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Skilled trades need to reach the next generation

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When I think about the future of construction in Western New York, I don't just think about the buildings we'll construct, the infrastructure we'll improve, or how these projects will shape our communities. I think about the people who will make these things possible and the imprint our handiwork will leave for future generations.

For decades, the construction industry has been built by skilled workers who learned their craft through hands-on experience, mentorship, and time spent working outdoors in the field. I was fortunate to learn from that tradition while working for my family's construction company. I saw firsthand the pride that comes from building something that will outlast you, and I learned the importance of investing in



Carley Hill is the founder and owner of two local companies, CaHill Resources, a construction firm, and CAHill TECH, a workforce development company.

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the people who are willing to work those early shifts and find the creative solutions that make this industry successful.

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Today, I am driven by the understanding that our construction industry has evolved far beyond the work of the 1970s. Resources are limited, and population and workforce availability have become more complex. Across Western New York and throughout the country, the construction industry is facing a workforce shortage. Experienced workers are retiring, demand for skilled labor continues to grow, and employers need new ways to connect with young people and show them the opportunities available in the trades.

The question most often asked is how do we reach the next generation? The answer starts with meeting them where they are.

That realization led me to rethink how we introduce young people to careers in construction. They've grown up learning through technology, watching videos to develop new skills, using software to solve problems, and exploring their interests. But, technology can only take them so far. Getting into the trades requires seeing the work, trying it, learning from someone who has done it and, ultimately, having a clear pathway to a job and a sustainable career.

I've found that combining technology with hands-on training is a model that works. Using a digital platform built around field-based training meets young people where they already are: on their phones and on their own schedules, but also eager to see the real thing.

Instead of simply telling young people what construction work is like, showing them videos from actual job sites, featuring real machines and tools and the voices of people working in the industry, can bring the work to life in a much more meaningful way.

It gives someone who may have never stepped onto a job site a window into the work and a chance to explore whether it might be right for them.

Technology is an entry point, not an endpoint. The most effective workforce development happens when digital learning is paired with hands-on experience, mentorship, and connections to real opportunities.

That's where partnerships matter most, especially local ones that strengthen our community. The organizations we work with, the people willing to share what they've learned, and the opportunities we help young people discover can be the difference between simply learning about a career and actually finding a path into one.

Recently, CAHill TECH partnered with Laborers' Local 210, Workforce Buffalo, and Buffalo Public Schools to bring the aQuiRe Construction Academy pre-apprenticeship program to McKinley High School P-TECH graduates. These students earned college credits while in high school and faced a gap-semester between graduation and the start of their Alfred State College trades program.

Instead of waiting for the next step, they are using that time to get further into construction. By taking the opportunity to continue building their skills, earning certifications, and gaining hands-on experience, participants increase their odds to

succeed in technical college and in their vocational careers. This is what workforce development should look like: a community coming together to create a clear pathway from education to employment. Bridging the gap together.

The skilled trades offer tremendous opportunities for young people. They provide careers where individuals can earn competitive wages, develop specialized skills, and take pride in contributing to the growth of their communities. Construction is not just about building structures. It's about using creativity, skill, and ingenuity to build the future of our nation.

For employers, investing in the next generation of workers is not just a responsibility, it is an opportunity. Young people entering the workforce today bring curiosity, creativity, and a willingness to learn. Our job is to provide them with the tools, training, and support they need to succeed.

Western New York has always been an industrious region. We've built everything from neighborhoods and businesses to the roads and bridges that connect our communities. Even the amazing new Highmark Stadium, which I'm proud to have been a part of.

Now, we have the opportunity to build something equally important: the workforce that will carry our region forward.

The future of construction isn't just about the projects we complete tomorrow. It's about the people we empower today.

Carley Hill is the founder and owner of two local companies, CaHill Resources, a construction firm, and CAHill TECH, a workforce development company. She grew up learning the family construction business and now leads in an industry where women are still rare.