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One of the benefits of being a member of the Montana Contractors’ Association is the affiliation with the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC).

MCA Vice President Bob Warren and I recently attended the AGC National Chapter Leadership Conference in Washington DC, along with Executive Director David Smith. More than 70 chapters were represented by officers and executives. Really, it is a large family reunion with competition set aside in favor of improving all areas of the construction industry, and the networking with our peers was rewarding.

Our MCA contingent had meetings with senators Jon Tester and Steve Daines, as well as Congressman Greg Gianforte. Our message was consistent with all three: Don’t let the highway funding bill expire; pass a comprehensive infrastructure funding package; and re-direct PELL grant funding to more technical and trades programs. While I would like to say that the highlight of the trip was Congressman Gianforte allowing my daughter to cast his vote on the floor of the House, that would be a small part of the story. The real story is the access we had to our officials and the power of the AGC of America.

I believe we have that access because we are not a left- or right-leaning organization. We are working from the center. As we saw in the 2019 Montana State Legislature, many Democrats scored as high as some Republicans. Likewise, some hard-right legislators did not support our efforts to increase aviation fuel taxes for airport improvements, or raising fees for gravel permits. In the next session I’m sure that will change, but I’m also sure that the MCA will again represent its members – from the center.

Meetings, access, and evaluating are all part of the process. However, a bigger component is an area where we need to step up our game – donations to political action committees. Once an election is over, it’s easy to step back and hope we don’t have to see another negative TV ad for a very long time. But that’s when we really need to roll up our sleeves.

The AGC PAC raises more than $1 million annually, which does not put it anywhere near the top of the business-related PACs. We had the privilege of providing several AGC PAC checks to Senator Daines this past year, which was a little humbling when we realized that Montana contractors have not made any donations to the AGC PAC this year.

We’ve done well here in Montana, however. The MCA Contractors PAC raised more than $50,000 in the last election cycle, and supported 16 different legislative candidates (eight Republicans and eight Democrats). Of the candidates to whom we donated PAC money, 15 were victorious. Of those 15 elected, all but one scored above 75 percent in our scorecard. I’d say that was money well spent (and raised).

We need to keep up the great work supporting our MCA Contractors PAC. But I’m also putting out a challenge for us to raise the bar with the AGC PAC. If we’re going to be in business of public works and workforce development, we have to be at the table, or we’ll be on the menu.
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After one year on the job, I have to say, I feel like we are on the right track. As we put the finishing touches on 2019, here are some things in the works...

My goal was to meet with 100 percent of our Montana-based general contractors within my first year. It’s going to be close, but I’m determined to make that happen. What have they had to say? “We need people!” But not just anyone – people who have work ethic and a little bit of skill – we’ll teach the rest.

The good news is that the Montana State Legislature heard that as well. Several bills came out of the 2019 session, and the Interim Education Committee is doing a deeper dive into tools that will enhance career and technical education in K-12 schools. The Montana University System subcommittee is also talking about a better alignment with two-year and community colleges. The MCA is attending and participating in these meetings.

Improving relationships was also identified as a priority in 2019. Exploring partnerships from cooperative efforts with both DEQ and MDT have been a focus for us this year. DEQ’s Opencut Bureau drafted a gravel bill for the past session, but the MCA was successful in getting our own version of the bill passed, which included provisions requested by our member gravel companies. The bureau chief attended an MCA board meeting for a discussion on areas that could be improved, and MCA staff and volunteers helped write the new online application. MDT and the MCA started meeting in October to draft a partnership agreement, which will guide each project and shared expectations and processes from the start. We are also pleased with several MDT personnel changes.

Heading into the new year, I see improving our relationship with the Montana Department of Labor as another area for focus. The MCA is represented on a wage misclassification task force appointed by the governor, and one of our goals is to get the Independent Contractor dilemma cleared up and GC and specialty contractor risk reduced.

I’ve now survived a Winter Convention and Summer Outing, and I can tell you that I’m impressed. When industry gathers with common goals, a lot of enthusiasm and a beverage or two, the force is mighty!

I’m also impressed with the focus and determination of the Education Foundation. The year 2020 will be full of industry-changing activities, I’m certain.

Finally, as Trevor Livesay points out in his article, it’s absolutely critical that the MCA’s political voice is strong and relevant. Let’s not sit on the sidelines.

Every day that I’m in the office I see the pictures of 80-plus years of past presidents. The legacy of this organization is epic and powerful. What a great ride.
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By the time this magazine is received by MCA members, I will have almost a year of service as your MCA Associates’ Division president under my belt. What better time for me to reflect on the work the Associates’ Division has accomplished this year, and to look forward to what we hope to accomplish moving forward.

We were glad to see a lot of familiar faces at the 2019 MCA Summer Outing in Butte in August. Not only does the Summer Outing provide a prime opportunity for our MCA members to connect with old friends, but it opens doors to new business relationships as well. If you have never attended the event, or you haven’t attended recently, you should put it on your calendar for next year. By popular demand, the Summer Outing will return to Polson on August 13-14. We would like to extend our thanks to all our 2019 attendees and sponsors. Without their support, the Summer Outing wouldn’t be possible.

So, what do we do with the funds we raise through the Summer Outing? In 2019, we used the money to provide scholarships to the children of eight employees of MCA member companies to help them pursue their postsecondary education. To keep up with the increasing cost of continuing education, the Associates’ Board of Directors voted earlier this year to increase scholarship amounts from $1,000 per award to $1,500. Beyond the scholarships distributed by the Associates’ Division, funds raised through activities at the Summer Outing can be used for other purposes, such as helping to support local charities or providing opportunities for professional development.

MESSAGE FROM THE MCA ASSOCIATES’ DIVISION PRESIDENT
Corey Crum
Outing are also directed to assisting the MCA Education Foundation in its efforts and the Construction Leadership Council (CLC) in its work to develop the construction industry’s next generation of leaders.

While the Associates’ Board of Directors is honored to be able to lend a helping hand to these individuals and programs, board members also recognize we need to view our efforts with a critical eye and face our future with a directed purpose. Over the past several years, we have accumulated healthy reserves and we want to put them to the best use possible. For that reason, the Associates’ Division Board of Directors will participate in strategic planning in the latter months of 2019 and return to our membership in 2020 with solid goals for not only the upcoming year, but for many years to come.

The question we will be asking ourselves is: How can the Associates’ Division best support the work of the MCA through goals we can measure and report upon to our Associates’ Division membership? We want to hear from you as we embark on this planning process, so I would encourage you to reach out to any of our Associates’ Board of Directors members to share your ideas. We look forward to hearing from you and sharing our plans with everyone at the 2020 MCA Annual Convention in Missoula on January 15-16. See you there!

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Summer Outing 2019 in Butte

The 2019 Summer Outing offered a fun and relaxing retreat for MCA members in August. Golfers played the links at the Butte Country Club while shotguns blasted at the Butte Trap Club. More than 200 people attended the event which was held at the historic Copper King Hotel.

Not only is the Summer Outing a great getaway, it’s also a great networking opportunity. It’s not too early to mark your calendars for the 2020 Summer Outing, which will be held in Polson, August 13-14. We hope to see you there!

Tom Zimmer with Tri State Truck & Equipment won the shotgun rifle, presented by Associates’ Board Member Brad Newcomb.

Winners of the Summer Outing golf tournament (left to right) Jim Thomsen, Corey Crum, Alex Freter, and Brandon Raether.

Josh Montanye from Williams Civil won the rifle raffle, presented by Associates’ Board Member Michael Richards.

MCA Associates’ Board of Directors gather at the registration table to welcome Summer Outing attendees. More than 200 members attended.
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The MCA is pleased to announce that Karl Mecklenburg will be the keynote speaker at the January 15 Winter Convention banquet.

Mecklenburg rose from a college walk-on and 12th round draft choice to a National Football League (NFL) career that included three Super Bowl and six Pro Bowl appearances. The former Denver Bronco captain spent his entire 12-year career in Denver and still lives in Colorado.

Mecklenburg was arguably the most versatile player in the NFL, playing all seven defensive front positions, often in the course of a single game. Mecklenburg was selected as the AFC Linebacker of the Year, AFC Player of the Year, and since retiring from the NFL, has been enshrined in the Denver Broncos Ring of Fame and the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame. Mecklenburg has been a Pro Football Hall of Fame Semifinalist each of the last eight years.

Mecklenburg is the only NFL legend to have earned the Certified Speaking Professional designation from the National Speakers Association. As an author and speaker, Mecklenburg’s stories of teamwork and leadership are humorous and inspiring. He approaches his speaking career with the same intelligence, passion, and intensity that punctuated his great football career.

The Winter Convention will be held January 15-17, 2020 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Missoula. Agendas and register information are online at www.mtagc.org.

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The MCA is pleased to welcome Barry Houser as the MCA’s marketing and communications director.

Houser joined the association’s staff in October of 2019. Prior to joining the team at the MCA, he was the media & graphics design specialist for Intermountain.

Houser has nearly 30 years of experience in the field of marketing and communications, and has led campaigns for businesses such as Opportunity Bank of Montana, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Montana, and the Helena Area Chamber of Commerce. He holds a degree in Business Marketing from Montana State University-Bozeman and is a graduate of the Leadership Helena program. He has been active in the community as a volunteer for events and as a coach for various youth sports teams. Houser and his wife, Frieda, have two daughters who are both attending college. ✪

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**A new face at the MCA**

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MCA provides 15 aspiring students with $19,000 in scholarships

New this year, the MCAEF provides construction trades scholarships for apprenticeship and certificate programs

This spring, the MCA awarded $19,000 in scholarships among 15 students to help them pursue their career aspirations.

The annual scholarships are awarded in three categories. The $1,500 MCA Associates’ Division Presidential Scholarships are awarded annually to students whose parents or guardians are employed by MCA member companies, and the $1,000 Concrete Division Scholarship is awarded to students whose parents or guardians are employed by member companies in the MCA’s Concrete Division. The $1,000 MCA Education Foundation (MCAEF) Construction Trades Scholarships supports individuals planning to attend a construction trades program, like an apprenticeship or certificate program in Montana. Unlike the Associates’ Division and Concrete Division Scholarships, the MCAEF scholarships are not limited to students with family members affiliated with MCA companies.

Recipients of MCA Associates’ Division Presidential Scholarships include: Chelsi Ebelt, Helena; Bayley Ginnaty, Great Falls; Mackenzie Gunn, Cody, Wyo.; Derek Jenneskens, Montana City; Kylee Longnecker, Helena; Mady Skawinski, Missoula; Aryn Terrio, Helena; and Colton Whitney, Joliet. The recipient of the MCA Concrete Division Scholarship was Norris Blossom, Helena.

Recipients of MCA Education Foundation Construction Trades Scholarships include: Grady Althoff, Bridger; Devin Crawford, Helena; Dawson Meixner, Clinton; Jerry Pospisil, Great Falls; Maria Ralph, Butte; and Matthew Woldstad, Missoula.

“We at the MCA have a strong commitment to helping Montana students pay for their postsecondary education, whether that includes apprenticeships, certificate programs, four-year degree programs, or whatever their calling may be,” said David Smith, MCA executive director. “We are dedicated to building Montana’s workforce.”

Watch for scholarship applications for academic year 2020-21 at www.mtagc.org in January.
Colton Whitney  
Grady Althoff  
Devin Crawford  
Dawson Meixner  
Maria Ralph  
Matthew Woldstad  

Not pictured: Derek Jenneskens, Norris Blossom, and Jerry Pospisil.
Earlier this year, the Montana Contractors’ Association Education Foundation (MCAEF) awarded $1,000 MCA Construction Trade Awareness Grants to industrial arts programs at eight Montana schools to help raise awareness for construction careers.

“The construction industry on the national level is experiencing an extreme workforce shortage, and Montana is no exception,” said Tyler Smith, president of the MCAEF Board of Directors. “We hope that by helping industrial arts programs in Montana schools, more students will have the opportunity to recognize that construction jobs are a desirable option for their future. Careers in construction should be a first choice, not a fallback.”

The MCA Education Foundation Board of Directors evaluated the applications based on whether the applicants had partnered with MCA member companies for their event/project; whether the event/program coordinates with Construction Week (Oct. 7-11); how the event/project will impact the students’ understanding of opportunities in the construction industry; and creativity.

WINNING PROJECTS INCLUDE:

**Belt High School**: Students will construct park benches, picnic tables, and a shaded area for the Belt Community Pool.

**Great Falls East Middle School, North Middle School**: Students will each build a two-foot by four-foot wall on 16-inch centers and wire it for residential. (This project will affect more than 400 students.)

**Helena High School**: Students will rebuild welding tables in the school’s industrial arts area.

**Hellgate High School**: Students will build and manage a “reader board” in the school’s student commons area that will feature trades careers, slideshows, job opportunities, and more.

**Highwood High School**: Students will design and build work benches, work tables, and work areas as part of an upgrade to the school’s industrial arts facilities.

**Lodge Grass Public Schools**: Students will build small sheds for calving, storage, etc. and sell them in their community at a discounted rate.

**Whitehall High School**: Students will fabricate two large storage racks to hold raw lumber in the school’s wood shop and metal in the welding shop.
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MCAEF is a leader in workforce development

Your support is creating a renewed interest in the construction industry

In Belt, Montana, high school students are building park benches, a shade structure, and picnic tables for the community pool, and in Lodge Grass, students are building sheds and selling them in their community. In Great Falls more than 400 students learned the basics of construction by building a wall on 16-inch centers and wiring it to meet residential building codes.

What do these schools all have in common? They were all recipients of the MCA Construction Trades Awareness Grants.

These projects would not be happening if it wasn’t for your commitment and generosity. Thanks to you, the Montana Contractors’ Association Education Foundation (MCAEF) was able to provide thousands of students with a hands-on introduction to the construction trades this year. With these increased outreach efforts, we made connections with more educators and parents than ever before.

Slowly but steadily, we are seeing a cultural shift. More educators, parents and students are looking at careers in the construction trades and recognizing their opportunity. This is good news, but the need for a skilled workforce is huge. As you know, the workforce shortage continues to plague the industry. Eighty percent of contractors nationwide report trouble filling their open jobs.

The MCAEF is not letting up on this issue.

Also this year, the MCAEF provided members with the tools they need to reach out to potential employees in their communities, and more than 30 of you sat in on our workforce development workshop at the annual convention. We’ve also partnered with the Montana Office of Public Instruction on several outreach projects across the state. Fifteen high school seniors who are interested in the construction industry are headed to college with MCA and MCAEF scholarships and they could be your future employees! Soon, our MCA Construction Trades Awareness Grant applications will be going out to high schools and we plan to offer even more in 2020.

The shift we’re talking about, the one that will bring construction careers to the forefront, will happen only with awareness, and there is still lots left to do. The MCAEF is poised with committed and passionate leadership to continue to advocate for the construction industry.

We can’t do this important work without you. When you give to the MCAEF you are investing in the future of the construction industry in Montana. You are investing in your future.

The end of the year is a great time to make a tax-deductible donation. To donate online, go to mtacg.org/mca-education-foundation, or mail your check to MCA Education Foundation, 1717 11th Ave., Helena, MT 59601.

If you’d like to learn more about the MCAEF, call MCA communications director, Barry Houser at 406-442-4162 and he will put you in touch with an MCAEF board member.
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The MCA to offer AGC’s Construction Supervision Fundamentals this winter

“The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been.”

— Henry Kissinger

In our industry, that can be viewed as going from looking at plans and blueprints through to the construction process to the final punch list of the completed bridge or building or highway. Where they are, to where they have not been.

How do the leaders know “how” to get their people to that place? Leaders are built through experience, training, and education. As a company owner, you are providing them with experience; let the MCA help with the training and education. After all, as John F. Kennedy said, “leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”

This winter, you can challenge and train your own organizational leaders through attendance at the AGC’s Construction Supervision Fundamentals class. This is a nine-part class, designed by the AGC specifically for emerging leaders within the construction industry. Intended for new leaders at every level – foreman, superintendents, project managers – the course will focus on the “how” to become a leader that workers will want to follow.

One of the keys of leadership is communication. An entire module is devoted to communications with superiors, peers, workers, effective listening, verbal, written, and electronic communication, as well as potential barriers to being effective. Other modules include time management/project scheduling; risk management/safety; construction law/contract documents, and more. We should note here that leadership is NOT management! As Stephen Covey put it, “Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall!”

The MCA is offering the course in three, two-day sessions with one class in December, January, and February. This schedule prevents participants from being overwhelmed with trying to learn all nine modules at once. It will also give your developing leader a chance to implement what they have learned as they go. Coupled with feedback from your company, this is a very effective manner of ensuring that your investment in the leadership development of your employees is truly worthwhile.

For more information, contact Keith Ouzts, vice president of training and education, at 406-442-4162.
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October 7-11 marked #ConstructionWeek2019

Across the state, MCA member companies feature their work during Construction Week 2019.

Developed by the Master Builders of Iowa (MBI) and adopted by the MCA, Construction Week is a nationwide effort created to raise awareness about the career options available in the construction industry and to promote the industry as a safe, exciting, and rewarding employment path. It presents a great opportunity for Montana contractors to connect with the public, specifically youth, to build a future workforce.

This year marked the third year the MCA has participated in Construction Week, and member companies hosted or participated in construction-related events in schools and communities throughout the state and region. ♦

MCA member, Schellinger Construction, traveled to the MSU-Northern Career Fair in Havre for Construction Week 2019. The company offered on-the-spot interviews for interested candidates.

MCA member O'Keefe Drilling visited the welding class at Whitehall High School to provide students with a hands-on look into welding careers.

The public was invited to a “topping out” ceremony at Sletten Construction’s Hot Springs County Memorial Hospital project in Thermopolis, Wyoming.

Jackson Contractor Group has been partnering with YWCA Missoula’s GRIT program for several years. Jackson hosts field trips for girls in the GRIT program to local job sites.

Sletten Construction employees give a presentation about careers in the construction industry to students at North Middle School in Great Falls.

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The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) Office of Civil Rights (OCR) is working with construction contractors and consultants to increase their participation in the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program on MDT highway-related projects. A Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) program administered through the OCR, the DBE program is aimed at leveling the competitive playing field for minority- and women-owned businesses participating in federally funded contracts on Montana roadways. The OCR has proposed an increase to its FY 2020-2022 DBE program participation goal to 6.5 percent. The previous year’s goal was 6.14 percent.

The U.S. Department of Transportation defines a DBE as a for-profit small business where socially and economically disadvantaged individuals own at least a 51 percent interest, and control management and daily business operations. In Montana, this equates to 107 highway-related DBEs presently, categorized as White, Native American, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific, Subcontinent Asian, and Black in the following percentages: 66 percent, 20 percent, eight percent, four percent, one percent, one percent, respectively. White women are the highest DBE demographic in Montana, followed by Native Americans.

The DBE program was conceived by congress in 1983 to ensure that small disadvantaged business enterprises can compete fairly for federally funded transportation-related projects. A 2016 Availability and Disparity Study conducted by Keen Independent Research LLC noted, “there is quantitative and qualitative information suggesting that there is not a level playing field for minorities and women, and minority- and women-owned businesses, in the Montana transportation contracting industry. There is quantitative information indicating disparities regarding entry and advancement as employees within the industry, disparities in business ownership for certain groups, disparities concerning access to capital and bonding, and certain disparities in success of minority- and women-owned construction firms. Also, relatively more minority- and women-owned firms report difficulties networking with prime contractors or customers based on survey data.”

As mandated by a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling resulting from a contractor lawsuit against the Washington State Department of Transportation, MDT uses disparity studies to determine the status of the state’s disadvantaged population and subsequently set participation goals for the DBE program.

The federal government requires state departments of transportation (DOTs) to establish a target goal, which defines the percentage of an overall project construction cost that must be completed by a DBE. OCR’s 2020-2022 goal raises the bar for Montana prime contractors as they collectively strive to meet 6.5 percent DBE participation over the course of a three-year period. Although based on a three-year timeframe, each year is significant, as FHWA reviews any shortfalls and determines if project-specific goals are necessary to achieve future DBE participation goals. For Federal Fiscal Year 2019, contractors are achieving about 5.7 percent DBE participation, short of the 6.14 percent overall goal. With only a few lettings left in the year, it is unlikely that Montana will meet the overall goal for 2019. Even so, Megan Handl, OCR’s DBE program supervisor, believes the state’s prime contractors can meet the newly proposed goal.

“Past participation increased, so the overall goal increased. Contractors have
shown through past participation in recent years that the proposed goal is attainable,” said Handl.

Meeting expectations is critical, as evidenced by past years where Montana did not meet the target DBE participation goal. When the DBE goal is not met, FHWA requires MDT to come up with a shortfall analysis and explanation of why the goal was not met and a plan to meet the goal going forward. Between 2012 and 2014, MDT implemented project-specific goals, which required accountability at an individual-project participation level. This finite level of scrutiny provided challenges to both OCR and contractors in the field, the greatest being a provision where a contractor could lose a bid for failure to meet – or show good faith efforts to meet – the project-specific DBE participation goal.

In order to meet the overall DBE participation goal without using project-specific goals, MDT implemented aspirational goals on construction contracts in April of 2017. The aspirational goals are a race-neutral measure intended as a transparent way of showing contractors the DBE participation, or availability, that can be expected for a project based on type of project work, project location, and associated work that available qualifying DBEs conduct. Project aspirational goals are calculated based on the same availability data from the Keen disparity study, so if contractors meet the individual aspirational goals, they would meet the overall goal at the end of the year. There are no penalties if the contractor does not meet the aspirational goal, as it is intended as a tool to help the entire contractor base meet the collective year-end goal percentage.

The proposed 2020-2022 goal of 6.5 percent has been submitted to the Federal Highway Administration for consideration. OCR will implement the new goal once it is approved by FHWA. Additionally, as demographic data is ever-fluctuating, a new disparity study will need to be conducted to ensure current and accurate data is used in the setting of future DBE goals.

Meeting the established participation goal goes beyond satisfying a congressional mandate; it ultimately can boost local economies through strengthened local businesses, which can set into motion a snowball effect when DBE success on a job through the DBE program leads to additional job prospects. This result is one measure of success for the entire DBE program at a federal level through state DOTs, as it satisfies a sustainable preservation objective of the program – state DOTs assisting in the development of firms that can compete successfully in the marketplace outside the DBE program.
The MCA Board of Directors is dedicated to ensuring favorable regulatory and business climates for Montana construction companies and the businesses that provide products and services to them. One important tool that the MCA has to accomplish these goals is the Montana Contractors’ PAC.

PAC funds are used to help elect local and state-level candidates who are supportive of priorities established by the MCA Board of Directors on behalf of the association’s members.

Members of the PAC include the MCA’s officers, the past presidents’ representative, and the Associates’ Division representative.

To contribute, contact the MCA office at (406) 442-4162.

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By law, the Contractors’ PAC cannot accept corporate donations. All contributions are reported to the Commissioner of Political Practices in accordance with Montana law.
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ALL OF YOUR BOND AND INSURANCE NEEDS MET IN ONE LOCATION
Toston Structures Project, a $41.5M project with a focus on highway safety

Anyone who has traveled between Three Forks and Helena along US-Hwy 287 will remember the Toston Bridge. Although it crosses the Missouri River just downstream of the confluence and the scenery is beautiful, most people take a tight grip on the steering wheel and keep their eyes on the road. There’s a good reason to slow down and pay attention. The Toston Bridge is narrow and built on a curve, and in a recent Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) study, that stretch of road saw more frequent and more serious crashes than similar areas.

To address safety concerns, a new highway bridge is under construction. It’s part of the Toston Structures Project, which includes not only the highway bridge, but also 3.5 miles of new roadway, a new railroad bridge, a pedestrian tunnel, and new culvert on nearby Six Mile Creek. Riverside Contracting and Sletten Construction broke ground in April, and the project isn’t expected to be done until spring of 2021. Existing traffic is using the current roadway until the new bridge and highway are complete. After completion, the old roadway and bridges will be removed.

The new highway bridge will be much wider and include adequate space for bicycles and pedestrians. Additional safety features include wildlife fencing and a state-of-the-art wildlife detection system that will alert drivers of animals on the road. A pedestrian tunnel will offer safe passage for people crossing the highway from a parking area and busy school bus stop on the west side of the highway to the fishing access site on the east side and beyond to the small community of Toston.

“They are really trying to address all the safety issues associated with that bridge,” said Becky Bey, public information officer for project.

According to Stephanie Brandenberger, MDT bridge engineer, the highway bridge is more than 70 years old and had started to deteriorate. In 2016, during a routine inspection, a fatigue crack was detected in the steel, which put the Toston Bridge on a three-month inspection cycle.

“Once we found that crack, and considering all the other factors with that structure, it was clear that it needed to be replaced,” she said.

The overall cost of the project is about $41.5 million. Of that total, MDT is providing about $3 million, and $28.5 mil-
lion is coming from the Federal Transit Administration. Another $10 million is provided through a highly competitive BUILD (Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development) Federal Transportation Grant.

“The BUILD Grants are so competitive and so hard to get. It’s a real boon to the project to have this grant,” Bey said. “It has reduced by quite a bit what would have been the state’s cost.”

Riverside Contracting is the prime contractor on the job. Sletten Construction is a subcontractor providing the bridge work. Russ Gaub, project engineer at Riverside Contracting said that at $29.6 million, the Toston Structures Project is one of Riverside’s largest contracts.

“It’s going to be much safer for the traveling public,” he said.

Bey said that in public meetings prior to the start of the project area, property owners had long recognized the safety issues regarding the bridge and were excited to see a new, safer bridge being built.

The Toston Bridge is one of 2,489 bridges on MDT-managed highways and interstates. An additional 1982 bridges are on city or county property. MDT inspects all of them.

“We’re looking at the condition, not necessarily the age,” Brandenberger said.

Through regular inspections, the state prepares a cost benefit analysis to determine what rehabilitation is needed and the best time for replacement. It’s a holistic approach, which includes a combination of preservation projects and replacement projects. Several structures of similar age and construction on I-90 west of Alberton are slated for replacement in the next five to 10 years.

“Right now, our federal aid bill just doesn’t provide enough to meet the needs we have coming,” Brandenberger said. “We hope to see more funding for Montana and other states to meet these critical infrastructure needs.”
Toston Bridge crosses the Missouri River just downstream of the confluence of the Jefferson, Madison, and Gallatin Rivers. A new highway bridge and new railroad bridge are under construction.

If you would like direct weekly construction updates on the Toston project, text “tostonstructures” to 555888, or email tostonstructures@kljeng.com. There is also a construction hotline that will be able to answer frequently asked questions and/or take a message: 1-800-982-3161. You may also visit the project website at www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/tostonstructures/.

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Students who live in Lockwood, an unincorporated town south and east of Billings, will finally have their own high school, after voters approved a $49.9 million building bond in order to construct it. Prior to the passing of the bond, Lockwood served only students in kindergarten through the eighth grade and bused its high school students into Billings.

Langlas and Associates started work on the new Lockwood High School in March, with a completion date set for fall of 2020. The school is unique because it’s being build – and used – in stages.

The company focused first on building a 26,000-square-foot premanufactured metal building using expedited construction methods. The building was constructed in less than six months. When the whole school is finished, that building will be the career and technical education building, but this fall, it is housing about 100 freshmen, which will be the first graduating class of Lockwood High in 2024. In the coming years, the school will fill as the freshmen move up in the grades. When the whole project is complete, the building will have a 700-student capacity.

According to Joe Clark, project manager at Langlas and Associates, the main high school building is being con-
constructed using a structural-steel skeletal frame with light gauge framing for interior walls. Huge precast concrete sections were shipped in by semis – one at a time – for the gym and theater. To support the weight of the building, it’s constructed on a deep rammed aggregate pier foundation.

Lockwood High School is being built on the same footprint as the elementary and middle school, and it’s a busy campus.

“When you have students involved, that becomes one of our utmost concerns,” Clark said.

Temporary walking paths provide students with a safe passage around the construction site, and all the workers on site are required to undergo and pass a criminal background check, Clark said. Additionally, they are all required to wear ID badges and check in and out of the jobsite every day.

In addition to the high school, Langlas is also building the football/track field, with locker rooms, concessions, and stadium seating. The school will be a place for the community as well. It includes an outdoor amphitheater, and the gym and full production stage inside the school can also be used for community functions.

**SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION, A SPECIALIZED APPROACH**

In recent years, Langlas and Associates has carved out a niche in school construction in Montana. The company is presently building two high schools, the one in Lockwood and another in Bozeman. Recent work also included elementary school projects in both Kalispell and Helena.

All the schools in Langlas and Associates’ portfolio have what Clark describes as a “shared space aspect.” Commons areas are designed for multiple use and offer additional teaching spaces, classrooms are more spacious,

The first building was constructed in less than six months. When the whole school is finished, that building will be the career and technical education building, but this fall, it is housing about 100 freshmen, which will be the first graduating class of Lockwood High in 2024.
School safety is a huge topic of consideration when you’re designing these buildings,” Clark said. “It adds a whole new element with our construction.”

Entrances need specialized doors and sophisticated, electronic-locking mechanisms that can be controlled from a central location should there be the need for a lockdown. In some areas, safety glass is standard, and the whole building is wired for security cameras.

Clark said he’s enjoyed working on school projects, especially the high schools.

“High schools are fun because we see a lot of technical aspects that you don’t typically see in elementary schools,” Clark said.

Those next-level elements include wiring for advanced technology, and plumbing and natural gas for science laboratories. Career and technical education facilities are state-of-the-art. Everything’s larger and designed for the needs of older students.

As students’ learning needs change, construction companies, including Langlas and Associates, have had to adapt bidding and building methods for school construction.

“With schools, you have a set time frame,” Clark said. “You can’t negotiate a schedule change. School starts at the same time every year, so you basically work your schedule backward from then.”

For school construction, Langlas and Associates uses an alternative delivery method. They are the construction manager at-risk, and the project proceeds in phases, so construction can start before the bidding for all the phases is finalized. It allows school construction to be fast-tracked and stay on schedule.

“A schedule for school construction has a different flow,” Clark said.

Lockwood High School is a good example. The phases move throughout the building, from the commons area, to the academic wing, administration, the gym, career and technical education, and the arts.

Next fall, as students fill the halls, they’ll be learning in one of Montana’s premier high schools.

“As a Class A school, this facility is going to be considerably nicer than a lot of the larger schools out there,” Clark said.
In 2017, the Montana Legislature passed Senate Bill 139, allowing three large K-8 school districts – Hellgate, Lockwood and East Helena – to expand to K-12. Taxpayers in both East Helena and Lockwood followed by approving building bonds for new high schools, and they’re both expected to open in fall of 2020.

According to an MCA survey of news coverage, Lockwood and East Helena high schools are just two of more than 15 school construction and expansion projects that were passed by voters since 2015, providing the construction industry with more than $877 million in contracts.

The East Helena High School contract came in at $29.5 million, and Lockwood High School is being built for $49.9 million. Also this year, Bozeman School District is building a new high school, as well as remodeling its existing high school for $125 million. Billings, Belgrade, Kalispell, Helena and Great Falls have all built new elementary and middle schools in recent years.

New school building projects, coupled with remodel and deferred maintenance projects, are providing a steady income stream for construction companies across the state. It’s up to voters whether or not that trend continues, but if the past is any indicator, school construction is expected to hold steady.
Tabbert Construction marks 60 years
The company started as Utility Builders, one of the MCA's earliest members

By Laura Bailey

This fall, Rod and Jason Tabbert of Tabbert Construction, based in Helena, were hard at work on a public utility project near Lincoln. The patch required four tons of asphalt, and while everyone did their part, perhaps no one worked harder than Rod and Jason.

“He was right back there with me shoveling and raking,” Jason said.

That’s saying something, considering Rod is in his 70s. He’s been working alongside his son for almost 30 years. Looking toward a full retirement, Rod is handing the reins of the company over to Jason a little at a time. It hasn’t been easy, and maybe that’s because Rod has been at the helm of Tabbert Construction since he bought the company in the 80s.

Rod started working for Utility Builders, based in Great Falls, when he was 18. It was founded in 1941 by Bob Blakesley, who joined the MCA in its infancy. Rod started as a laborer, then operator, then superintendent, overseeing operations in the Helena division. Rod worked for Utility Builders as VP for more than 20 years before buying the company, moving the headquarters to Helena, and changing its name to Tabbert Construction.

Blakesley admired Rod’s work ethic and treated him like family, Jason said. Rod’s crews always got the job done, and frequently out-worked the other
crews. In those days, Utility Builders owned the only two curb and gutter machines in Montana, and they were in high demand. In the ’70s, Rod and his crew laid down more than 80,000 feet of curb and gutter in one season in Chinook.

“We traveled a lot all over the state and worked on the Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy Indian reservations,” Rod said.

Jason joined the Laborers Local 254 when he was 18, but he’d been working for his father since he was young, helping in the shop, packing forms and washing machinery. Although he attended Montana State University – Northern in Havre, Jason returned to Tabbert Construction and put his auto mechanics and autobody training to use on the Tabbert Construction fleet. He still does much of the maintenance.

“I just grew up around it,” Jason said.

Utility contracts with NorthWestern Energy, primarily, have been the mainstay for Tabbert Construction, and as the industry has changed, they’ve kept pace and continued to follow the work around the state.

“We’ve done miles and miles of fiber optics out of town, including projects in Missoula and conduit runs down Babcock in Bozeman,” Jason said.

Tabbert Construction employs about 12 people, but when demand was high, that stretches upwards of 20. Like many companies in the construction industry, Tabbert has struggled to find qualified employees, especially truck drivers. For now, Jason and Rod are the only ones on the crew with a CDL.

To say Tabbert Construction is tight-knit might be an understatement. Most employees have been with the company for decades. Brothers, Richard and Frank Fetter have worked for Tabbert since the ‘70s, and brothers Terry and
Lyle Price, both now deceased, had been with the company almost as long. Bobbi Andrew, who handles traffic controls, has also been with the company for 21 years.

Last spring, they lost one of their long-time employees, Mike Wrigg, to cancer. It was a tough loss for the entire company. Since then, Jason’s been working to come up to speed on all the office processes and Mike’s unfinished projects. It’s taken some time, but he thinks he’s finally sorted things out.

While the office project has taken some time, Jason said it’s just one more reason he likes what he does. Construction work is always different from one day to the next, and one thing’s for sure – there’s never a shortage of work.

“We’ve had a lot of competition over the years, but we’ve managed to stay busy,” Rod said.

Rod was always a proud member of the Montana Contractors’ Association, Jason said.

“My dad always had the AGC logo on his trucks along with the American flag,” he added.

While Rod looks to retirement, Jason has his eye on the work at hand.

“We’re just trying to get everything patched and concrete poured before the ground freezes,” Jason said.

An early photo of Utility Builders in action.
Finding and buying quality used construction equipment

From lower cost to quicker acquisition, there are several advantages of adding used machines to an equipment fleet.

With more than 75 locations, five of them in Montana, RDO Equipment Co. offers a large selection of used construction equipment – several brands, various hours, and a range of price points.

Here are five ways RDO helps MCA partners find the best used equipment for their fleet and make the buying process easy.

1. WIDE VARIETY
   Thanks to its large network of stores, RDO has the ability to source equipment from different locations. If the right machine isn’t available at a nearby store, chances are there’s one at another RDO store – and it can be sold and delivered to a customer anywhere in Montana.

2. CERTIFIED USED
   In addition to a sizeable fleet, RDO also offers the largest selection of John Deere Certified Used machines compared to any other dealer in the country.
   So what separates Certified Used equipment from other machines? It’s equipment that has passed a strict 100-plus point inspection, covering everything from the engine to the undercarriage. Certified Used machines are inspected and cared for by RDO’s certified service technicians.

3. SERVICE RECORDS
   One of the most important parts of the used equipment search is finding out a machine’s history. Every seller should be able to provide records, some will provide more detail than others.
   RDO provides service records that go beyond a simple log. Depending on how long the machine has been in the fleet, records may note details like if service included the full manufacturer recommendation or just the bare minimum, when service was performed, and the history of oil scans, not just the most recent one.

4. NEW TECHNOLOGY
   Can used equipment be upgraded with the latest technology? It can, from basic GPS tracking to advanced machine guidance and grade control technology.
   If a machine doesn't currently have the right technology, RDO has a good inventory that can be added or upgraded on used machines, depending on a customers’ need. Thanks to the company’s technology division, RDO Integrated Controls, customers receive
the training, service, and support they need to make technology work on the jobsite.

5. ONGOING SUPPORT
And speaking of service and support, perhaps the most important part of buying used equipment has nothing to do with the actual purchase – it’s what happens after the sale.

RDO offers a range of after-sale support, from parts and service to more advance fleet monitoring and maintenance.

There’s no shortage of places to find and buy used equipment – individual owners, companies, auctions, and the list goes on. However, not all used machines are created equal and finding a trusted seller is the first step in a smart used equipment purchase.

RDO strives to make the used equipment buying process valuable in the end and hassle-free along the way.

RDO Equipment Co. has five locations in Montana: Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, Kalispell, and Missoula. To search all used construction equipment or view new equipment from John Deere and other manufacturers, visit www.RDOequipment.com.

Visit the Montana Contractors’ Association website at www.mtagc.org

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Montana 811: Getting to know private underground facilities

Private underground facilities, also called customer-owned facilities, may be found anywhere, including your excavation site. Operators of lines buried in the public right-of-way must register with Montana 811 (MT 811), so these lines will be marked as the result of a locate request. Privately-owned facilities, like utility lines that serve heaters for hot tubs, gas barbecues, electric security lighting, invisible dog fences, farm taps, buried sprinklers systems, and many others are not marked when locators respond to your MT 811 request, since they are the owners’ responsibility. Let’s take a look at some common types of private underground facilities.

ENERGY-RELATED PRIVATE FACILITIES

Propane is a fuel source used to heat residential buildings, swimming pools, grills, fireplaces, and appliances, among others. In agricultural settings, it can be a fuel source for buildings, corn dryers, and other equipment.

Natural gas can fuel grills, pool heaters, yard lights, or heaters in outbuildings like sheds, garages, and barns. Natural gas may travel through a “master meter” to a residential building. As a general rule, natural gas facility operators will mark underground gas lines only from the main to the meter, making the lines on the “other side” of the meter a private facility.

Electricity can also be supplied to a “master meter” to power multi-resident properties, such as trailer parks, town homes, or apartment complexes. These lines may connect outbuildings like garages, sheds, and barns to a source of power. Remember that the electric operators usually only mark the power lines up to the meter.

Farm Taps are private natural gas lines. All the equipment from the outlet of the meter (usually, but not always, located near the pipeline) to the house, corn dryer, milk house, or barn belongs to the landowner and will not be located. Farm taps support many farms, and as farms have expanded, adding more houses and buildings to the original farmstead, private lines attached to a single tap have increased in number.

Some other types of private facility lines are underground sprinkler systems, data communications cables, fiber optic lines, septic systems, and waste collection lines, among others. In agricultural settings, drain tile and irrigation lines are often buried.

If you are installing private facilities, consider preparing maps of any new facilities, burying tracer wire with new facilities, and/or using above-ground markers or signs to indicate buried facilities.

If you are a landowner or a professional excavator digging on private property there is a good chance that there are private facilities in your work area. Protect yourself by investing the time necessary to determine if there are private utility lines buried in your area of excavation. Look for above-ground warning signs such as a “master meter” or “farm tap” and any former colored marks or flags and contact whoever installed the lines to determine if any current records or maps exist of the area. Remember that a good excavator is also a mindful detective and investigator!

You or the owner of the property may have to contact a private locator to get these lines marked. You can view a list of private Montana locators at www.montana811.org/private-locators.html.
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