



The Contractors Assistance Association

Vital for Cleveland and Community

The Construction Industry has never been for the faint of heart.

This remains true even though the industry is far removed from the days of strong backs, bulging muscles, and rough hands. Today, whether you are a worker in the field or a manager in the front office, the requirements for success are likely to include being tech savvy, team-oriented, and a skilled communicator.

In addition to these basis qualities and subject matter expertise, to climb the rungs to management and ownership, you also need skills in prudent risk assessment and management, problem solving, relationship management, and the fortitude to be judged on the bottom line. Naturally, since this is true for laborers, tradespeople, managers, engineers, architects, contractors and other industry professionals, it applies in spades for people of color and women.

This is why an organization of black contractors first formed in Cleveland fifty years ago. Its membership comprised several storied names in Cleveland's minority construction history, including Ware Plumbing, Dunham Brothers Construction, Seawright Construction, Burks Electric, Ozanne Construction and others. While few of those companies or their corporate descendants are around today, they paved the way for their successors, who united just over a decade ago to form the Contractors Assistance Association (CAA).

Today, there are more than a score of substantial minority contractors active in CAA with a mission to strengthen contracting, education and employment opportunities among people of color and women in construction. CAA operates as an affiliate of the Construction Employers Association [CEA], a group of the largest builders in NE Ohio. The relationship greatly enhances the diversity, inclusion and programming work of both organizations.

The construction industry is core to the well-being of our local economy. It is especially vital to Cleveland area minority communities for several reasons. Construction generally has fewer barriers to entry on almost every level. If you have the necessary skills, there is a place for you. Construction is one of the largest industries around. It is estimated that more minorities are involved in some facet of construction than in any other single local industry.





Also, demographic and other changes are creating more opportunities in construction than ever before. Industry and societal needs have converged and new horizons for construction careers are beckoning diverse contractors.

CAA and CEA have several initiatives that support its members. Among them are a Mentor-Protégé / Capacity Building Program in alignment with a business coach, access to CEA educational offerings, mentor from larger local construction management and general contractor firms to access larger and more complex projects and learn to manage them. Dominic Ozanne, was instrumental in the redevelopment of CAA and the Construction Management Academy Program, designed to promote diversity in the construction professional workforce by exposing minorities and young women to the industry as they start to contemplate life-long career decisions. This important effort placed and nurtured several young trainees in the front office of large national contractors. CMAP eventually aligned as a core component of the ACE Mentor Cleveland program, which itself is part of a larger, successful national program.

CAA and CEA collaborate with local trade unions, government agencies, and local organizations — including Tri-C, the Urban League, El Barrio, Spanish American Committee, and National Association of Women in Construction — to enhance employment opportunities for area residents and increase diversity in the construction workforce.

In recent years CAA members work on projects their forebears could only have dreamed about. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals and other sizable projects have all enjoyed unprecedented participation by minority companies.

As CAA members continue to build capacity, there is every reason to expect the number of thriving area minority contractors will continue to grow.

