

INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES

Staying Ahead of the Curve

From boiler room to board room, MCAA president Robert Beck says working together in today's changing landscape is key to moving the industry forward.

[John Mesenbrink](#)

As a former business development manager for Lochinvar, his foray early in the industry taught him how important industry relationships are regarding opportunity and success. For **Robert Beck**, current President of MCAA, and President and CEO for John W. Danforth since 2018, business development and project management became his forte. From project clerk in a jobsite trailer to president and CEO, Beck's journey is a clear testament that this industry can make dreams come true with hard work and determination. CONTRACTOR recently talked with Beck about his path to the trades and his tenure as MCAA president.

CONTRACTOR: After working with Lochinvar, what was next in your professional journey?

BECK: John W. Danforth Company hired me early in 1993. *[John W. Danforth was CONTRACTOR's Contractor of the Year in 2021 - Ed.]* My career at Danforth started in a jobsite trailer as project clerk. My next phase was in business development followed by move back to operational side of business. After developing and advancing in project management, I was appointed to oversee company operations. The executive phase started as a vice president followed by president, and currently CEO since 2018.



Robert Beck.

CONTRACTOR: At what point did you get involved with MCAA? What were the benefits that attracted you to the MCAA? And, what are some of your past duties with MCAA?

BECK: I first got involved with MCAA in the 1990s when I attended the Institute for Project Management. The caliber of the industry-specific class content, the faculty and instructors, and especially the talent of my fellow students, was extraordinary. They were all rock stars to me. I realized very quickly these were

people I wanted get to know. Getting involved with MCAA and building a network of industry leaders as peers was essential to our company success and my professional development.

MCAA appointed me to the Project Manager's Education Committee (PMEC) in 2005 and I was chair for many years. The PMEC is a perfect example of how the MCAA thrives as a member-driven organization. This committee consists of amazing member volunteers who have created a world-class mechanical contracting specific curriculum that ranks second to none. The PMEC acts as program advisors, faculty and instructors.

After various other appointments, assignments and committee positions, I was appointed to the MCAA National Board in 2015, and I was privileged enough to be voted to the Executive Committee in 2019.

CONTRACOR: The MCAA is a storied and venerable association. What does it mean to you to be the next president?

BECK: It is both humbling and an incredible honor to serve as President of MCAA. To follow the past presidents as an ambassador of this great organization is a privilege I take very seriously. The foundation and principles of this organization were built by those amazing people who served by leading this organization with vision, strength and integrity. My focus remains the same as when I first became a committee member back in 2005—build upon the momentum those before me have created. It will be our mission to continue the journey and tradition of providing the highest value to our MCAA membership and industry.

CONTRACTOR: We are three years removed from the pandemic. What are some of the major issues facing contractors today, and is some of it a result of COVID residue?

BECK: Our major issue as mechanical contractors largely remain the same on surface but continue to evolve as our industry environment and challenges evolve. The pandemic reinforced our need to anticipate, identify, manage and mitigate risk at all levels. Risk is not only project or contract related, but also relevant from a technology, market and people perspective.

CONTRACTOR: What are some of your top initiatives to tackle such issues?

BECK: First, by increasing efforts to encourage our industry leaders to engage and participate in our organization. As previously mentioned, the tradition of this world-class organization was built by our membership. We want to motivate our members to participate with relevance and continue to provide best in class value to our members and industry. It is the unselfish sharing of information and lessons learned that is priceless to membership.

Second, find more avenues to connect MCAA companies with our vast resources available to assist with every aspect of our business and industry.

Our mission is to provide our member companies the tools to improve, reduce risk and maximize profitability.

And last, but by no means least, we must work together to find ways to stay ahead of the curve by reinventing how we provide value and conduct business in an industry that no longer looks like it did yesterday—and that will undoubtedly look very different tomorrow.

This cannot be done individually but will take collaboration by all of us, from the boiler room to the board room. Working together with our amazing partner, the hard working and greatest skilled trade professionals from the United Association (UA) will be essential. We will have the right talent in the room to get the job done.

CONTRACTOR: What are some core values you've learned during your tenure at John W Danforth that you want to take with you to this new position?

BECK: Our company vision and mission at Danforth completely align with MCAA. Danforth's vision is building meaningful relationships from coast to coast. Our mission is delivering industry leading experiences to our customers every day. These apply to internal and external customers. This same approach will be valid to MCAA. We will find proper balance between working on industry initiatives, as well as finding ways to continually improve our organization and the value we provide our membership.

CONTRACTOR: Give us your perspective of the current regulatory environment. It seems we are all systems go on electrification, heat pumps, decarb, etc. What is MCAA's stance on such inevitable regulations and/or how does MCAA approach such measures?

The Administration's broad scope infrastructure, computer chip and energy projects in the Inflation Reduction Act are a big and long-overdue boost to

infrastructure funding in this country. They will improve our long-term economic competitiveness, economic conditions, and our workforces overall.

So that's the big picture—we can look forward to strong market prospects in the near and intermediate term—we can plan for and invest in market gains. Yes, there are regulatory aspects and complications, but they are secondary, and for many of them our union-signatory firms are in the better competitive position with respect to training and workforce supply, deployment and pension and health plan contributions, and all the other aspects of the high skilled workforce development system we jointly build and maintain with the UA local unions.

CONTRACTOR: How do we motivate and educate the younger generation about the great trade in which we work?

BECK: There is no “easy” button. We must engage our newest generation through education and awareness on all aspects of our business. We must continue recruiting, mentoring, coaching, teaching and meeting the needs of our curious and bright young minds. We must make this generation aware of the immense opportunities and career paths in our amazing industry. From technology and innovation, to system installation and integration, to contract execution and many others... we have a dynamic industry with many pathways for an engaging and prosperous career... both personally and professionally.

CONTRACTOR: How do you take MCAA to the next level and leave it a better place from you started your tenure?

BECK: By continuing to utilize our most valuable asset, our membership. We will continue to engage our membership's industry leaders to shape our future. Our various committees include remarkable people that educate and provide expertise to our membership. We will continue to educate our members on the current issues of today, and more importantly the challenges and opportunities

of tomorrow. This will allow our companies to stay relevant, take advantage of opportunities and avoid industry threats.

Also, by remaining in lockstep with the leadership of our United Association labor partners. We will continue to work together regarding current issues, labor-management relations and increasing market share to name a few. The UA is leading the construction industry in technical training at all levels from apprenticeship to leadership. No trade trains better than the UA... period.

In addition, we will continue to utilize our MCAA staff. The MCAA staff includes talented, passionate and incredibly supportive people. Their amazing effort and service make our membership unique, and members feel special. The staff is insightful and focused on the issues at hand. This provides the highest level of support and allows our volunteer members to devote their valuable time most effectively.

We have vast momentum built by those remarkable people who served before me. Our organization is strong and we will stay the course. My job as President of MCAA will be simple... be a great ambassador of this amazing organization, bring people together and stay out of the way!

Source URL: <https://www.contractormag.com/industry-perspectives/article/21262748/staying-ahead-of-the-curve>