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Central Pennsylvania Building and Construction Trades Council and Management Meet to Discuss Future of Union Construction

Nationally known union construction expert shared insight for a successful future

Harrisburg, PA (August 19, 2009) – The Capital Area Labor/Management Council met this evening to discuss the future of union construction in Central Pennsylvania at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex. During the meeting Mark Breslin, a nationally-known construction expert spoke to the group on inspiring individuals and organizations to become the best in their chosen field.

“We are fortunate to have Mark with us to help define the roles that unions, signatory contractors and union members need to play in order to create a cooperative environment,” said Kerry Zettlemyer, business manager for Ironworkers Local 404, Harrisburg, PA. “We also know that our past has provided a hurdle to success between labor and management, which we have been working aggressively to improve over the past decade. One example of this focused effort is our invitation to Mr. Breslin to speak and help us improve the relationship between labor and management. His involvement is a vital step toward continuous improvement to effectively work together to ensure a bright future in which our unions provide a well-trained, highly skilled and safe workforce to the many signatory contractors in our area.”

This meeting signifies the change that has taken place within the union construction industry.

Historically, labor and management have met only when negotiations over contracts were required. There is a changing dynamic among the union construction industry nationally as well as throughout Central Pennsylvania. Many employer and contractor associations – such as the Ironworker Employers Association, the Keystone Contractors Association, the Masonry Contractors Association, the Mechanical Contractors Association and the National Electrical Contractors Association – have been working independently for decades and now, for the first time, these organizations have met together with union members and their representatives to address the issues that face the union construction industry. In fact, this philosophical change is one in which Breslin speaks about in his many presentations.

“Without a competitive union contractor, there’s no work. Without the union, there’s no recruitment, no training and no workers. Without the best union workers the entire union concept becomes meaningless,” said Breslin in his book, *Survival of the Fittest*.

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Breslin spoke for nearly three hours on the strategic initiatives that are necessary to build a cooperative environment, which include marketing, operations, collective bargaining, training and financing. Open to any union member or signatory contractor, the event was well attended and also offered a networking opportunity for the many members of the union construction industry of Central Pennsylvania.

Signatory contractors are contractors and businesses who sign an agreement to hire union building trade members. Union members join a particular union and commit to a three to five year apprenticeship program that teaches every aspect of their selected trade. This training is funded through collectively bargained contributions agreed upon by the employer associations and the unions. Contractors and unions both recognize the need to provide a continuous stream of properly trained craftsmen to the construction industry. Most union apprentices graduate and become journeymen, but the career path does not end there. Those who are so inclined continue an upward path that may include becoming union leaders, foremen or project managers for contractors. They also have the opportunity to become their own boss and own and operate their own business.

The Capital Area Labor/Management Council serves as a clearinghouse for contractors and unions alike to learn, share, network and grow into a strong healthy business community. The organization includes seventeen unions and contractor members of the various trade associations, including the Asbestos Workers, Bricklayers, Boilermakers, Carpenters, Cement Masons, Electricians, Elevator Constructors, Glazers and Painters, Ironworkers, Laborers, Millwrights, Operating Engineers, Plumbers and Pipefitters, Roofers and Waterproofers, Sheet Metal workers, Sprinkler Fitters and Teamsters.

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