**AN EXCEPTIONALLY PROUD MOMENT**

Mike Holland wrote the following "Letter from the Chair" for ABC Houston’s Build Houston magazine. Holland is the 2016 ABC Greater Houston Chair.

I write this message with great pride as I return from the ABC Workforce week in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. While the primary focus of the event is the National Craft Championships (more on that later), this conference also focused on national award winners at the annual Excellence in Construction gala, held on Wednesday, March 2nd. I witnessed an amazing parade of ABC Greater Houston contractor members walk across the grand stage to receive many of the national awards being presented. Some awards presented were for project excellence, and some were for safety excellence.

Given that the highlight of this Build Houston issue is safety, we can all be proud of our members’ excellence in this area. There was considerable emphasis on safety and the ABC STEP (Safety Training Evaluation Process) program throughout the conference, and ABC’s stated goal to increase the percentage of members who participate in this valued process. I highly encourage all ABC Greater Houston contractor members who are not currently STEP certified to check out this program. The data coming back from national clearly indicates that STEP participants perform well above the BLS average for contractors, and in the case of Platinum and Diamond STEP level contractors, the performance improvement is significant.
This week’s conference was my first opportunity to attend the national craft championships, and what an experience it was! It was an exciting and special moment to see the 218 craft competitors marching into the ballroom to a continuously applauding audience. I can assure you those 218 men and women definitely thought they were in the right industry and career path at that moment.

Again, the ABC Greater Houston chapter was well represented, both by competitors, and by volunteers, whose service on behalf of aspiring construction craft professionals is admirable, and reflects our chapter’s strong commitment to workforce development. ABC Greater Houston member firms who sent craft competitors included Performance Contractors, Jacobs, KBR, and S&B Engineers & Constructors. Two students from the Houston chapter won Medals in their respective fields. The Medal winners included Jose Morua (Jacobs) who won Silver for Structural Welding; and Michael Noschese (Performance Contractors) who won Gold for Structural Welding. Volunteers who made their way out to the competition included Warren Adamson, S&B Engineers & Constructors, Ltd.; Heath Culbertson, KBR; Francis Hernandez, Jacobs; Sal Mellado, Performance Contractors, Inc.; Natalie Smith, KBR; Mike Stilley, S&B Engineers & Constructors, Ltd.; and Matt Villere, Performance Contractors, Inc.

In addition to the outstanding craft competition, there were many other educational sessions for the benefit of ABC member attendees. I left the conference having reinforced the knowledge that ABC member companies, and their people, are the finest in the construction industry. Next spring, you need to make the ABC Workforce Week one of your priorities to attend. You will never forget it, and you might just return to your company and our chapter a more informed, motivated, and committed workforce champion - one who is ready to move the ball for future craft professionals.