

Cleveland mechanical contractor Lonnie Coleman sees new jobs in push to increase energy efficiency

Posted by [kkroll](#) September 02, 2009 15:31PM



Lonnie Coleman

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- A Cleveland mechanical contractor who has made some of the area's most prominent structures comfortable year round foresees an economic boom and new jobs as the nation embraces greener climate-control systems in buildings.

Lonzo "Lonnie" Coleman, president of Coleman Spohn Corp., said his role as president of the Mechanical Contractors Association of America has been "an eye opener." He said he now realizes that "President Obama's promise to increase energy efficiency in buildings will mean a great deal for our whole economy and our industry."

Coleman took the job as head of the Washington-area trade organization in March. As he began visiting the group's 82 chapters around the United States, he realized that "hundreds of thousands of new jobs can grow out of the president's stimulant program" aimed at making government and other U.S. buildings greener.

By replacing old heating units, air-conditioning systems and other generations-old climate-control equipment with new systems that achieve better results using less energy, "we'll be making buildings greener," he said. "We also will create lots of new jobs and work for plumbers, pipe fitters and welders."

For one thing, Coleman said, some 35 percent to 40 percent of the pipe fitters and plumbers who work in mechanical contracting "are baby boomers, people who have worked hard and moved up in this business but now are getting close to retirement age." As they leave their careers, contractors like Coleman Spohn are putting out the welcome mat for trained younger workers, including recent armed forces veterans and high school and trade school graduates looking for solid, good-paying jobs.

Some of the stimulus money the government has set aside for the industry will go to training programs, Coleman said. He mentioned two that focus specifically on helping military veterans get fast-track training in trades that will prepare them for careers. "Thirty-five percent of 350,000 workers, that's a lot of jobs," Coleman said.

Openings for management jobs with contracting companies will increase dramatically, too. The MCAA has established 50 student chapters at colleges and universities around the country that prepare business students and engineers for careers in mechanical contracting.

"We provide internships for these students so they can get a sense of what these management jobs are all about," Coleman said of the trade group.

In fact, Coleman Spohn, which designed and installed mechanical systems for Progressive Field, Quicken Loans Arena and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, as well as buildings at University Hospitals and the Cleveland Clinic, just hired two former management interns. One came from Tuskegee University in Alabama, the other from Kent State University.

Coleman said his company, with 65 workers in the field and 17 office staffers, will continue bidding on jobs to retrofit older buildings with new climate technology and expects employment to grow.

Coleman is the first minority MCAA member in the group's 118-year history to become president. His term ends in March.