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2016 Legislature: Funding to train new generation of skilled workers in construction

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Cindy Bodine hears it every time she has a conversation with someone in her industry: There's a lot work to do, but not enough skilled construction workers to go around.

Central Florida's construction industry has seen a huge spike in work since the economy began its recovery a few years back. And it's expected to continue throughout the U.S., as strong consumer spending drives growth.

But the workforce is aging, and as baby boomers retire, there isn't a huge younger generation scrambling to take on those jobs being vacated.

"The demand is there and the industry is welcoming people, but we do not have enough skilled workers. That's the bottom line," said Bodine of Orlando-based McCree General Contractors & Architects, who is the 2016 chairwoman of the Associated Builders & Contractors Central Florida chapter. "There's more work than there are people to do it."

That workforce shortage is one of the most significant issues for the local construction industry as the Florida Legislature begins its regular session this year.

Though no bills have been filed as of yet directly dealing with this issue, Bodine said state lawmakers can best support the industry with this issue by continuing to fund apprenticeship and vocational training programs.



Cindy Bodine, McCree General Contractors & Architects

Central Florida reported \$6.1 billion worth of commercial and residential building permits pulled between January-November of 2015, according to Dodge Data & Analytics. That's up 42 percent from the \$4.3 billion reported in the same timeframe in 2014.

And even more is on tap for this year, as the population continues to grow and the region's \$60 billion tourism industry drives even more new development.

But as it is, general contractors and subcontractors in the region are having a tough time keeping up with the demand for skilled workers.

"We've had a skilled trade shortage problem for years, so we really are trying to get more younger workers into the industry," Bodine said. "Not everybody is college bound and we're doing a lot of different things to try to pique interest. Wages used to be a concern, but not anymore. Some skilled trades workers here at McCree make more money than some people with a college degree."

Here's a look at some of the construction-related bills that will be considered in this year's session:

HB 95/97 and SB 124/126: The Public Private Partnership Reform, filed by Rep. Greg Steube, R-Sarasota, and Sen. Greg Evers, R-Milton, is a follow-up to the public/private partnership bill passed in the 2013 regular session that called for the creation of a statewide task force to review the law, compare it to other states, and to report back to the Legislature with any recommendations for change. These bills would amend the current law with recommendations from the task force and address a need for a public records exemption as well as receipt of unsolicited proposals.

HB 181: The Public Works Projects filed by Reps. Charles Van Zant, R-Palatka, and John Tobia, R-Melbourne Beach, would prohibit state and political subdivisions that contract for public works projects from imposing restrictive conditions on certain contractors, subcontractors or material suppliers. It also would forbid the restriction of qualified bidders from submitting bids or being awarded contracts.

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