

**IT CAN BE A STRUGGLE FOR SMALL CONTRACTORS TO KEEP EMPLOYEES FROM GETTING POACHED WHEN LARGER PROJECTS PROMISE HIGHER WAGES.**

With trillions of dollars in new work coming online this year, smaller construction companies — already struggling to retain workers during a historic shortage — now face the challenge of competing with big projects that come to town with a lot to offer workers.

This year, the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the CHIPS and Science Act, which allocates \$39 billion to build and expand semiconductor manufacturing plants, will create thousands of new construction jobs — on top of what Ken Simonson, chief economist for Associated General Contractors of America, called “an unusually large concentration of really large projects right now.”

“A remarkable number of multibillion-dollar projects are showing up in many states,” Simonson said. “In many cases, the owners of these projects, while not insensitive to cost, may

When projects compete for the top available labor, “it gets messy,” said Portland, Oregon-based Eric Grasberger,

Rives.

“In order to compete, the contractors on those jobs have to

not going to get the labor unless you authorize an increase in the hourly wages, the per diem, or both — or perhaps other

everything from hot meals and heated bathrooms on jobsites to paid volunteer and educational opportunities that may even

value, which is beyond just the dollar.”

### **FREE LUNCH, WELLNESS CENTERS**

In central Ohio, megaprojects are becoming the norm rather than the exception — a \$20 billion semiconductor manufacturing plant for Intel, a \$4.4 billion electric vehicle battery plant for Honda, data centers for Google and Amazon, and a biomanufacturing plant for Amgen are just a few.

have the potential to make as much as \$135,000 per year, said Dorsey Hager, executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbus/Central Ohio Building & Construction Trades Council.

Throwing more money at workers to keep up with megaproject salaries is not an option for many local contractors, but Dorsey

are offering amenities such as free breakfast and lunch, onsite wellness centers, heated restrooms and changing areas, and convenient paved parking, he said.

Sizemore said tradesworkers used to ask just three questions when considering a job: how much it paid per hour, how many hours they would work, and what the per diem was.

new people coming into the industry who are looking for opportunities to go to work for contractors that have a long-term value proposition that meets their needs — things like paid time off, maternity and paternity leave.”

Younger generations of workers are asking more questions about company culture, what types of projects they would be working on, and even safety protocols, said Keyan Zandy, CEO of Skiles Group, a mid-size general contractor in Dallas.

In his market, Zandy is facing competition from a host of massive industrial, infrastructure, and residential projects such as a \$3 billion 112-acre mixed-use development that recently broke ground near Dallas. The Mix — which will include 375,000 square feet of retail, a 200-room boutique hotel, and a 400-room business hotel — will be under construction through 2026.

Skiles Group makes a concerted effort to align workers with activities, whether volunteer programs or company picnics, Zandy said.



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