Dear NSA Today Readers,

Last year we relaunched NSA Today in a themed format. The NSA Today workgroup had conceived of several themes that would be relevant to Association leadership and their members which would, issue by issue, be the platform for content. Then the COVID crisis struck. Our themes no longer captured the mood. Uncertainty, sudden change, and stress caused us in the workgroup to abandon the spring issue. As we learned to manage COVID, our work and our home life, we decided to move forward with a themed issue of NSA Today. Needless to say, the theme we chose was not on the list we prepared last year!

In times of crisis leaders must project optimism and look for opportunities and possibilities. The people and organizations who will survive a crisis and come out of it stronger are the ones who are creative, work together, are more resilient, stay focused on the essentials, and identify opportunities that others miss. Individuals and associations may have success through innovating, taking out cost, improving processes, leapfrogging a change initiative, shifting delivery methods, increasing visibility via webinars or social media, or deepening important relationships with members and partners.

We put a call out to Associations for articles that highlight the positive impacts of the pandemic. Those positive impacts could be to the Association itself, subcontractors’ business, or personally. We are pleased to present this unique edition of NSA Today. Many thanks to those of you who contributed.

The NSA Today Workgroup -
Hank Kita, John Lloyd, and Jonathan Mitz

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Greetings,

2020 has been very challenging to say the least. Many construction firms believe the brunt of this storm is yet to come for the industry. I was very pleased when the group decide to focus on what is good and promote optimism in the NSA Today. It is more important now than ever that everyone as NSA leaders be the best leader they can. When COVID-19 concerns started this spring, NSA leadership made the prompt decision to cancel Subcon 2020 and not infiltrate members with correspondence unless it was essential. Each region was affected at different times with the pandemic. Governors of each state were given control to decide who was essential, rules for quarantine, and safety measures to protect the public.

This was when we saw the NSA and its mission shine. There was much correspondence amongst the Executive Directors. They gave each other updates and ideas on how they were coping. Helping each other deal with no face to face meetings, PPP Loan guidance, who and/or what was essential in the industry, and more.

COVID-19 was followed up by the death of George Floyd which ignited protests and riots in our country and around the world calling to end racism.

As we move forward as leaders, we must embrace changes in the way we do things. The updates in this publication highlight some of those actions we must all take. I am very proud to be part of NSA and as we navigate through these challenging times remain positive knowing that we are all better and stronger together.

Take care,

John Lloyd– NSA President
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Special Points of Interest In This Issue:

• COVID-19– Positives
• COVID-19– Opportunity
• COVID-19– Teamwork
• COVID-19– Successes
• COVID-19– New Perspective
• COVID-19– Strong!

Be of good cheer. Do not think of today’s failures, but of the success that may come tomorrow. You have set yourself a difficult task, but you will succeed if you persevere, and you will find a joy in overcoming obstacles.” – Helen Keller

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NSA’s 2020 Spring Conference

SubCon 2020 was shaping up to be a fabulous event. Mary Byers was booked to be our keynote speaker and to facilitate thoughtful seminars throughout the day. There were going to be informative and fun subcontractor-centric sessions. And as always, the attorneys’ council was going to be happily sequestered. I was so looking forward to absorbing new ideas, meeting new like-minded people and reconnecting with our great industry’s peers. But it didn’t happen.

It is not that we didn’t try. Shelly Miller, our Alliance’s Executive Director, had worked so hard to put all the pieces in place, hotel, food, meeting rooms, and a thousand other things. And then she had to work so hard to take it apart, piece by piece. Mike McDonagh, the ED in Boston, helped developed programing and scheduling, fine-tuned Mary Byers’ direction, and guided SubCon 2020’s marketing to the associations. Credit goes to Scott Grimes for finding Mary Byers. And finally, we can thank John Lloyd for making the wise decision to cancel the event when he did.

So, what’s in store for the rest of 2020 and 2021? We are not sure. We recognize that COVID has not been overcome yet. The economy, our industry and the finances of individual associations are closely connected. So, what’s being planned for NSA’s 2021 Spring Conference? If it is prudent to have it then it will be scaled down a bit from the grand plan we had for 2020. It will be geared towards executive directors, association leadership, and attorneys. I can promise that we will absorb new ideas, meet new people and see old friends. SubCon’s grand plans, however, are going to be put on the shelf until life is more predictable.

Jonathan Mitz, ASA Metro Washington
Can We Talk About the Good Things for a Minute?

As an NSA member, I was tasked with observing the massive changes that have occurred during this pandemic. As we watch the news outlets or listen to politicians, one would tend to think that the world is currently hurtling out of control. While there has been some bad outcomes of being told to stay home, close down businesses, social distance from loved ones, and everything else, we need to pause for a moment and try to look at some positives that have come about.

So, I have created a list of sorts to walk through some of the positives I have observed from the state of Indiana.

- We got our Construction Networking Event of the Year in on February 27! Talk about getting lucky with that. This is the most valuable thing we do each year as a membership. Not to mention a great financial help for the year. Our board had the foresight several years ago to set a goal to hold back 6 months of operating expenses. We are financially healthy, but that would have been a big hit.
- Construction was deemed an essential industry. That is great because it kept our members going and their employees employed. On top of that, the Indiana construction market is very good right now. Our members are staying very busy.
- Due to construction being essential, our members had to quickly figure out how to keep their workforce safe. While many of their offices closed at first, their field had to keep producing. We, along with our sister organization, created an entire COVID toolkit that ended up being a valuable resource for our members. A pandemic isn’t something that most of our members had thought of incorporating before and now this toolkit can help them be prepared if god-for-bid this happens again.
- Like most everyone else, our organization did not utilize technology well, if at all, to communicate, meet and educate. Since March, my staff and our volunteers have completely shifted everything to a virtual world. We have to date, in fact, done more in terms of education than we did last year. Typically, ISA holds several networking functions through the year, with pure educational seminars sprinkled in. And, we have had great attendance.
- We figured out a way to hold virtual networking sessions. These were well attended, and the membership enjoyed getting to talk to people they haven’t seen in a while.
- Committee and board participation in virtual meetings have been outstanding and way better than when you must have people travel from all over to meet. Our members have reported that they have seen the same thing occur within their company. Many have said that they will most likely keep virtual project meetings going forward as it saves their staff tons of time.
- Working from home has changed the culture of many companies to a more results focused evaluation of someone’s work. No more will our culture be to evaluate you by how much time someone’s butt is in a seat.
- There are a lot of displaced workers right now from other industries. We have seen an uptick of those people wanting to get into the construction industry. We are hopeful that this will produce construction labor that Indiana sorely needs right now.
- Because so many Indiana based organizations were presenting on the same topics, ISA partnered with several different organizations we have not normally partnered with. Those partnerships have gone well, and we have cut down on the saturation level of COVID related topics.
- This pandemic has forced our board to start thinking hard and strategically about the value that can be brought to the membership through the end of this year, next year and beyond. Once we get back to in-person engagement, the virtual world will not stop being a reality now.

There are probably more to list, but this is a pretty good list! When I started this article, I was really struggling with what I could pull out of my observations that would be positive. I surprised myself, but I didn’t do this alone. I asked my colleagues, virtually that is.
COVID Windfall
Jonathan Mitz, Vice President, Ennis Electric (ASA of Metro Washington)

The silver lining of the COVID cloud is our self-funded employee health insurance program. As a merit shop and employee owned subcontractor Ennis Electric has always provided top of the line employee benefits for everyone, with the company paying 100% of the premium. A few years ago, we migrated from a traditional fully insured health benefits plan to the self-insured model. With self-insurance we pay our any employee’s claims under $50,00 and purchase catastrophic coverage from a stop loss carrier to eliminate our financial risk for any employee claims that are over $50,000. What this means is when claims are down such as during COVID, Ennis Electric gets the windfall not the traditional insurance company.

Insurance companies have figured out how to make huge profits. Self-funding, either through a group captive or on its own, takes the profits away from the insurance companies and puts them in employer and employee pockets. At Ennis we also self-fund our dental, vision, workers compensation, short- and long-term disability, AD&D and life insurance benefits.

Due to people staying safe at home, the reduction of recreational sports, bars being closed, and the partial ban on elective surgeries I’m projecting our savings in 2020 will be several hundred thousand dollars as compared to a traditional fully insured plan. You read that right, hundreds of thousands. And we are a company of just 125 employees. While being self-insured has saved us plenty of money these last few years, this is going to be a banner year.

If you want to explore self-funding health insurance for your business, then feel free to contact me. 703-334-5904, JMitz@EnnisElectric.com.

ACT– Arizona Construction Trades– Human Interaction

Has COVID-19 Ended In-Person Meetings?
By Neal Eckel, Farhang & Medcoff (Arizona Construction Trades)

With very few exceptions every court hearing, settlement conference and seminar I have attended since March 2020 has been done online. And almost all of these sessions went off without a hitch (if you don’t count the inevitable Zoomer who forget to hit the mute button while their dog was barking).

This is a good thing. I have saved many hours in travel time by being able to log on for a meeting rather than navigating Tucson traffic. I’ve cut down on gas consumption and reduced my carbon footprint. And I’ve freed up more time to spend at home so I can scroll through Netflix trying to find a Nordic crime drama I’ve haven’t already seen.

For most of the webinars I’ve attended or taught I do not think there has been any loss of effectiveness in the information being conveyed. As long as the webinar format allows for the use of slides, I don’t see much difference in sitting in a roomful of people watching a speaker present information vs. sitting at my desk watching the same presentation. And as a speaker there is an added bonus: I don’t have to look out over the audience and watch people surreptitiously check their phones; now people can do that unseen from the comfort of their own office or home.

As for settlement conferences, I was initially hesitant to use an online format because most attorneys (myself included) believe it is much more effective to have a judge or mediator sit face-to-face with the parties while negotiating a settlement. Guess what? I’ve participated in five online mediations and only one of them failed to settle (for reasons unassociated with not being in person). An effective mediator can still communicate the pros and cons of a case and (virtually) twist arms through a screen.

I have yet to conduct an arbitration online and I have heard conflicting reports on how effective that is. Presenting evidence and having exhibits available for examination and cross-examination is the biggest challenge, although having a trial notebook available for all the parties and witnesses would address some of the issues.

I’m not saying we should never meet in person again; after all it’s tough to meet for happy hour after a virtual meeting. But for most circumstances I think we have moved into a new reality in which we can, and should, rely on technology to simplify meetings and keep us safe.
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PERFORMANCE DRIVEN TRADE FOCUSED SYSTEM WIDE
Northeastern Subcontractors Association
With Adversity Comes Opportunity
(even in the era of COVID-19)

On March 20th the shutdown order finally came. That was when New York Governor Andrew Cuomo issued an executive order which stated in part:

“Effective on March 22 at 8 p.m.: All businesses and not-for-profit entities in the state shall utilize, to the maximum extent possible, any telecommuting or work from home procedures that they can safely utilize. Each employer shall reduce the in-person workforce at any work locations by 100% no later than March 22 at 8 p.m. Any essential business or entity providing essential services or functions shall not be subject to the in-person restrictions. An entity providing essential services or functions whether to an essential business or a non-essential business shall not be subject to the in-person work restriction but may operate at the level necessary to provide such service or function. Any business violating the above order shall be subject to enforcement as if this were a violation of an order pursuant to section 12 of the Public Health Law.”

COVID-19 was beginning to have what would become a devastating impact on the economy of New York State. All business activity in our state was effectively shut down for an indeterminate period of time, other than businesses providing “essential” services or functions. Fortunately, certain types of construction projects were defined as essential, so many members of the Northeastern Subcontractors Association (NESCA) continued to operate, at least on a limited basis.

As for NESCA itself, shortly before the shutdown order came, we were not prepared to operate remotely. Fortuitously, about two weeks before the Governor issued his executive order, we could see the handwriting on the wall, so we contacted our IT consultant, ordered laptops for staff, and set ourselves up to operate remotely from home.

Like many associations, we were forced to cancel previously scheduled membership meetings, seminars and other events, many of which are significant annual sources of revenue for our organization. Working remotely from home and with no meetings or seminars to prepare for, we had to figure out how to stay relevant in our members’ eyes and provide them with as much help navigating through this unprecedented time as we possibly could. With the Governor’s executive orders changing the rules on an almost daily basis, NESCA members were frantic for clear, accurate and trustworthy guidance on such issues as: the required safety and health protocols for operating during the pandemic; which projects were considered essential; the federal CARES Act and FFCRA; the Employee Retention Tax Credit; the NYS Emergency Paid Sick Leave law; SBA PPP loans; eligibility for unemployment insurance; and more recently, New York’s phased re-opening and its current travel restrictions from other states. Because of COVID-19, NESCA was forced to pivot, and since late March we have focused our time and attention on providing members with accurate and understandable information almost on a daily basis.

In doing so we’ve discovered one of the positive outcomes of this pivot is that many more members now recognize NESCA to be a trusted source of valuable information they can access at any time. More members now know that we’re much more than an organization that provides them with networking opportunities, educational programs and legislative advocacy. They recognize NESCA as a full-service association that can provide guidance and answer their questions regarding a wide variety of issues. During the height of the pandemic here in New York (March, April and May), NESCA often received 100 or more phone calls and emails per day (including weekends) from members looking for help. And because of the assistance we provided them, we have never received so many unsolicited “testimonials” from members in the history of the association. Here are just a few of the more than 100 we received:

⇒ “It’s very comforting to have NESCA as a trusted and helpful source at this critical time.”
⇒ “I’m glad we have you guys to rely on for the information we need.”
⇒ “It’s so great to have a place to reach a human and get guidance!”
⇒ “The information you’ve provided through all of the COVID nightmare has helped more than you know.”
⇒ “I just wanted to let you know how clear and simple your COVID communications have been, and that I am reading each and every one! I have also been forwarding them to my boss, who has asked if he can be added to your list because they are so helpful.”

Of course, the proof is always in the pudding. Like many NSA chapters, NESCA operates on a July 1 – June 30 fiscal year, which means the COVID crisis was at its worse in New York during our fourth quarter. Given the impact COVID-19 has had on the economy, we were understandably apprehensive about the timing of sending out 2020-21 dues invoices to members in the midst of so much uncertainty. However, we have been pleasantly surprised by the results. At the end of the first month of our new fiscal year (July 31st), more members had paid dues and total dues revenue was up by more than 5% when compared to the same time last year. In fact, we recruited 5 new members in June simply because existing members shared our communications with them. Another good sign is that our advertising revenue for NESCA’s membership directory is up by more than 6% when compared to last year.

What we have learned while operating during the COVID-19 pandemic is that while face-to-face networking events, educational programs and legislative advocacy are all important benefits of membership in NESCA, perhaps rapid and continuous communication coupled with direct and tangible staff assistance to members is the association’s most valuable asset. Since we don’t yet know when we’ll be able to resume our membership meetings and other networking events, NESCA’s primary focus will continue to be on providing quality staff assistance to our members.

Michael Misenhimer, Executive Director, Northeastern Subcontractors Association, Inc.
The Association of Subcontractors and Affiliates of Chicago (ASA Chicago) hosted our annual Expo and Safety Conference March 2-3, 2020. One week later, our Governor issued a stay at home order and nothing has been the same since! Like all NSA Associations, we are working hard to reinvent ourselves to continue to offer benefits to our 250+ subcontractor members and affiliates. COVID has inspired our staff, board, committee members and all members in several ways:

COVID has highlighted our most dedicated members – We entered our renewal cycle in the midst of COVID. We were so pleased to see so many members renew within the first days and weeks of receiving their invoices and list of member benefits. During tough times, these members knew now is not the time to be a “lone wolf” but more important than ever to belong to a group like ASA Chicago.

Improved committee engagement – Thanks to Zoom, our committee meeting attendance has dramatically increased! By eliminating commute time and providing an easy way to connect, committee members have jumped on calls and contributed great ideas to our reformatted events.

Increased numbers of members participating on educational webinars – As we all know, COVID information was coming out fast and furious for weeks on end. ASA Chicago hosted several education webinars on COVID safety protocols, PPP loans, laws and insurance and other important topics. Several of our webinars topped 70 attendees!

Chance to innovate and be a leader – One thing we all agreed on is that we would not be part of the cancel culture. We worked closely as a staff with our committees and board to pivot to reinvent our events to virtual offerings – from our small educational seminars to our large 2021 Expo. We have worked to stay relevant and continue to offer valuable member benefits by shifting our energy to learning new virtual platforms, engaging our members in new ways and helping them connect digitally.

On the personal side, I think we can all agree that we have all learned a whole lot of technology quickly! And I have enjoyed a break from running kids from school to sports and the many obligations we usually have and replaced that hectic life with long walks and many great books!

Terri Rivera, Executive Director, ASA Chicago

Some weeks are incredibly busy and some weeks I think the phone will never ring again. Construction workers in Illinois are considered “essential” workers so most projects are continuing. I have not heard of too many Covid cases among the trades which is wonderful. Chicago has seen peaceful protesters but also violent looters. Many downtown shops are boarded up which makes me very happy to live 150 miles away from Chicago. Unfortunately, the division in our country continues to raise its ugly head even in my small town of Galena, IL.

This leads me to the conclusion that I will continue to work from home on my front porch and try to stay off Facebook. So, with deference to Charles Dickens, as I head back to my porch to finish my work for the day, I will tell you that it is a far, far better place that I go, (to work) than I have ever gone.”

MARGERY NEWMAN
Physically Apart. Yet more CONNECTED than ever.

The construction industry around the world has undergone tremendous change since the introduction of COVID-19. And, naturally so has our Association.

As Ohio Governor Mike DeWine’s shutdown order loomed SANEO’s phones began ringing, emails started coming, and I quickly realized that people had more questions than answers.

This provided us with a unique opportunity to be of service to our membership. Time was of the essence to quickly get a support network together for our members and the questions & challenges that would certainly come. We needed to pivot quickly with technology & thus we became a virtual platform for information almost overnight.

One of our most successful means of communication became video conferencing on Zoom. Each Wednesday we hosted a scheduled Zoom call with our Attorneys and Accountants taking the lead and myself acting as moderator. Members were encouraged to call in with any issue.

We were able to walk with our membership together through SBA EIDL & PPP Loans, PPE and where to source it, Pandemic Policies, and daily changes to the stay at home orders in our state and others. I watched our membership come together and shine. We became the “go to” call to put on your weekly calendar. As word of this got out, our membership grew. The Northeast Ohio Construction industry needed what we were offering. It felt wonderful to be of service, support them, and welcome the new members, even virtually.

Sometimes, people would just call in because of discouragement or to share small victories in the way they were navigating this new normal. During the most uncertain days I felt like our work counted the most. In embracing new systems & tools quickly we were able to grow. Sometimes in resiliency you move farther than any success you have ever had. Fortunately, even during a global pandemic, SANEO, as well as our members, managed to achieve both.

As we continue this adventure of virtual meetings, virtual events, and new technology I for one will recall this time as one where our association walked forward in faith and not fear working together to make a difference now and for our future.

Jodie Oates, Executive Director, The Subcontractors Association of Northeast Ohio

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**How is COVID-19 affecting subcontractors in the DMV?**

(DMV = District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia)

A short answer to this question, as of August 1, 2020, is “Not much at all” – at least from a business standpoint. What are the positives since March 1st? 

1. Traffic – DC has some of the worst traffic in the nation. In this article, Business Insider places DC fifth in the nation, behind Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and New York City. Since the onset of COVID-19 at the beginning of August, traffic has not been an issue. Even at the busiest of times traffic is moving and you can expect to get to your destination without unexpected delay. One of our board members, Hugo Sanchez (BSA Construction) says, “I think the COVIC-19 situation made our industry enhance technology more. People didn’t know what Zoom was before March and now it has become a convenient tool that allows you to connect anywhere; especially around this area where traffic has so much effect on your time.”

2. Meetings More Efficient – Our Board meetings started out as Zoom meetings and have morphed into a combination of in-person and Zoom. It takes a certain discipline, which we have not mastered, to run a meeting this way. If there is any side conversation with those in the room, it disturbs those on Zoom. Also, the technology is not perfect, and the Zoom people can be knocked off without notice.

3. Effective Advocacy Efforts – We were able to hold a Zoom meeting with the top construction official in DC. This meeting revealed how much we can accomplish by meeting with administrators and regulators before we introduced needed legislation. We discovered the laws on the books are not being used to protect subcontractors as intended. For instance, retainage can be reduced from 10 percent to 5 percent at fifty percent completion of the project. Few of our members ask for this reduction which has a major impact on their cash position.
How is COVID-19 affecting subcontractors in the DMV?
(CONTINUED)

(DMV = District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia)

4. Good Events – We are planning a meeting in conjunction with the Construction Financial Managers Association (CFMA) with AGC’s top economist.
5. Connection with GC Partners – We are planning our annual dinner with the Fifteen General Contractor Partners to be both in-person and on Zoom.

As horrific as COVID-19 is, there are many positive consequences. Our Board Financial Advisor, Brian Pollack with Lanigan, Ryan, Malcolm and Doyle states, “I would say overall for ASA, LRMD and me personally it has forced us all to get out of our comfort zone and adapt to change quickly. The biggest of that being trying to figure out how to operate each of our businesses on more of a remote platform. I think this leads to all of us rethinking office space and being more open to work from home options for employees when the job can still be completed remotely.”

Thanks for Everyone’s Help

Minnesota’s construction companies were deemed “critical sector” businesses by Governor Tim Walz in the first few weeks of the coronavirus chaos. Since that time, subcontractors across our state have worked tirelessly to protect their employees and the businesses they’ve built over generations. Through their dedication, sleepless nights, and ingenuity our construction community has operated non-stop throughout the pandemic.

The Minnesota Subcontractors Association (MSA), like our members, jumped in with both feet and learned to swim in a rising tide (seriously, our lakes are big enough to have tides). At the request of our subcontractors and with the assistance of professional service providers we began sending two emails a week to keep members up to date on daily executive orders, emerging safety procedures, and webinars. This gave us the ability to showcase the great work our attorneys, accountants and insurance companies and created a win-win for all our members. Lisa Houts on our staff developed and updated a new webpage with links to important materials and in the process of all this outreach we’ve improved our pipeline for getting and disseminating information to our members.

Like all our NSA partners, our spring events were cancelled, but before March was over we purchased our first web-conferencing subscription. Since that time, we’ve held virtual board meetings, committee meetings, general contractor council meetings, and our first annual meeting (on most occasions we have increased rates of attendance). Although we lost out on some revenue on our events we’ve also cut costs allowing us to add to our rainy day fund.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our NSA partners many of which have acted as a source of inspiration and information over the last six months! Your shared experiences have helped augment our internal operations and our members’ experience. With some of your suggestions we are moving to standardize our committee schedules and offer some webinar discussion forums related to PPP. Thanks again!

Our staff remains in good health and we wish you and yours well.

Nick McNeely, Executive Director  Minnesota Subcontractors Association
This is a time of transition for both the New York City construction industry and the STA!

The COVID-19 crisis will continue to impact our industry and the Subcontractors Trade Association (STA) for the foreseeable future. COVID-19 has changed the construction process as we know it. Health and safety practices have become more important than ever and the use of PPE and the emphasis on more sanitary and healthy jobsites are likely to become the norm for the long run. The robust construction market which we had prior to March 2020 is no more. Both public and private sector owners are carefully assessing their financial positions and the viability of putting forward much of their previously booked work. Projects which were in design before the crisis are now being carefully reviewed and many may not proceed for some time to come, if ever.

Likewise, the STA is itself in a time of transition. Over the past 150 days, the STA has had to focus almost solely on the changing construction landscape and the impact that COVID-19 was having on its members. We adapted to the times and set up a series of regular bulletins (now housed on our website) informing our members of the changes in the rules governing our industry as they were being promulgated at the Federal, State, and City levels. To supplement these bulletins, we provided several virtual presentations for our members on issues such as safety, the impact that the crisis was having on our members, the status of public projects, and the need for better linkages between the design and subcontractor communities.

STA also advocated at the State and City level for legislation that would benefit our membership and against other ill-informed proposals that might threaten the very livelihood of our members. In addition, we continued to network and interact with other trade associations in order to make certain that the needs and views of subcontractors were understood by owners and general contractors as construction moved from an extended “pause” to “startup” in early June.

The impact that the COVID-19 crisis has had on the STA and the way we do business is unmistakable. Virtual meetings and seminars are the new normal for at least the remainder of this year. We have been hurt financially by having to postpone our major fundraiser, the 2020 Annual Awards Dinner, from April to November of this year. What was once a dinner to be attended by 600 guests, has now been rescheduled as a virtual event. We joined forces with the Women’s Builder’s Council to co-sponsor our annual golf outing. STA has formed a blue-ribbon committee which will review the finances and business operations of our organization in order to make certain that we best adapt to the changing times and maintain a fiscally viable organization.

Our members are of course the backbone of the STA. The STA continues to stay in touch on an almost daily basis with our members, with information that they can use to stay viable in this uncertain construction market. The feedback from our membership has been positive and we will continue to provide them with the information and education that they need to make it through these tough times. We need our STA contractors during this transitional period to keep the STA as a strong voice for the local union affiliated subcontractor community.
ASSOCIATED SUBCONTRACTORS OF MASSACHUSETTS

ASM FOCUSED ON HELPING MEMBERS GET BACK TO WORK

Michael McDonagh, Executive Director

It is hard to believe that six months have passed since the start the COVID-19 pandemic. So much has changed in all aspects of life. Since the beginning of the pandemic, many ASM members were deemed to be essential workers by the State of Massachusetts and kept working, and adjusting, throughout the various levels of the shutdown. The jobs that remained open were primarily housing and public construction, such as schools and other state or municipal facilities. Many other ASM Members were at a near complete shutdown for weeks until the state and municipalities permitted work to restart in May. It was a challenging time for all subcontractors- whether working at full capacity or waiting to get back to work. PPP and PPE were the focus of most discussions in April and May. Everyone investigated whether to apply for a PPP loan and after donating PPE to hospitals and first responders, many construction companies struggled getting enough mask and gloves on time for the reopening.

ASM went into action to help members by providing resources to manage a situation no one predicted and for which no one had a roadmap. We did this mainly in two areas: 1. providing the most up to date information which often changed daily and, 2. engaging with legislative, regulatory officials, and partner organizations. Over those first 16 weeks ASM conducted 17 webinars or online seminars- certainly a record for our Association. Some were simply opportunities for members to connect and share ideas. On a webinar in May, Boston Mayor Martin Walsh, along with several of his senior staff addressed over 200 ASM Members. The topic of discussion was construction safety and the reopening of construction. The Mayor spent a considerable amount of time responding to questions- questions that no one, either in Government or industry would have imagined. On the advocacy side, we saw about 240 pandemic related bills filed in our Legislature and our Governor issue dozens of executive orders and advisories- many of which directly impacted construction and subcontractors.

More recently, many ASM members reported that business is getting back to normal but still about 85%-90% percent of pre-pandemic levels. Although we all hope this trend continues, the long-term impacts of the pandemic remain unknown. Questions remain about projects in the pipeline. Will owners and developers keep plans at the white-hot pace that we saw before March? There is much still unknown but there is optimism about the direction we are headed. Work delays, increased costs, and productivity losses are part of our new normal. But how do these costs get covered? In most cases, it is the subcontractor who is providing the bulk of the labor, material, and supplies for a job. When a job shuts down or slows down, those costs only increase. It will take teamwork and collaboration among all parties to get through this pandemic and to ensure that contractors, owners, and industry partners can emerge from this pandemic intact.

FINDING OPPORTUNITY IN ADVERSITY: OPTIMISM FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

JUSTIN M. ALABURDA

Looking for good news? If so, you are not alone. Aside from the collective mental, physical and emotional human toll imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, entire sectors of the economy have been ravaged, and old, familiar ways of doing business have been disrupted.

Although deemed essential, the construction industry has not been immune to interruption and uncertainty during these unprecedented times. Amid new health and safety concerns, coupled with financial uncertainty, progress on projects has slowed, and the start dates for a number of new projects slated to begin in 2020 have been deferred.

However, resilience has always been a trademark of contractors, subcontractors and other industry professionals. Reports indicate that while the construction industry lost more than one million jobs February through April, at least 600,000 of those jobs had been gained back by the end of June.

It is said that opportunity hides itself in adversity, and for those industry stakeholders still struggling with the impacts of the pandemic, it is fair to ask: what opportunities has the COVID-19 pandemic created within the construction industry?

Opportunities to Collaborate are at an All-Time High. Collaboration is, at times, a byproduct of necessity. For many years, contractors, subcontractors and lower-tiers, have been subject to onerous, one-way contract provisions and risk allocation mechanisms. Now, however, project owners and construction managers are best served to work in unison with their project teams to revise project programs, manage disrupted supply chains, accommodate public health restrictions, and mitigate project delays. This presents a real opportunity for the industry to come together to develop processes and procedures that correspond to the changed public health and market conditions.

As part of that process, project owners and program managers may see the benefit of increased participation in discussions related to project budget, scope and time. Adding stakeholders to the conversation lends itself to the future use of more collaborative project delivery methods, including improved contracting processes through which parties agree to fairly allocate risk based on their ability to control, and prevent, such risk.

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Innovations in Technology and Building Methods. Physical distancing is now the norm, which necessarily changes the way contractors, subcontractors and project participants interact with one another. Interactive web-based meetings have replaced in-person meetings. Tours and inspections are being conducted virtually to allow stakeholders to monitor project progress from miles away. Artificially intelligent sensors and devices can be worn to ensure physical distancing measures are being observed. All of these tools offer real-time information so that issues can be communicated and resolved quickly, thus improving productivity and efficiency.

From a building method standpoint, we can expect to see an increase in the modular building trend. Here, control is the key. When physical components or units are built off-site, there are more opportunities to control not only the safety of that off-site environment, but also control (and reduce) on-site congestion.

Made in the U.S.A. The pandemic has exposed another truth: the construction industry in the United States is still dependent on international materials and workers. Reports indicate that nearly 30% of building materials used in the United States are imported from China. When international borders are closed, or trade relations are strained, disruptions in critical supply chains are inevitable. Herein lies an opportunity to bring production and manufacturing operations back to the United States, particularly where owners and developers may be willing to pay higher prices for materials that come from a more reliable supply chain. The construction of those very manufacturing facilities could, in and of itself, also be a boon for the industry.

Safer and Cleaner Project Sites. Practices such as temperature checks, frequent handwashing, improved mask and glove policies, and sanitization of work sites and equipment are all drivers for improved public health and are likely to continue beyond the pandemic. We may also see evidence of secondary benefits from certain health and safety measures. For example, staggered shifts will lead to less crowded work areas, which should aid accident prevention efforts. Less congested work areas may also lessen burdens to coordinate work, which in turn may increase productivity. With these practices likely here for the long-term, the project participants most willing to embrace the new measures are most likely to succeed.

Justin M. Alaburda is a member and co-managing partner of the Akron office of the business law firm of Brennan, Manna & Diamod, LLC. https://www.bmdllc.com/team/justin-m-alaburda/ (330) 253-9134, jmalaburda@bmdllc.com

IT’S BETTER IN TEXAS– SUBCONTRACTORS OF THE METROPLEX

I have felt so blessed to be in Texas during the COVID pandemic. As a Texas born and bred kind of girl, I believe I live in the best state in our nation. Maybe that’s my annoying Texas pride beaming through, but we have wonderful weather, polite people, and a strong economy most of the time. There is very little to complain about in Texas other than the super-hot summers and our “cold” February’s, which would be dream winter weather for our NSA friends in the north. Even in all of this COVID fallout, I have felt like Governor Abbott and most local authorities who have intended to get us back to our normal life as quickly as possible; not the “new normal” we keep hearing about elsewhere. I find it comforting in the midst of the chaos we have been living in since the middle of March.

In the Subcontractors Association of the Metroplex (SAM), we have introduced a new Membership Benefit in the last few months. We have partnered with 365 Workplace Safety to offer our members a discounted membership with them. 365 Workplace Safety is an online portal stocked with a multitude of Safety and Human Resources information that every company needs to operate in compliance with State and Federal Laws. For Safety, its members can find Toolbox Talks, Safety Manuals, Policies, OSHA Compliance Updates, Presentations on various topics, and other training materials. For Human Resources-related items, its members can find Federal Law Updates, DMV Records, Employee Manual Policies, an Employee Handbook Builder, 200+ Free HR related training courses, and other best practices information. Members also gain access to Sierra Dwight, the Executive Director who is always an email or call away to help with any HR or Safety related task or concern. 365 Workplace Safety is a powerful tool, and we are proud to have partnered with them!

SAM has followed others’ lead by hosting Webinars and Virtual Happy Hours. While this platform is not nearly as well-attended as our traditional in-person meetings, the sessions have proven to be valuable and interactive for our attendees. We have discussed Using Social Media to Promote Your Business, The Impact on Texas Unemployment Rates due to COVID, and Cyber Security Insurance. Our Annual Subcontract Review Seminar will be presented in a Webinar format in September, and our 2nd Annual Clay Shoot will follow in October. We are very eager to host an in-person event!

SAM has gained a few new members since March, and we have several more waiting to join until we get back to having regular in-person meetings and events. It has been really nice to continue to contact new prospects and talk up SAM during this time.

On a personal level, I have witnessed and experienced more of the simple things in life. Immediately after our State shut some things down, I noticed more children playing outside, couples taking evening strolls, and families enjoying bike rides together. I have discovered and explored a few of our beautiful State Parks and even went camping for the first time in probably 25 years! It turns out I kind of love doing that, and I’m going again over Labor Day weekend. I had no idea because I have been so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life for so long.

I have a greater appreciation for the COVID pandemic than negative feelings towards it because it has forced us all to slow down and enjoy the simpler things in life. There will always be something to work on. But when it is all said and done, the people and experiences in life are the most important parts of the whole living experience. I’m grateful for the extra time we have all gained to spend with those I love most.

Carrie Edomm, Executive Director, Subcontractors Association of the Metroplex, Dallas, Texas
Top Reasons to Be Member of NSA

The National Subcontractors Alliance was formed to connect associations across the United States that share a common purpose and provide a forum to exchange information and influence the national debate on construction issues.

The mission of the National Subcontractors Alliance is to promote the exchange of information between its member organizations, and to foster opportunities for representation at the national level on industry issues.

NSA represents the epitome of “lean” principles – with simple governance, low overhead and minimal dues, to make it easy to participate. Avoiding a top-down approach, we focus instead on direct member-to-member exchange to provide the greatest value.

Connections
Through NSA, you connect with the most successful subcontractor associations in the nation that share your same goals and challenges, and you learn from their experiences.

You build relationships with association leaders that last throughout the year - giving you a “go to” resource for information and ideas to help build your organization

News & Information
Through Member-to-Member exchange, you get practical information on all aspects of association operations - including governance, membership, education, events, marketing, communication, advocacy and more.

Beneficial exchange continues throughout the year - in person at the Annual Spring Conference, and Fall Meetings of the Executive Directors and Attorneys’ Council: through conference calls, one-on-one contacts and online channels; and through NSA’s official publication, NSA Today.

Through NSA, you learn what works and what doesn’t, so you are primed for success. You get new ideas to try in your organization, AND the tools to implement them, so you don’t have to reinvent the wheel.

Education
At NSA conferences, you hear experienced, national level speakers on topics directly relevant to association and business management; and you leave with proven “best practices” to apply in your own association/or and business.

At special meetings of the Executive Directors and Attorneys’ Council, you benefit from peer-to-peer learning at its best.

Influence
The NSA Attorneys’ Council keeps members informed of important legislative and legal developments around the country so you are better equipped to support or oppose similar initiatives at the local level.

Through NSA, you learn about legislative successes in other states that aide in mounting successful legislative campaigns in your area.

Through NSA’s membership in the Associated Specialty Contractors and connection to other national industry association, you have an opportunity to be heard on national industry issues.

Fair Contracts - ConsensusDocs
As one of the 40+ members of the ConsensusDocs coalition, NSA plays a role in the development of model contract documents that are designed to be fair to all parties and achieve the best possible project outcome.

Through NSA’s endorsement of ConsensusDocs your members receive a 20% discount on any ConsensusDocs purchase.

Savings
Through NSA’s Key Partners and Services your local members enjoy substantial savings on office products, computer equipment, conference call services, shipping, marketing with promotional packages and more.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS:

Art Flagg, Executive Director
Alliance of Construction Trades (ACT)
3131 N. Country Club Road
Tucson, AZ 85716
Ph: (520) 624-3002
Fx: (520) 624-3049
Website: www.actaz.net
Email: Art@actaz.net

Terri Rivera, Executive Director
Association of Subcontractors & Affiliates (ASA Chicago)
2200 E. Devon – Suite 261
Des Plaines, IL 60018
Ph: (847) 827-8336
Fx: (847) 827-8359
Website: www.asachicago.org
Email: ginny@asachicago.org

Ike Casey, Executive Director
ASA Metro Washington (ASAMW)
1004 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
Ph: (571) 237-7101
Fx: (571) 237-7101
Website: www.asamw.org
Email: ike@asamw.org

Michael McDonagh, Executive Director
Associated Subcontractors of Massachusetts (ASM)
15 Court Square, S.840
Boston, MA 02108
Ph: (617) 742-3412
Fx: (617) 453-4338
Website: www.associatedsubs.com
Email: mmcdonagh@associatedsubs.com

Wendy Lambert, Executive Director
Central Texas Subcontractor Association (CTSA)
P.O. Box 1087
Cedar Park, TX 78630
Ph: (512) 299-0150
Website: www.ctsaonline.org
Email: wendy@ctsaonline.org

Scott Grimes, Executive Director
Indiana Subcontractors Association (ISA)
8909 Purdue Rd. Suite 130
Indianapolis, IN 46268
Ph: (317) 686-2563
Fx: (317) 686-2671
Website: www.indianasubcontractors.org
Email: sprimes@indianasubcontractors.org

Nick McNeely, Executive Director
Minnesota Subcontractors Association (MSA)
1123 Glenwood Avenue, Suite 100
Minneapolis, MN 55405
Ph: (651) 206-6753
Website: www.msamm.com
Email: nick@msamm.com

Joe Teeter, Executive Director
North Carolina Subcontractors Alliance (NCSA)
PO Box 30604
Charlotte, NC 28204
Cell: (407) 468-1912
Of: (803) 548-1480
Ph: (704) 578-1072
Website: www.ncsubcontractors.com
Email: jteeter@goettle.com (Joe Teeter)
OFFICERS

President
John Lloyd
Minnesota Subcontractors Association (MSA)
1123 Glenwood Avenue, Suite 100
Minneapolis, MN 55405
763.413.0669
jlloyd@lloydsmsn.com

Vice President
Scott Grimes
Indiana Subcontractors Association (ISA)
8909 Purdue Rd. Suite 130
Indianapolis, IN 46268
317.686.2663 | sgrimes@indianasubcontractors.org

Secretary
Carrie Edomm
Subcontractors Association of the Metroplex (SAM)
205 Sharon Street
Irving, TX 75061
972.438.1110
execdir@sam-dfw.org

Treasurer
Hank Kita
Subcontractors Trade Association (STA)
1325 Ave. of Americas – 10th Floor
New York, NY 10019
212.398.6220 | hkita@stanyc.com

Ex Officio-
Thomas McIndoe
Northeastern Subcontractors Association (NESCA)
AM Contracting, LLC
290 Elwood Davis Road, Suite 290
Liverpool, NY 13088
315.491.1010
TMcIndoe@amcontracting.com

Ex Officio-
David G. Cannistraro
Associated Subcontractors of Massachusetts (ASM)
J. C. Cannistraro, LLC
80 Rosedale Road, P.O. Box 413
Watertown, MA 02471
617.926.0092
davec@cannistraro.com

Executive Committee Members at Large

Jonathan Mitz
ASA Metro Washington (ASAMW)
Ennis Electric Co.
7851 Wellingford Drive
City of Manassas VA 20109
703-335-6700
jmitz@enniselectric.com

Executive Committee Members at Large
Art Rouse
North Carolina Subcontractors Association (NCSCA)
Binswanger Glass
P.O. Box 30604
Charlotte, NC 28204
arouse@binswangerglass.com

Executive Director
Michelle Miller
National Subcontractors Alliance
5514 Diamond Creek Drive
Medina, OH 44256
330.592.0891
director@nationalsubcontractors.com

ATTORNEYS’ COUNCIL

Alliance of Construction Trades (ACT)
Neal Eckel
520.214.2000 | neael@farhangmedcoff.com

ASA Metro Washington (ASAMW)
Andrew N. Cook
202.778.9106 | Andrew.Cook@KLGates.com
Jonathan Mitz
703.335.6700 | jmitz@enniselectric.com

Associated Subcontractors of Massachusetts (ASM)
John M. Curran
617.849.6032 | jcurran@corwinlaw.com
David E. Wilson
617.849.6032 | dew@corwinlaw.com

Association of Subcontractors & Affiliates (ASACHicago)
Margery Newman
312.377.1297 | mnewman@bdifirm.com

Central Texas Subcontractors Association (CTSA)
Shelly D. Masters
512.615.1139 | smasters@klinglerlaw.com

Indiana Subcontractors Association (ISA)
Carl Pebworth
317.237.1267 | carl.pebworth@FaegreBD.com

Minnesota Subcontractors Association (MSA)
Jason Tarasek
704.998.2214 | jtarasek@taftlaw.com

North Carolina Subcontractors Alliance (NCSA)
David Carson
704.998.2214 | dcarson@jahlaw.com

Northeastern Subcontractors Association (NESCA)
Walter G. Breakell
518.869.5552 | wbreakell@breakell-law.com

Rhode Island Subcontractors Association (RISA)
Girard Visconti
401.272.1400 | GVisconti@shslawfirm.com

Subcontractors Association of Delaware Valley (SADV)
Andy Cohn
610.941.2549 | acohn@kaplaw.com

Subcontractors Association of the Metroplex (SAM)
Sewall “Spike” Cutler
214.219.0800 | scutler@cutler-smith.com

Subcontractors Association of Northeast Ohio (SANEO)
Todd Harpst
330.983.9971 | tharpst@hrblegal.com

Subcontractors Association of Western Ohio (SAWO)
Robert Dunlevey
937.641.1743 | rdunlevey@taftlaw.com

Subcontractors Trade Association (STA)
Brian P. Craig
516.764.2800 | bpcraig@goldbergconnolly.com