

BEST PRACTICES

FROM MILLEN, GEORGIA

BUILDING AMERICA, ONE COMMUNITY AT A TIME



INTRODUCTION

In order to build America, there must be a foundation of community. Together we are stronger.

The construction industry has the incredible opportunity to affect change in a community. When a large-scale construction project moves into an area, there are countless opportunities for impact far beyond the job site. We have seen firsthand the creative ways that construction industry organizations are leaving a community better than they found it. We would love to share those stories with you.

This series of Best Practices aims to inspire and empower you, as well as your organization, to make a difference in whichever communities your projects land. From education and career counseling, to community service and job-site mentoring, your workforce has the power to build a better future for our industry, for a city and for our country as a whole.

Join us as we explore the practical ways that contractors have partnered with their local community leaders to educate and help those in need.

“We all understand the what. It’s the how that sets you apart. How you do, what you do and why you do it.”

- Mittie Cannon

SECTIONS

01: The Story

02: Making Connections

03: Education Impact

04: On-Site and In the Community



THE STORY

In December of 2011, NBC's Dateline aired a documentary called, "The Town that Jobs Forgot." The manufacturing town of Millen, Georgia, was hit from all sides during the recession, leaving the area with an extraordinarily high unemployment rate. After factories closed or left town, the city struggled to keep their local economy from collapsing. The documentary followed the lives of three women in Millen as they looked for ways to sustain their families and their town.

In May of 2012, just five months later, CARBO announced it would be building a state-of-the-art ceramic proppant manufacturing plant in Millen. As bids were awarded for the construction of the plant, Mittie Cannon, director of workforce development for Robins & Morton, received a phone call from her vice president. He told her, "You need to go watch this Dateline documentary."

Mittie Cannon grew up in a small town just a little more than an hour outside Millen, so she immediately felt a connection to the residents and their struggles. Robins & Morton would be the lead contractor on the two-year construction of the new plant. Mittie set out to form a connection and offer sustainable resources for the community.

Each Robins & Morton team member had a role to play if they were truly going to make a positive impact in Millen. Mittie led the way by creating 90-day look-aheads for all workforce development and outreach events. The project manager, Bill McGuire, championed each project along the way and provided leadership for the field staff and craft professionals. Training Coordinator, Marjorie Sealy, was the consistent on-site connection to all educational activities.



Field Administration Manager, Debbie Gable, organized staff for community events and communicated details throughout the site.

NCCER and its Build Your Future initiative supported Robins & Morton through various events and during Careers in Construction Month. This joint effort created momentum, and what many are calling a tremendous success of not only workforce development, but true rebuilding in the heart of America.

"I appreciate how the leadership of Robins & Morton can see it's not just about training the future workforce, it is about building relationships and building sustainability in the community."

- Mittie Cannon

MAKING CONNECTIONS

When Mittie and the team from Robins & Morton first made their plans to visit Millen, their goal was to identify key members in the community. Creating an environment of trust among these leaders was a top priority, as well as gathering leaders from many different community areas.

FIRST MEETING

Mittie and the project manager met with representatives from the Jenkins County School System, which included the superintendent and head of curriculum design. Some questions Mittie asked during the meeting included:

- Can you tell us about your education system?
- What are your goals?
- If you had a wish list for your schools, what would be on it?

After the first meeting, Mittie made a point to keep a dialogue going with the leaders she met, and held a second meeting to discuss planning a community event.

Before her second meeting, Mittie also reached out to industry partners (contractors, subcontractors and construction industry organizations) to gather their support. She asked for each organization to make a contribution to the educational aspects of community outreach in Millen.

SECOND MEETING

Mittie invited community leaders from organizations such as:

- Chamber of Commerce
- Rotary
- City Council
- City Permitting
- Churches and Faith-based Programs
- Veterans Association
- Family Enrichment Organizations

It was during this meeting that the group decided that a “Back to School Bash” would be the right way to open the hearts of the community and provide support for students and schools.

“The greatest ship of all is relationship.”

- Mittie Cannon

TIPS FROM THE FIELD

1. Expect the community to be wary of your offers to help - they will be protective of their home.
2. Involve your project manager early on so he understands the needs of the community and can connect them to the job site.
3. Don't leave any part of the community untouched. Systematically include everybody.
4. Support current programs in the community instead of reinventing the wheel.



EDUCATION IMPACT

In order to show support for the educational system in Millen, Mittie and her team focused on finding specific needs for the schools, teachers, students and parents. There was a clear intention to meet needs and create sustainable growth, rather than imposing outside ideas that would disappear when the project was completed.

BACK TO SCHOOL BASH

The first event that Robins & Morton helped bring together, was a back to school event, open to students and parents. Build Your Future also supported this event and helped provide each student with clear backpacks, which are mandatory to attend school. The community was incredibly grateful for the donation, and one teacher mentioned that no company had ever made such an impact.

CAREERS IN CONSTRUCTION MONTH

To celebrate Careers in Construction Month, NCCER and Build Your Future joined Robins & Morton to hold a big event for students to learn about opportunities in the construction industry. Activities for the event included:

- Essay Contest
- Art Contest
- Math Competition
- Classroom Guest Speakers
- Outdoor Career Parade

Activities were geared toward specific age groups. Students were able to see real construction equipment and meet construction craft professionals who were working in their town.

HIGH SCHOOL WELDING CLASS

The Robins & Morton project manager took special interest in the welding class at Jenkins County High School. The supplies and equipment were outdated and insufficient. Robins & Morton gathered new equipment and supplies from industry partners to donate to the welding program. NCCER also donated welding education resources and textbooks.



EDUCATION IMPACT

BACK TO SCHOOL DRIVE

Robins and Morton's on-site staff at the CARBO project held a school supply drive in the summer of 2013. Mittie provided the site administrator with a list of needed school supplies from her contacts at the school board. The site managers then encouraged the craft professionals and employees to bring in supplies from the list, or to donate gift cards. The supplies and gift cards were then given to the school administration with no announcement to the community or parents. When a student arrives without supplies, the school will have an extra supply to draw from so that teachers and administrators do not need to purchase these items with their own funds. Mittie also created this strategy with a sustainable purpose - if the supplies were given to each child with great fanfare, then parents would expect supplies to be handed out each year. After the drive was over and the school year began, a media release about the donation was sent out.

OPEN HOUSE

At the start of the 2014 school year, Robins & Morton volunteered at the Jenkins High School open house. They were assigned as greeters, simply welcoming the students to school and pointing them in the right direction for further information. Mittie chose this event to show support for the school and community, rather than promoting Robins & Morton or the construction industry. Volunteers wore company shirts, but no other promotion took place.

3 THINGS IMPORTANT TO EVERY COMMUNITY:

1. Education
2. Local Economy
3. Jobs

TIPS FROM THE FIELD

1. Use the momentum of national campaigns for local events.
2. Use craft professional expertise to share with teachers and students.
3. Find out specific needs in local schools.

ON-SITE AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Mittie and the Robins & Morton team knew that at the core of each community outreach, there needed to be champions; employees and craft professionals who were passionate about helping the people of Millen. To ensure that their connection to the community ran deep on the job site Mittie engaged her senior-level site management early on, and found ways for them to use their interests in meaningful ways. The senior superintendent and other managers quickly found their niche and made each project their own, rather than simply following a top-down mandate from the corporate office.

TIPS FROM THE FIELD

1. Create a 10-day outlook for every community project.
2. Assign specific tasks to each volunteer so everyone has a clear role.
3. Look for community projects that need heavy equipment, like cleaning up a local park.
4. Ask site management to recognize employee volunteers at staff meetings.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH COMMITTEE

To organize the site staff, a community outreach committee was formed with 20-30 employees who rotated in and out. This committee helped plan events, distribute information and encouraged their co-workers to get involved. They also took the lead volunteer positions for each event. Outreach volunteers from the job site were able to volunteer their company time and were paid for their service hours. This strategy removed any excuses and proved to be a successful incentive.

SITE COMMUNICATION

On a large industrial job site, communication can be complicated. In order to make sure everyone was connected to current outreach projects, Mittie planned a communication board at the job site trailer with pertinent event details and photos of past outreach involvement. The board became a sense of pride for the craft professionals involved in each event. Mittie also used the Robins & Morton website to communicate information about upcoming outreach projects and needs.

HOLIDAY SEASON

When the holiday season arrived, Robins & Morton and CARBO partnered with the Jenkins County Family Enrichment Center to donate and deliver a collection of canned goods and turkeys to 100 needy families in Millen for Thanksgiving. A few weeks later, Robins & Morton employees “adopted” 10 Millen families and donated money and other gifts for Christmas. Robins & Morton also partnered with the Millen Chamber of Commerce to host the annual Christmas in Millen celebration, which organizers reported was the most well-attended in the event’s history. These outreach efforts not only provided the Millen community with much-needed material benefits, but they also offered residents a renewed sense of optimism.

HIRE AND MENTOR

A key strategy in involving the local community was quite obvious due to the extreme unemployment rate; hire local craft professionals. Robins & Morton used their relationships in the community to hire as many local employees as possible. Each new local hire was then assigned a mentor who could assist them in learning company procedures and provide on-the-job training for their craft. Many local employees were also taught about the industrial construction industry as a whole, and the need for travelling skilled craft professionals.

CONTACT US

For more information about how you can become involved in the community near your job site and how you can help build America, please contact NCCER and BYF. We are happy to speak with you.

Email: marketing@nccer.org

Phone: 888.622.3720

If you are planning an event for Careers in Construction Month, please visit byf.org

