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Why Charlotte's booming construction industry appeals to young talent

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Charlotte is the fifth-fastest growing metropolitan area in the country and the U.S. Census Bureau reports that nearly 850 new people move to the area every week, on average. This population surge has led to new construction projects across all sectors – office, retail, hotel and housing. In fact, a 2019 report by the nonprofit Charlotte Center City Partners said that in 2019, projects valued at \$1.7 billion were under construction in Center City alone.

Job opportunities available in Charlotte's construction industry are so enticing, people are relocating from other states to fill some of the demand. "We're seeing people move here from other markets because Charlotte has a reputation of being a great place to work and live – and we have a robust market for the construction industry," said Gary Creed, chief operating officer at Edifice. "A lot of recruiting companies are spreading the word about how great the Charlotte market is because they know they can get their construction clients placed."



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Although the fact that Charlotte is a hot market is a major draw for young talent, it's not the only reason candidates are drawn to the construction industry in the area. Job candidates also find value in the diversity of the work, its tangible results, a certain degree of work/life balance, and the possibility of achieving career success in a growth industry, according to Creed.

Diverse career paths

From general contractors to subcontractors to craftsmen, employment opportunities in Charlotte's construction industry are booming. For general contractors, the most in-demand jobs are project managers, the people handling project finances, contracts and schedules; project superintendents, those who coordinate the work onsite; and pre-construction managers or estimators.

For subcontractors, opportunities exist for all the trades, particularly mechanical, electrical, pipefitting, welding and plumbing. "There's a demand for labor across the board," said Creed. "But the more skilled the craftsman level, the higher the demand because it takes longer to learn those skills."

Work/life balance

"The number-one factor for people looking for employment in the construction industry is company culture – work/life balance, flexibility, opportunities for growth, diversity of projects," said Creed.

Robby Hale, an assistant project manager at Edifice, put it this way: "It is key for me to work for a company that allows me to set my career goals while offering a clear path to reaching those goals. A learning environment that promotes opportunities for growth, celebrates my successes, and clearly understands the significance of work/life balance, is a top priority."

In the past, the construction industry was known for its long hours. People could be working onsite from daylight to dark six days a week. But that trend has changed. Even though, when the weather is good, workers can be onsite 50-60 hours a week, contractors are striving to provide their employees with a better work/life balance. "There are a lot of hours in the field, so we strive to make sure our employees don't work too many hours and burn out, said Creed." It's important that our employees don't miss quality time with their families."

While people who work in the office can easily work from home, it can be more challenging to give workers onsite that same flexibility. “We try to have a floating superintendent who can cover various sites,” said Kyle Hanrahan, vice president of operations and construction manager at Edifice. “We also monitor if our superintendents are working every weekend or over 50 hours a week. If so, we provide help with our added superintendent capacity. We may have a project manager who can take on more load, as opposed to having everybody over capacity. This helps our people achieve a better work/life balance.”

Growth opportunities

With the abundance of construction projects in the Charlotte area, there are ample opportunities for employee growth. One option for employees is to move up the position ladder. On the administrative side, an employee may start as an engineer and advance to assistant project manager, project manager, construction manager and, eventually, vice president of operations.

Others prefer to stay in the same position but work on increasingly larger and more complex projects. “A superintendent’s first project with us may have been \$200,000 and, down the line, they’re working on a \$100 million project and controlling a staff of 10 on their project site,” said Creed. “Their role may be the same, but their projects are bigger and more complex and they’re managing more people.”

Visible results

The opportunity to create something tangible draws people to the construction industry. “You’re building something substantial,” said Hanrahan. “At the end of the day, you can drive around Charlotte and see all the buildings you helped create.”

Hale agrees, “In this industry, we’re able to see the results of our work literally build up right in front of us.”

“It’s a tangible, rewarding occupation,” said Creed. “You can look at something on paper and, within 12 to 24 months, have something that is physically there because of your efforts. And it could be there for another 50 years or more.”

With no slowdown in sight, the future looks bright for talent in the construction industry.

Integrity. Quality. Family: These are the top three reasons cited by our employees when asked why they choose to work for Edifice. Learn more.

Edifice is a locally owned and privately held general contractor headquartered in Charlotte. In business since 1978, Edifice has contributed to projects ranging from complex multi-faceted structures to interior renovations. Edifice is one of the leading commercial contractors in the Southeast and is listed as an Engineering News-Record top 400 U.S. general contractor.