebl enjoys spending time with friends and family, golfing, powersports and — as he put it — “basically anything outdoors.”

— Jimmy Nesbitt
David Hennes joined Mortenson in 2015 and has since become a trusted partner to his colleagues and clients. Hennes started as an intern at the company before being hired full-time in 2016 as a field engineer after graduating from the University of Wisconsin. He has already worked on several prominent projects, including the Fiserv Forum, a 730,000-square-foot, 17,500-seat arena. The arena is the cornerstone of the sports and entertainment district in downtown Milwaukee.

“David is proud of building a landmark within the city of Milwaukee where his friends and neighbors will enjoy spending their time for decades to come,” said Lauren Giannini, marketing coordinator for Mortenson. “Building a first-class facility was both challenging and rewarding. Over the course of the two years, David had the opportunity to see the project from site prep through punch list and was involved with almost every scope of work at some point during the project.”

Hennes, who is now assistant superintendent for Mortenson, said the hardest part of his job is coming to terms with the fact that not everyone out in the field works in exactly the same way.

“Everybody communicates in their own way and some are more flexible and adapt better to change than others,” he said. “Coordinating these various personalities and getting them to buy into the overall goal of the project team can be challenging.

“In addition, some have a better understanding than others of how the work around them may be impacted by the installation of their scope, so convincing them that the right thing to do may be slightly less efficient for them can be challenging.”

Hennes is an avid outdoorsman and enjoys hunting, fishing and snow sports.

“I have always enjoyed working with my hands and grew up on a farm where we built or repaired everything ourselves,” he said. “That played a big role in my career choice along with enjoying being outside.”

— Jimmy Nesbitt

In just 6 years, Hennes already making mark at Mortenson

David Hennes Mortenson Construction

Congratulations to Adam Grahn
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When the pandemic hit last spring, Allison Hill had to adjust her day-to-day work in order to continue meeting her clients’ needs. Hill, client executive at Cobb Strecker Dunphy & Zimmermann in Middleton, went from meeting clients in their offices to scheduling chats over Zoom meetings. The company had also recently started a mental health and suicide-prevention program, which proved timely.

“This topic has become a priority for many of our clients during the past year as they look to support their employees who have struggled through the impacts of the pandemic,” Hill said.

Hill, a graduate of the UW-Madison School of Business, works with construction and design firms on risk management, including insurance and surety needs.

“Although Allison works on risk management and insurance placement during the day she often wears a tool belt of her own on evenings and weekends,” said Dawn Filtz, administrative manager at Duwe Metal Products. “You will find Allison and her fiancé doing remodeling jobs for family and friends. Allison has found that her hands-on experience with these remodeling projects has allowed her to better understand the construction process and respond to her clients’ needs more accurately.”

Hill said that one of the hardest parts of her job is recognizing that no two contractors are the same.

“Every company has its own culture and approach, risk tolerance and unique risk profile; my job is to learn these things about an organization and identify opportunities that we can help you do what you do safer, more efficiently, and ultimately, more profitably in a way that will uniquely work for each individual organization,” she said.

“One of the great challenges is encouraging this type of proactive engagement, which allows for the insurance procurement relationship to actually create value for the contractor and not just a ‘necessary evil.’”

— Jimmy Nesbitt

Michael Hunzinger
Hunzinger Construction

Hunzinger puts Marine training to use at family business

After completing a four-year commitment to the Marines, Michael Hunzinger decided it was time to join the family business.

Hunzinger was hired by the construction company with his namesake as an assistant project manager in 2018 and has been a rising star ever since. He has worked on several noteworthy projects, including the Komatsu South Harbor Campus Project in Milwaukee’s Harbor District. He oversaw the company’s self-performed concrete work on the 410,000-square-foot manufacturing operation, which is scheduled to be complete in mid-2022.

He has also worked on the Zund North American Headquarters project in Oak Creek, a 61,000-square-foot building with offices, product display, training for customers and employees and warehousing for their products.

“Michael brings a disciplined, winning attitude to his work because he was an accomplished Marine officer,” said Joan Zepecki, Hunzinger diversity and community outreach coordinator. “He understands hard work, perseverance and determination, and is willing to learn and get better every day.”

Hunzinger said his experience in the Marines helped prepare him for his construction job.

“It gave me a new perspective on construction, and when I joined Hunzinger full-time, I began a career in project management,” he said. “I have been able to build on my experience in the military. There are plenty of similarities — you have to be organized, precise and you are only successful when you are working as part of a larger team.”

Hunzinger said the most satisfying part of his job is learning about his clients.

“I like the sense of pride and camaraderie that I see from all the workers on the jobsites — it’s very impressive and it makes my job very satisfying,” he said.

Outside work, Hunzinger enjoys spending time with family and being outside.

“I enjoy hunting and am looking forward to spring when I can go camping, have bonfires and maybe even go swimming,” he said.

— Jimmy Nesbitt
Erik Ivers can’t say “no” to a good challenge. It’s that attitude that has made him a go-to guy for complex projects at J.H. Findorff & Son, where he works as a project manager.

“Every new project is different and presents its own unique set of challenges,” Ivers said. “The complexities of large projects with tight schedules are some of the greatest challenges, but also create opportunities to learn and further develop my career in the industry.”

Ivers, who joined Findorff seven years ago, said that his favorite jobs are large campus projects.

“I enjoyed working on both the Epic Storybook Campus and on the new Verona Area High School,” he said. “It’s incredibly rewarding to see the community’s appreciation and satisfaction with these campuses once we turn them over.”

Ivers’ love for construction goes all the way back to his childhood, when he would build tree forts with his brother near their home in Whitehall. That experience came in handy years later when he was pursuing his civil engineering degree at UW-Madison.

“Those long afternoons spent in the woods building forts helped me learn how details on a project are so important,” Ivers said. “Even today I find myself working on carpentry projects at home during my free time.”

Nancy Mayek, marketing lead at Findorff, called Ivers an “energetic, driven and thoughtful young professional with a bright future ahead of him in the construction industry.”

When he’s not at work, Ivers enjoys spending time with family and friends and volunteering. He has helped with Habitat for Humanity and Project Home’s Hammer with a Heart events, which help improve home sites near Madison.

He also enjoys training young people in the construction business, whether they are students or new recruits to the industry.

— Jimmy Nesbitt
Amy Kopplin
Brothers Interiors

Kopplin thrives amid endless variety at Brothers Interiors

Amy Kopplin’s problem-solving talents are second to none, her colleagues say. Kopplin, director of design at Brothers Interiors, thrives in a setting where endless variety is to be expected. “I have the opportunity to design for corporate, health care, mixed-use, hospitality and more,” she said. “The constant evolution of projects I am part of is what keeps me wanting more.”

Kopplin has worked at Brothers Interiors for eight years and credits the company with fostering her professional career. “As I grew with the company, I learned I had the unique opportunity to help build, develop and strengthen the furniture, interiors and construction divisions from the ground up,” she said. “The opportunities for professional growth, networking and personal career development have been outstanding, and I’ve consistently had an amazing team of coworkers by my side.”

As is true of most workplaces, Kopplin’s has been greatly changed by the pandemic. “Many people in the design industry have faced tough times during the pandemic over the course of the past year, and my heart goes out to so many of those that lost their jobs or are struggling with lack of opportunities to keep their business afloat,” Kopplin said. “I am grateful and fortunate to be in position that my employment has remained stable, and the past 12 months have shown to me that you really have to think outside the box to find new solutions to stay relevant for your customers.”

“l was a part of a team that provided many back-to-office solutions and work-at-home products for our existing customers that helped catapult us to where we are now.”

Tim Gokhman, managing director at New Land Enterprises, has worked with Brothers Interiors on six projects. Kopplin has been the lead designer on each one. “She’s the best I’ve seen in the industry,” Gokhman said.

— Jimmy Nesbitt

Alex Leitzke
Stevens Construction

Despite short tenure, Leitzke already earning respect

Since joining Stevens Construction in 2018, Alex Leitzke has shown a commitment to obtaining excellent results. Leitzke, an assistant superintendent at the company, has worked on several notable projects, including the Home2 Suites, Tru and Holiday Inn Express hotels in downtown Milwaukee. He is now working on the St. Francis Apartment project, a 236-unit, four-story building on a concrete parking structure.

Leitzke has helped keep the project on schedule, while also adhering to safety and quality standards. “With the mindset that every problem has a solution, a personality of treating everyone fairly and a communication style that portrays respect, Alex successfully leads his crews while demanding excellence and fostering a positive culture on site,” said Steve Vogt, director of field operations at Stevens.

“He creates cohesion among our SCC team, subcontractors, project owners and all others involved; welcoming advice and different perspectives while finding solutions to issues as they arise,” Vogt added. “… We support Alex in his commitment and career growth, looking forward to him continuing on the path as a future project superintendent with Stevens Construction.”

Leitzke, a native of Delavan who now lives in Elkhorn, said one of the most enjoyable parts of his job is watching projects progress. “(You) start with just an empty lot and make it into a building you can be proud of, saying you were involved in that,” he said.

Leitzke said the pandemic hasn’t made anything easier. “It’s another step of our safety protocol to make sure we have hand sanitizer stations throughout the building, ensuring subcontractors are wearing masks and trying to manage 6-feet separation protocols,” he said.

Outside work, Leitzke tries to spend as much time as he can with his two daughters — ages 2 and 5. He also enjoys fishing and snowboarding.

— Jimmy Nesbitt
Allison Mastel
Bray Architects

**Mastel turns childhood love into work of art**

As an architect at Bray Architects in Milwaukee, Mastel specializes in school projects. Her portfolio includes Mill Valley Elementary School, where she reused wood flooring from an old part of the building and incorporated it into the ceiling design.

Mastel said she enjoys working on projects that benefit society. Schools, in particular, are satisfying.

“I love working with people to create a space that has a positive impact on their daily life,” she said. “We so often meet with people who have a vision of how they want to work, teach and learn, and it is so rewarding to be able to shape an environment that allows their goals to be realized.

“I also love that I get to be creative, and work with creative people, every day. Every project is a series of puzzles that we work to solve in a way that is beautiful and functional, and I can’t think of anything better than that,” Mastel added.

Agatha Vonderberg, Mastel’s colleague, noted: “She works within the parameters she is given, but never allows them to hinder her design abilities.”

Mastel said her advice for other young designers is to always have the confidence to ask questions.

“Architecture is a profession with so many specialties and so much to know, and starting out it can be intimidating. You can’t possibly know it all on day one, but you won’t learn if you don’t ask.”

— Melody Finnemore

**THE DAILY REPORTER**

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The Daily Reporter is putting together its annual LIST of Wisconsin’s top construction-related companies.

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For more information or to get on The Daily Reporter’s LIST, email or call Joe Yovino at 414-225-1829 or jyovino@dailyreporter.com.
Emily Neal, an associate at Quorum Architects in Milwaukee, recalls drawing floor plans for pretend houses as a young girl. As she grew up, she quickly came to recognize how much she would like helping people as a Habitat for Humanity volunteer.

“Architecture lets me help others by designing spaces that will create a better quality of life, whether that’s spaces where they live, work or play. Architecture is a very people-centered profession and I really enjoy that aspect,” she said.

Neal graduated from UW-Milwaukee with dual degrees in architecture and business. She began at Quorum Architects as an intern and is now sustainability director.

“I have seen her develop into one of the most confident, capable and effective professional colleagues I have ever known,” said Kate Edwards, a senior associate. “Emily is an outstanding young professional who takes the lead to design a built environment that is equitable for the community and environmentally sustainable for the planet.”

Neal said her favorite projects are small and local, the sort of things that help new businesses into their first spaces.

“We do a lot in our local community in (Milwaukee’s) near west side and I’m super proud of that. I also love anytime I can work with a client that has big sustainability goals because those are so fun. Passion meets passion.”

A board member of Habitat Young Professionals, Neal has organized teams of volunteers and brought them to El Salvador. She sits on the Global Partnership Committee and helps the organization decide how much tithe dollars should go to El Salvador, Zambia and Thailand. She also sits on the USGBC Young Professionals Wisconsin Board and is active in the state’s Women for Sustainability group.

As a member of the AIA Milwaukee Young Professionals Board, Neal has set up a design competition to showcase the talents of emerging architecture professionals and draw attention to development opportunities in previously overlooked areas of the city.

— Melody Finnemore

Matt Ostovich knew from watching his father and grandfather that he wanted to pursue a career in construction.

Growing up, he watched them run their residential construction business and saw how much they enjoyed their work. But at 14, he got a taste of construction firsthand. His father and grandfather enlisted Ostovich to help as they were building a new house for the family.

His grandfather, an architect, drew up the plans. Ostovich and his family then executed the design, performing rough carpentry, building the flooring and installing the roof themselves.

“That was my first real-life experience of what they were doing for a living,” Ostovich said. “I was eager to help. But also a part of it was they told me, ‘you are going to help.’”

Ostovich’s other love was wrestling. He’d been practicing the sport since he was 11 and had competed in Wisconsin’s yearly statewide contest in high school.

At the Milwaukee School of Engineering, Ostovich could pursue both. He studied architectural engineering and mechanical building systems and competed on the school’s wrestling team — he’s among the school’s most successful wrestlers, lettering in the sport four years.

“One of the things I got from wrestling was determination,” Ostovich said. “There’s a lot of passion and determination that is required if you want to be successful.”

On the suggestion of his grandfather, Ostovich took an internship at the mechanical contractor JM Brennan in 2012, working alongside the company’s senior project managers and lead estimators. He joined Brennan full-time after graduating in 2013.

Ostovich is now working on some of JM Brennan’s largest and most complex projects. He recently completed work on downtown Milwaukee’s BMO Tower, a 25-story building across the street from City Hall. He also recently managed work on the St. Camillus Senior Living tower in Wauwatosa.

Ostovich, meanwhile, is continuing to push himself to tackle bigger projects.

“I’m always working to further develop the skills that I have,” he said. “My goal is to run larger projects and more challenging projects to continue that development.”

— Nate Beck
Richard gets education in working on schools

Steven Richard recalls walking to and from his middle school as a teenager while Scherrer Construction was working on an addition and renovation project at the nearby Waterford Union High School.

“I got a firsthand view of progress throughout the duration of the project and I remember thinking it was astonishing what they were able to achieve,” said Richard, now a principal and senior project manager at the Burlington company. “Ever since I’ve found myself enthralled with the creation of things, and I’m proud to have had the opportunity to work on projects at both my old middle school and high school buildings.”

Beyond leading the project management team, Richard oversees daily construction operations on his own projects, working with owners, architects and subcontractors on scheduling, budgeting, shop drawings, submittal reviews and contract management.

He has overseen various school, health care, municipal, commercial and retail, industrial and religious projects. His portfolio includes the $19.9 million Williams Bay Elementary School, the $24.9 million Fox River Middle School and a new $50 million, 80,000-square-foot factory in Racine County. Richard said his favorite projects are the ones that feel least comfortable.

“I have the mindset that when I don’t know exactly how to do something, I’ll work to figure out a way to complete it,” he said. “I enjoy the process of building something from concepts to tangible completed projects. The opportunity to work in concert with other individuals in problem solving and creating something is truly rewarding.”

Richard encourages the members of his team to treat others the way they’d like to be treated.

“Everyone you interact with has something to contribute in the construction process, and figuring out how the strengths of other individuals can complement your own will usually provide the best possible result.”

— Melody Finnemore

Steven Richard
Scherrer Construction
Connor Rice  
Catalyst Construction

In short order, Rice becomes catalyst for smooth project delivery

With a bachelor’s degree in construction management from the University of Wisconsin-Stout, Connor Rice joined Catalyst Construction in 2017 as a project engineer. He quickly earned the trust of the company owners, architects and his fellow employees and was promoted to project manager. During his time at Catalyst, Rice has managed more than $100 million worth of construction projects, including tenant improvements, school additions and multifamily-housing jobs.

“I really take pride in delivering a quality building on time and under budget,” he said. “When that happens and I see the gratitude from our clients, that is my favorite part of my work. Conversely, construction isn’t perfect so when that doesn’t happen, that is my least favorite part of my job.”

Rice said he appreciates the opportunity his job gives him to work on different types of projects, from churches to medical centers. His responsibilities include contract writing, contract management, owner correspondence, submittals, scheduling, subcontractor management, punch lists and project close-outs.

His colleagues said Rice ensures that projects move smoothly from preconstruction to construction, and that construction phases progress efficiently, safely and on budget.

“Connor brings exceptional leadership and communication skills to the Catalyst table, as well as strong knowledge and experience in the construction industry,” said Alyssa Young, business relations coordinator at Catalyst Construction.

Rice pointed out that he is young and still has much to learn. His advice to other young trades workers is stay humble and maintain strong work habits.

“You don’t have to be the smartest person in the room to make it far,” he said.

— Melody Finnemore

Erin Stephenson  
DOZR

Stephenson helps companies make most of technology

Before helping to found DOZR in Kitchener, Ontario, six years ago, Erin Stephenson found herself running a family-owned landscape construction business. It was expanding rapidly and experiencing some growing pains, particularly when it came to underused equipment.

“Equipment rentals was one of the solutions we started exploring, and quickly realized that there was a better way for contractors to source rentals,” she said. “As we started working on improving the rental experience for contractors, we began to identify other roadblocks and challenges within the equipment rental industry revolving around digitization.”

Stephenson’s experiences with construction and technology have given her an unusual perspective on these industries and the opportunities presented by technology. As an example, WebStores Powered by DOZR is a white-labeled software that can bring e-commerce to rental companies of all sizes.

“WebStores is an approachable solution for rental companies looking to digitize their businesses. We are also constantly working with our renters to create the most seamless rental experience possible for contractors who are searching for equipment,” said Stephenson, chief operating officer of DOZR.

Stephenson said her favorite part of her job is that it lets her work with a team of “amazing, brilliant and hard-working” people who share her desire to solve problems.

“Another big part of what I love about what I do at DOZR is helping to solve challenges within the rental industry. I love working with our customers, hearing their stories and then brainstorming with the DOZR team about what solutions we could possibly come up with to solve their business problems,” she said.

Stephenson advises other young people try to learn what it is exactly that they love and then learn all they can about it.

“Become an expert in what you love and trust your knowledge,” she said. “No one knows everything, but we can do our best to learn as much as we can.”

— Melody Finnemore
A job shadow at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation when he was 16 drew Colten Tuescher to civil engineering.

Then an internship at WisDOT showed him the construction aspects of the work. “I have loved it ever since,” said Tuescher, a project engineer at Beloit-based Batterman. “My favorite part of the job is watching an idea get drawn onto paper and then taking a set of paper plan sheets and watching it get built into a structure or roadway one step at a time.”

Tuescher joined the company after earning his degree from University of Wisconsin-Platteville in 2015. His experiences include work on mainline concrete pavement, Hot Mix Asphalt paving, Mechanically Stabilized Earth, wall construction, noise-wall construction, bridge and box-culvert construction and stormwater-sewer installation.

“My favorite jobs to work on are complex, staged construction projects like the IH 39/90 corridor projects,” Tuescher said. The IH 39/90 mainline reconstruction project from USH 14 to Kennedy Road in Janesville had Batterman working as the concrete paving lead.

Certified in PCC testing, transportation-materials sampling, nuclear-density testing and materials-coordinator training, Tuescher was the project engineer for the Creek Road, WSOR Bridge project in the town of Bradford. The project called for building a new single-span structure over a railroad. It entailed putting up two 20-foot walls at either end. The project, which saw as many as 12 trains coming through a day, presented difficulties requiring direct coordination with the Wisconsin Southern railroad.

Tuescher advised other young professionals to “learn as much as you can from as many experienced leaders as you can so that one day you will be the experienced leader that other young engineers look to for guidance.”

— Melody Finnemore

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Call Christy Peterson at 414.225.1830 or email cpeterson@dailyreporter.com
Jac Weitzel

Building and Construction Trades of South-Central Wisconsin

Weitzel blazes trails in the trades

Jac Weitzel earned a degree in graphic design from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and worked in the field for a while, but found it wasn’t fueling her fire. She then moved to Madison to figure out her next steps in life and got a “random” job painting. “I really loved getting to work with my hands and working with new people and different job sites. It was never the same thing,” Weitzel said, adding she jumped at the chance to join a registered apprenticeship program. “The day I signed my union card was the day that changed my life. I knew right away that I wanted to be heavily involved in my union and learn the legislation, development and organizing side of things.”

Last year, Weitzel became the first female and youngest executive director of the Building and Construction Trades of South-Central Wisconsin. She said she feels grateful for having an opportunity to represent thousands of hard-working men and women in the union building trades, through the South Central Building Trades Council and similar organizations. “Knowledge is power and I enjoy educating everyone, from city council men and women to high school students, about the amazing opportunities available in the union construction trades,” she said.

Weitzel’s colleagues noted that in her short time as executive director, she has already taken part in local politics and economic development work in the regional council’s jurisdiction. “The 4,000 members she represents are proud of Jac and the work she’s been involved with to ensure good-paying jobs and highly skilled and qualified workers have a voice,” said Jake Castanza, executive director of the Wisconsin Building Trades Council.

Weitzel said her advice to other young professionals is to put themselves out there and try new things. “If you find something you are passionate about and you love doing, go for it!”

— Melody Finnemore

Collin Zuehlke

Miron Construction

Zuehlke finds home at Miron following internship

Collin Zuehlke wanted to work in construction but wasn’t sure in which sector until his participation in several job shadows in high school helped him decide.

He worked for a small general contractor after graduating from high school and then earned a bachelor’s degree in industrial-technology management, having an emphasis in building-construction management. “Once I took my first step onto a project site and saw dozens of men and women working hard to build someone’s dream, it opened my eyes to the great outcomes of being in this industry,” he said. “One thing I told myself was that before I graduated from college I needed to have an understanding of the hard work the craftspeople do.”

While attending the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Zuehlke had an internship at Miron Construction’s Madison office and stayed there past his graduation in December 2019. He’s now a project manager in masonry at the company’s headquarters office in Neenah. “One of the many things I enjoy about being in this industry is the constant change and being challenged to be adaptable. You will face new challenges daily, with the option to take what you have learned to find a solution,” Zuehlke said.

He particularly enjoys working on school projects because they give him satisfaction knowing that they benefit students. He noted that students spend almost 50 percent of their time in these buildings. “Schools provide much more than just the infrastructure that our craftspeople build; they give students a place to feel safe, a place to learn, a place to eat and, above all, a place to be themselves.”

Zuehlke encourages other newcomers to the industry to be open to learning because it will help them grow and take a dispassionate look at their strengths and weaknesses. “Becoming coachable will also instill confidence in you that will help you grow as a leader,” he said.

— Melody Finnemore
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Special Congratulations to Jaclyn Weitzel, Executive Director of the Building Trades of South-Central WI from your friends at IUPAT DC7

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The Catalyst Construction team would like to congratulate Tom Baade and Connor Rice on their Icon of Construction and Rising Young Professional awards! The recognition is well deserved.