Construct Tomorrow took its show to Northern Minnesota this past February hosting events at Grand Casino in Hinckley and at Duluth Entertainment Convention Center. Construct Tomorrow hosted nine events this school year, starting in Eveleth in October and ending at Cooper High School in Minneapolis in early March. The Duluth events hosted 1000 students from 30 schools, and the Hinckley event had 700 from 18 schools across Northern Minnesota.

Both venues were filled with demonstration stations where students could experiment with the tools of the different trades. Laying brick, mixing concrete, pounding nails, walking a steel beam, pulling wire with electricians—all hands-on experiences allowing them to try their hand at a skilled trade. Students could practice hand-eye skills used in welding and running a backhoe via computer simulations, too. Moreover, they were able to speak directly with a union’s apprenticeship coordinator and educate themselves about the opportunities in the trades.

“Our mission with Construct Tomorrow is to get involved with the students and let them know there are other options than just going to college. They can make really good money in the different trades with benefits and the opportunity to retire someday. Schools are pushing the two- or four-year programs to students and they don’t realize school isn’t for everybody,” explains Andrew Richmond, co-chair for Construct Tomorrow and apprenticeship coordinator for Roofers Local 96.

“What’s really awesome is I take students to all kinds of college tours all over the state and this one has generated more excitement and more enthusiasm for my students and their parents than any other event that I had planned for them this year,” said Sarah Larson, academic advisor for the Cass Lake-Bena Schools who brought two vans loads full of students to the Construct Tomorrow event in Hinckley. “Most of them are not familiar with the apprenticeship programs, with the training and the different job opportunities that are out there for them and this is hands-on. A lot of my students who I brought down are hands-on learners. They want to dig in; they want to get dirty; they want to look at the work at the end of the day and say, ‘Man, I made that’ and have that sort of pride.”

Tricia Neubarth, a guidance counselor at Harbor City International School, a charter school in Duluth, said she noticed the reactions of some of her students: “... and they’re like, ‘Oh, yeah, now I know this is for sure what I want to do!’”

Mark the Date, Set the Rate
Our Annual Survey Reminder
The deadline for submitting commercial, highway/heavy, and residential surveys is May 31, 2019. Projects reported must be active between Apr. 1, 2018, and May 31, 2019. For this survey, the prevailing wage rates for the following year are determined by these surveys, so participation is needed. The new highway/heavy rates are usually published in October and new commercial rates in December.

For information on State Prevailing Wage, wage rates, and the survey process go to: http://www.doli.state.mn.us/business/employment-practices/prevailing-wage-information. If you have questions, call FCF at 651-797-2726.

Save the Date
The Minnesota State Building and Trades Council will be hosting their 73rd annual Convention: July 24 – 27, 2018, at Madden’s On Gull Lake in Brainerd, MN. This year FCF will give a short present during the convention.

School Construction: It’s All About the Kids
Schools all across the state are being modified, expanded or built anew. These projects place the multi-million dollar decision at the top of school board agendas as our government bodies decide how to provide infrastructure for students and prudence for taxpayers.

Minnesota law requires local school boards to award the construction contracts to the lowest responsible bidder. Beyond cost factors, school boards will consider the quality of work, the responsiveness under strict timelines and the coordinated teamwork required of the entire project. Most of these community leaders also consider where the contractors are from, their supply of skilled labor and their commitment to safety.

FCF participated in a Minnesota School BoardAssociation workshop this past January to share ideas that respond to many of these considerations. Attendees had many questions about the enthusiasm for the Joint Apprenticeship and Training Programs. FCF has also met with leaders from several schools about the advantages of using prevailing wages to support the local construction workers who in turn support their school’s success. The quality, safety and skill that prevailing wages encourage are the very same contributions that build great schools and support local economies. Support your local schools by encouraging the use of prevailing wages.

CCLD Update
FCF and its affiliates view 2019 as a turning point in construction compliance. Around the country, prevailing wage advocates are pushing to enhance their laws instead of fighting just to keep them. In Minnesota, growth estimates for the coming years look promising, and our state prevailing wage law is secure. Thus, FCF has been increasing our investigations into more technical compliance issues, particularly with respect to independent contractor classification and licensing. Unlike prevailing wage, these problems are not limited to state or federal construction. They can infiltrate any public or private projects. FCF has several pending complaints before MNDC’s Construction Codes & Licensing Division for both misclassification and electrical and plumbing licensing violations. We continue to rely on our partners throughout the industry to catch active violations in the field. If you believe these issues are happening on a job, please contact FCF at 651-797-2726. We will investigate.
Enforcement Can be a Long Road

The wheels of regulatory justice move slowly. Prevailing wage enforcement is no exception. Recently FCF learned of the results of a complaint if filed regarding work performed between 2012 and 2014. Thu Specialty Contracting performed work on two prevailing wage projects for the Mn. According to stipulated facts found in two consent orders, Thu misclassified the work performed by its employees, failed to pay its employees the full prevailing wage rate, and failed to keep necessary records. Thu ultimately entered into two consent orders with Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry. Thu paid $15,118.65 in back wages to affected employees and paid $7,559.33 in liquidated damages as a result of its violations. Liquidated damages are rare in DLI’s Department of Labor and Industry. Thul paid $15,118.65 in back wages to affected employees and $15,118.65 in liquidated damages as a result of its violations. Liquidated damages are rare in DLI’s Department of Labor and Industry.

Through September May Require More

Additional 30,000 H-2B Visas Authorized Through September May Require More Enforcement

Mother/Daughter 49er Duo

When work on the I-35W downtown-to-crosstown project resumes in earnest this spring, Brittney (left) and Kim Bray will be hard at work once again. Amidst the mountains of concrete piled high in the southbound lanes and the heavy equipment, the mother/daughter duo will be working as operating engineers and members of IUOE Local 49.

Their family legacy in the trades began with Kim’s brother who worked as a pipe drier. “My brother told me they needed women and I was interested in joining the union. I went in and applied and got the job.” Kim says, now an 11-year veteran who started as a roller operator. The long hours and hard work don’t faze her. Her days as a working mom prepared her for life in the 49ers. “When I had kids and they were little I picked them up from day care and then I had to go back to work again. I’m used to working a lot.”

Her daughter Brittney graduated from Hamline with degrees in environmental studies and business. Soon thereafter she found herself “just tired.” “You work 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and maybe longer, working six days a week, sometimes seven. The project involves lots of people from several different crews because the work is so varied. New bridges, walls for the sides of the highway, underground roads, utilities like water, sewer and electrical work -- lots of construction you don’t see when you’re driving by. “We often work on top of each other with the different crews,” Brittney says. “You get used to the long hours. It can catch up to you as far as getting things done around the house and having a life. But the paychecks are good and the benefits are nice.”

One of the benefits for them has been having winters off from work. Brittney went to Thailand in December and Kim planned a trip to Houston for the two of them to see a Rolling Stones concert.

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