

EDUCATION

Five Questions With: Ron Stevenson

By **Chris Barrett**
PBN Staff Writer

Ron Stevenson is an architect with Saccoccio and Associates and a founding member of ACE Mentor Rhode Island, a group of architects and construction professionals that mentors high school students. He recently became chairman of the group and took some time to talk about the organization.



PHOTO COURTESY RON STEVENSON

"NOTHING VALIDATES this program more than having a former student return and talk about their ACE experience," said Ron Stevenson, an architect with Saccoccio and Associates and chairman of ACE Mentor Rhode Island.

PBN: Can you tell us a little about the ACE Mentor Rhode Island program?

STEVENSON:

The ACE Mentor program is a nonprofit organization that started in 1994 and is currently located in more than 200 cities throughout the United States. Our Rhode Island Chapter started in 2004.

ACE stands for Architecture, Construction and Engineering. The program's mission is to engage and enlighten high school students to pursue careers in the construction industry through scholarships and grants.

Industry professionals volunteer to mentor the students during our 18-week program.

PBN: I understand this year's program started this week. Can you tell us what's new for this year?

STEVENSON:

Every year we try and improve upon the last. This year we will be expanding the hands-on activities that are geared toward a particular discipline. One activity might be to ask students to design a beam out of cardboard so they can observe which design will hold the most weight.

The students will also engage in projects related to a variety of ACE fields, including urban design, structural design, space planning and cost estimating. The projects are designed to allow students to explore a variety of fields and learn which careers interest them.

Our returning students will compete in a national competition against other ACE affiliates. This is a more demanding program, and they will apply their knowledge and skills they acquired the previous year. Winners travel to Washington, D.C., to present their project so we are really looking forward to winning it this year.

PBN: Now that the program is six years old, you're likely seeing some of the first students you mentored graduating college or approaching a degree. Where have those students ended up?

STEVENSON:

We have many former ACE students attending local colleges. During the holiday break, they still reach out to us and ask to come to a session. Nothing validates this program more than having a former student return and talk about their ACE experience.

We have one former student graduating this May from the College of the Holy Cross pursuing a career with one of the mentor firms as a project engineer. That is when it comes full circle. We introduce them to the profession, they go off and earn a degree and then come back to work with us.

PBN: What are your goals as chairman for the program?

STEVENSON:

We have many goals and many dedicated volunteers working very hard to help our students become inspired to achieve.

Fundraising is always our biggest challenge. Our mentor firms pay for all administrative costs so all donations or proceeds we generate go directly toward scholarships. To date, we have awarded 16 scholarships in excess of \$33,000. As interest in the ACE program continues to grow, so will the need for fundraising. We want to be able to give all students something toward continuing their education.

PBN: Many in the construction industry are approaching retirement age. How does the program fit into a broader picture of ensuring the industry maintains its vitality?

STEVENSON:

That is one of the main reasons ACE was started. Construction being the second-largest industry in the United States means that there will be a strong need for more professionals in this field in the near future. What better way to fill this need than with young, energetic, talented youth who may or may not have thought about college or a trade in this industry originally. In return, the industry gets a much-needed boost of new talent.