

A Solid Future Being Built

Construction Industry Keeps Up Pace, Work Remains Steady

By JACK CRISS

While losing veteran employees to retirement and still facing difficulty in recruiting new talent, Delta contractors and their suppliers and partners are still forecasting a steady and positive 2025 in their industry.

February was Career and Technical Education Month, and national organizations such as the National Center for Construction Education and

Research (NCCER), have been working with contractors throughout the country, including Mississippi, to help jumpstart careers for young workers and help the industry find new talent.

Work-based learning opportunities in high school and articulation to postsecondary programs, including registered apprenticeships, are important components of NCCER's high-quality CTE program of study. Our accredited





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network of more than 2,200 postsecondary schools provides learners with many options to build on their construction education from high school. We also accredit nearly 1,000 contractors around the country actively looking to enhance their teams with the next generation of construction professionals.

“We are a mid-size family-owned business,” says Ashley Tillman, Head of

Recruitment and Marketing for RC Construction Company in Greenwood. “Our President and owners, John Powers and his wife, Toni Powers, reside in Greenwood where our home office is located on Park Avenue. Housed in our home office is the RC Accounting, Human Resources, and Legal Team. Our Preconstruction Team is located in our Southaven, Ms office next to our current

ongoing project at the Memphis Airport. If you take a flight out of Memphis to our other ongoing projects you will find yourself in North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Wisconsin, and South Dakota, states where we currently have work ongoing. 2025 is off to a great start for RC Construction and we are looking forward to seeing what else the year has in store for us as a company.”

Since 1986, RC Construction Co., Inc. has successfully delivered horizontal and vertical construction projects of various size and complexity throughout the Southeast. “We are known for maintaining strict budget and quality standards while executing aggressive, fast-tracked project



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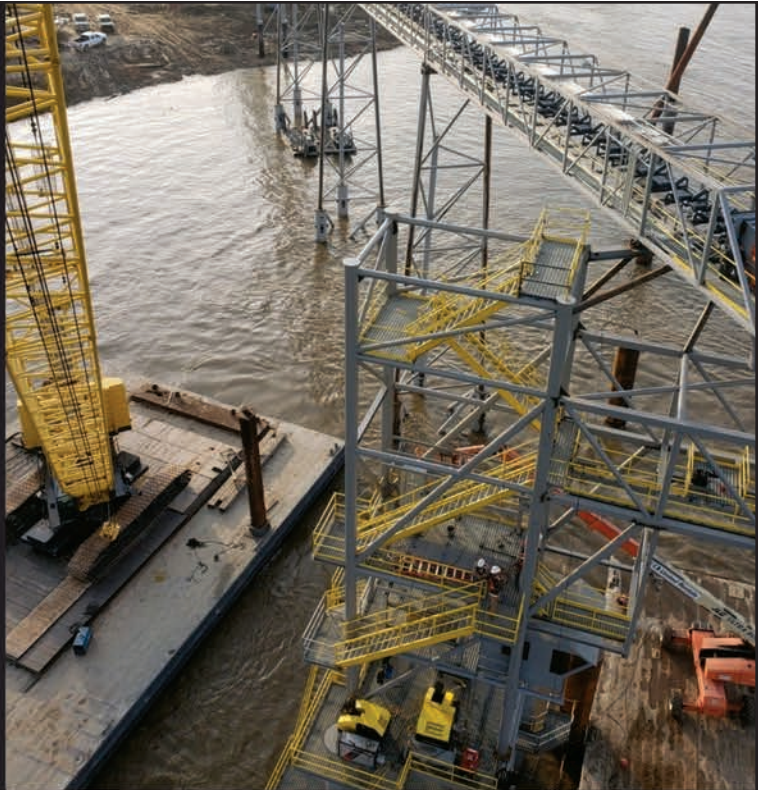
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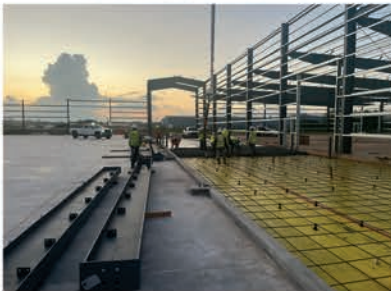
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Munn



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schedules,” says Tillman.

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“Besides our office in Greenwood, we also have offices in Fayetteville, NC; and Southaven, MS,,” says Tillman. “Our most valuable assets are our employees, many of whom have worked with the company since the first day of operation. Our personnel possess over 40 years’ experience and expertise in heavy civil horizontal construction, executing several million square yards of airfield pavements, including underground utilities (drainage, water, and fuel distribution) and airfield electrical installations.”

Tillman says RC provides complete design-build and installation services for all categories and customer needs on a vast majority of its construction projects. By overseeing projects from start to finish, our design-build approach is intended to improve the effectiveness of the final construction documents. “With our expertise in design and construction, advantages include faster delivery, reduced risk, cost savings, and an overall better-quality product,” she says.

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Solop



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size and complexity throughout the Southeast. “We are known for maintaining strict budget and quality standards while executing aggressive, fast-tracked project schedules,” says Tillman.

George Malouf, Jr., P.E., Preconstruction Manager for Malouf Construction says of the new year, “We’re optimistic that the recent trends we’ve seen will continue or even improve. There is a lot of support for infrastructure improvement across the board right now. And that can only be a positive thing for our private customers as well.

“We are a family-owned business, which I believe has helped our long-term vision for the company and our ability be flexible in a fluctuating market. More than anything, I like to think that it helps build trust and relationships, both within our organization and with our partners,” says Malouf.

As far as worker shortages, Malouf says, “We need to hire folks to keep up with our growth and we’re working to make that happen. Our biggest focus on that front is employee engagement and making Malouf Construction a great place to work. When you couple that with training and opportunities for career growth, we believe the hiring issues will resolve themselves.”

Lloyd Munn, Executive Director of the Association of General Contractors of Mississippi (AGC of MS) in Jackson, says that he wants the statewide organization to have a stronger presence in the Delta and is planning on hosting an event soon in the region in order to meet possible new members and interested parties of all professions that work with contractors.

“Our organization represents the industry on both a national and state level, dealing with legislative issues and our representatives and are watching about half a dozen bills right now” says Munn. “That’s

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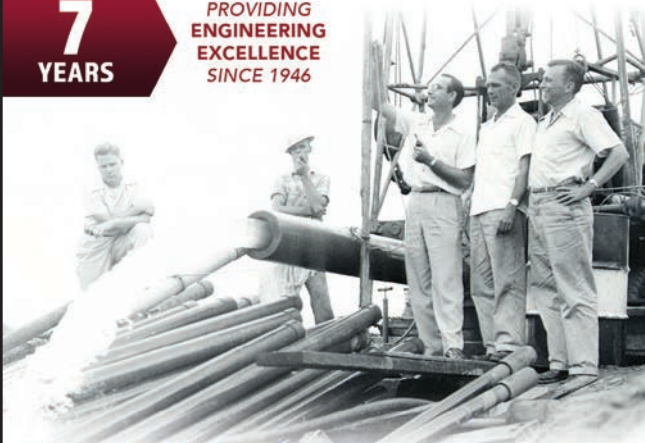
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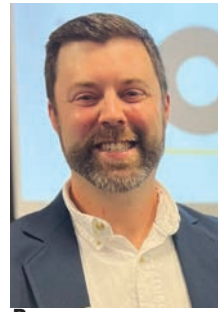
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year for the company.”

Collins, along with others interviewed, says that the tariff “wars” now taking place or about to gear up, are not effecting the construction



Bean

industry at all. “All of the federal contract work that had federal money attached to it has a ‘Buy American’ act or clause anyway, so there should not be any repercussions from what happens on a federal level to our industry. I see no price increases on material due to tariffs,” he says.

Contrary to others, Collins says that Roy Collins Construction is actually in good shape when it comes to having a full workforce.

“Yes, the attrition problem exists due to retirement, but our company has done a good job in bringing up our young workers and having them ready to assume leadership roles as others step down,” says Collins. “The key for us, and I think for

why it’s important that we have as many members as we can get—there is strength in numbers. The louder our voice, the better and our industry needs to be heard. We have all skin in the game and need to protect our livelihoods which, in turn, helps our fellow citizens. We want to represent all of our contractors throughout Mississippi, including the great companies in the Delta which I think have been underserved.”

Chris Collins, with Roy Collins Construction in Cleveland, says that 2024 was an average year for his company. “It was fine, but I do think that the outlook for this new year will be better for us,” admits Collins. “We have a good many warehouse and manufacturing company expansion projects that are in the pipeline and, if they materialize as we think they will, then 2025 should be a much better



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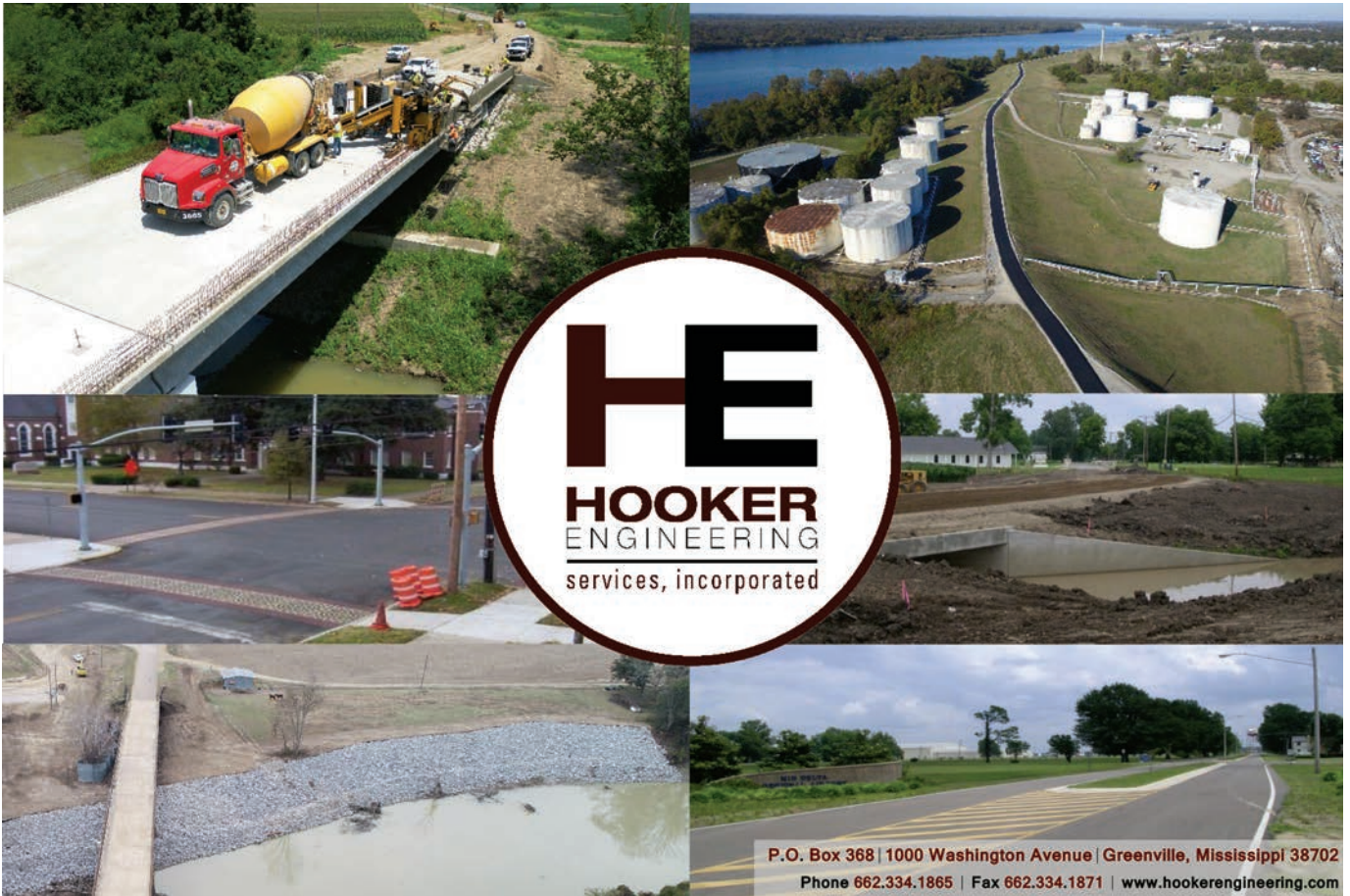
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other contractors, is offering apprenticeships and trying to train these young folks as leaders. Right now, though, all of our positions are filled and we're fortunate."

Collins does note, with some concern, the increasing use of Artificial Intelligence

in the construction field. "We're seeing more AI in estimating programs and more automation in the field than ever before," he says. "I'm interested to see where this goes over the next ten years—it will probably be transformative. That said, I'm not sure how I feel about it: will the people

involved, like the project manager, know enough about the projects they're charged to work on or will they rely on technology?"

Christopher Solop, a member with Biggs, Ingram & Solop, PLLC in Ridgeland, leads the firm's Construction Litigation and Government Contracts section. "One of the biggest concerns I'm hearing from our construction business clients is simply getting paid on a timely basis," he says. "Overall, the industry has done a good job with ensuring timely payment on state projects, but private payment continues to be an issue. Fortunately, contractors and subcontractors now have lien right, which provides them with some leverage to get paid."

One other thing that Solop emphasized is that contractors, subcontractors and suppliers must make sure to thoroughly review contract documents in advance of signing. It is important to make sure what the payment terms are and what remedies are available if payment is not received in a timely manner.

"Even having the right to stop work on a project for non-payment, the Prompt Payment statute does give a contractor and



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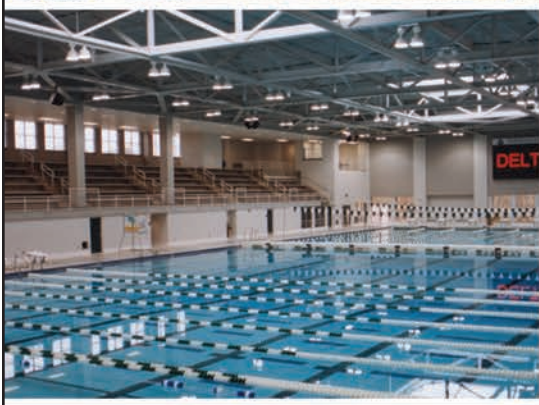
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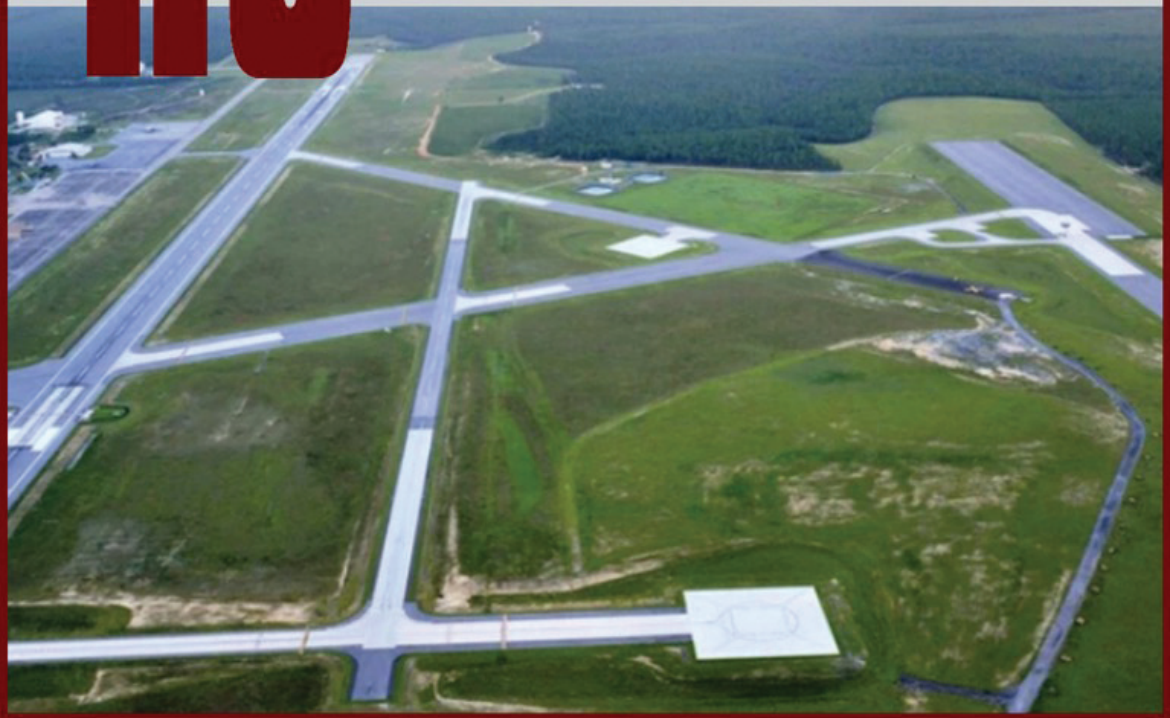
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subcontractor some relief,” says Solop. “However, when you’re not being paid on a project and just receiving interest, it’s just not enough for a business. This applies to both the prime and the sub-prime contractors. Moreover, fighting to get what little interest on a late payment is frequently not cost-effective.”

An attorney needs to review all contracts any construction company makes in advance to insure satisfactory remedies are in place for non-payment.

“If not, they could end up financing the whole project themselves,” says Solop. He

adds that while the problem is not rampant in Mississippi it does still occur frequently and needs to be headed off at the pass.

Phillip Davis, Executive Vice President of Codaray Construction based in Ridgeland, does work statewide including in Oxford, on the Mississippi State campus and pursuing jobs in Vicksburg for 2025. “We’ve done work in the Delta in the past and look forward to doing more in 2025,” says Davis. “We’re actively looking at some activity in the region.”

Davis says that, so far, the private sector is more bullish this year and his company

is seeing more work in that arena. “Of course, we also do a lot of public work and have been concerned about a few jobs that hit pause, so there’s been a little uncertainty due to the federal freeze that has taken effect,” he says. “It’s too early to tell whether the tariff issue will hit the industry hard, or at all. I do not that recent inflation certainly didn’t slow down the construction industry very much at all.”

Founded in 2017 and with a second office in Hattiesburg, Davis says when all is said and done in his industry, work comes down to having good relationships with clients,

“That might sound simplistic, but it’s true,” he says. “And I know every other construction executive would agree with me. All of the jobs we’re currently working on are due to relationships we’ve established over the years and that’s a critical and crucial part of our business. And we expect 2025 will be strong but that 2026 will be even better based on our projections.”

Brent Bean, President of Build Mississippi, with offices in Pearl, Jackson and the Gulf Coast, says his organization’s mission is to grow the construction

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industry statewide and to train workers once they enter the field.

“We also promote the industry as a whole on many different levels through the educational part of our mission,” says Bean, who has made many trips to the Delta to work and teach classes at Robinson Electric in Cleveland, for instance.

Build Mississippi is funded through the State Board of Contractors from yearly commercial contractors licensing fees, with no state tax dollars involved, says Bean.

Bean will be attending Robinson Electric’s first Apprenticeship Level 1

Ceremony scheduled for Wednesday, March 26th, in the company’s new training center. Other representatives from South Delta Planning, AccelerateMS and MDCC will be on hand, as well.

Headquartered in Inverness since 1976, David Smith of David Smith Construction says his company has been serving the Delta’s construction needs with projects throughout the region since that time. The family-owned businesses now include Smith and his two sons, Brady, who oversees Sunflower Lumber Company that was added to the construction business

umbrella in 1999, and Martin, who takes care of the construction duties. There is also a Starkville branch on the construction side.

“We have on our jobs, on any given day, between twenty and twenty-five employees,” says Martin. “We also have an offshoot company, Smith Dirt Construction, that employs three more and are looking to make additional hires.”

With projects also across the state beyond the Delta, David Smith Construction has also been actively involved in Rolling Fork working to help the town rebuild after 2023’s historic tornado destruction.

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