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WKU gets chapter for builders, contractors group

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Feb 19, 2021

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At a time when construction jobs continue to grow in the Bowling Green area, a new student chapter of the Associated Builders and Contractors organization could lead to more opportunities for students studying engineering and construction management and to a better pipeline for employees at local construction companies.

“It’s tough to find people (in construction) right now,” said Mike Murphy, CEO of The Murphy Construction Group and a longtime ABC member. “We intend to capitalize on this (WKU student chapter). It will be good for us and for the students.”

Murphy said this month’s creation of the WKU student chapter was driven by the students.

“These students reached out to us,” Murphy said. “They wanted to compete in a national construction management student competition. They found out that the national ABC had such a thing, so they contacted the local ABC chapter.

“I’m impressed that they took the initiative. It’s really embarrassing that we as contractors hadn’t already initiated it.”

Cameron Blevins, a WKU senior studying construction management, is serving as the newly formed ABC student chapter’s president. He said WKU had an Associated General Contractors Club, but he and other students saw a need to form an ABC chapter.

“In order to be in the ABC’s construction management competition, we had to start an ABC chapter,” said Blevins, a Columbia, Tenn., native.

Blevins said a team of four students from WKU’s new ABC chapter has already entered the competition that will be judged by contractors.

“We’re currently involved in the ABC Construction Management Competition,” Blevins said. “You’re basically a general contractor trying to win a bid. We’re doing estimates and scheduling for an 18-story building.”

Although it was only formed recently, the WKU chapter of ABC already has 23 members, Blevins said. He expects it to grow.

“The construction management major is fairly new,” he said. “But I’ve seen it grow exponentially since I’ve been in the program. Word is getting out.”

Blevins expects the ABC chapter to eventually be opened up to students studying the construction-related fields of architecture and engineering.

With commercial and residential construction activity in the Bowling Green area hovering near record levels even during the coronavirus pandemic, Blevins believes membership in the ABC chapter could be beneficial.

“It (the ABC chapter) is a great way for us to network and have contractors speak about what the career opportunities are,” said Blevins, who already has a job lined up with a Nashville-area construction company. “There’s a need for young students to start getting into that field.”

Murphy agrees. He said his company already has 27 WKU graduates on staff, but he believes that number can grow with the help of a strong ABC chapter.

“Local contractors and engineering firms do a lot of internships with WKU students,” said Murphy, a WKU graduate in civil engineering. “That will continue, and this (ABC chapter) will improve that.”

Murphy said so-called “baby boomers” like himself are nearing retirement age and will soon need to be replaced by young adults interested in the construction field.

“We need young people to take responsibility and move into these positions,” he said.

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