

THE BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE DISTRIBUTION CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION



DCA NEWS

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**Fall Meeting
Women Rising in
the DCA
Convention**



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Rob Darden, DCA

2024 DCA Fall Meeting Wrap-Up

Though unusually warm weather swathed much of the country throughout October, you couldn't tell by the leaves on the trees on the way to the Hilton Boston Park Plaza hotel from Boston Logan International Airport. The color was glorious on the beautiful grounds of Boston Common just steps away — gathering place of patriots since the days of the American Revolution and proudly commanded by a towering statue of George Washington on horseback. The setting was an appropriate reminder of our shared heritage as Americans in the final days before Election Day.

The welcome dinner on Wednesday, October 23, quickly showed that the shortest meeting of the year would be well-attended. Just downstairs from the Hilton lobby, the crowd gathered around the open bar sported an encouraging number of red badges for members attending their first Fall Meeting, and the green badges were quick to surround them with friendly greetings. As members talked shop, caught up with friends, and

reminisced about the last meeting, the noise level in the room remained high long after the dinner plates were taken away.

As the long day of business began the next morning, visitors were greeted by a strange sound as they trickled through the lobby down to breakfast. On the sidewalk just outside, hotel employees in a weeks-long labor dispute with Hilton fired up their protest at 7 a.m. sharp, shouting chants, drumming 5-gallon buckets, and blasting vuvuzelas (those loud horns you hear at Brazilian soccer games). It sounded for all the world like a marching band right outside the window from every floor of the hotel and naturally became the subject of many a discussion over the morning coffee and eggs. Fortunately, through a little creative rearrangement of meeting rooms, the DCA staff managed to insulate the proceedings from the worst of the noise throughout the day.

The Town Hall and Business Session kicked off the morning's events with not one, but three guest speakers.



Nathan Gonzales, *Inside Elections*

First up was Nathan Gonzales, editor and publisher of *Inside Elections* and frequent political analyst for nearly every major news source over the last couple of decades. Talking about “Electoral Analysis and Prognostication,” he billed this year as “The Latest Most Important Election of Our Lives,” noting without hyperbole that there truly has never been another American election like this one given the history of the candidates. He advised the audience to ignore national polls — the states are what really matter. Gonzales reviewed various scenarios and opportunities for each party, how candidates get cheap TV ads, and where to find opposition research online. The room had a good laugh at the story of a Virginia Senate candidate who, despite being single with no kids, published a picture of himself with someone else’s family. Gonzales then elaborated on how votes are estimated on Election Day along with ballot counting and processing differences from state to state. He did not expect any certainty right away, and lots of court challenges to follow. Whatever the results, he offered the ever-wise words of the immortal movie characters Bill and Ted as a solution to America’s divisive politics: “Be excellent to each other.” He was then

immediately interrupted by a fire alarm (thankfully false) lasting several minutes as he held a Q&A session with the audience.

The second keynote address was a joint presentation by Melissa Kirby and Hal Perloff of the Husch Blackwell law firm, which deals in government contract and commercial litigation among other things. Their talk covered the implications of the Build America Buy America (BABA) Act of 2021, which requires that all of the iron, steel, manufactured products, and construction materials used in public infrastructure projects be produced in the United States. Perloff began by emphasizing two important messages. First, there is no single “buy American” rule, and second, domestic preference regulations like this one can change — it’s not “set it and forget it.” Different federal agencies can have different requirements, as do state and local agencies. The act applies to all federal grant programs going forward, but it is dependent on agency-specific guidance and does not replace stricter standards. Kirby added that for BABA to apply, the project must be federally funded, the purchased items

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Melissa Kirby, Husch Blackwell



Hal Perloff, Husch Blackwell

must be incorporated into infrastructure, and the final product must be for public use. She then discussed the categories of products covered and the definition of “manufactured,” along with various processes associated with applying the act. Perloff finished with some scenarios for what happens if you get it wrong or don’t comply — your company could be sued or even blacklisted by the government. The most important thing is to know which standard you’re working with and act accordingly.

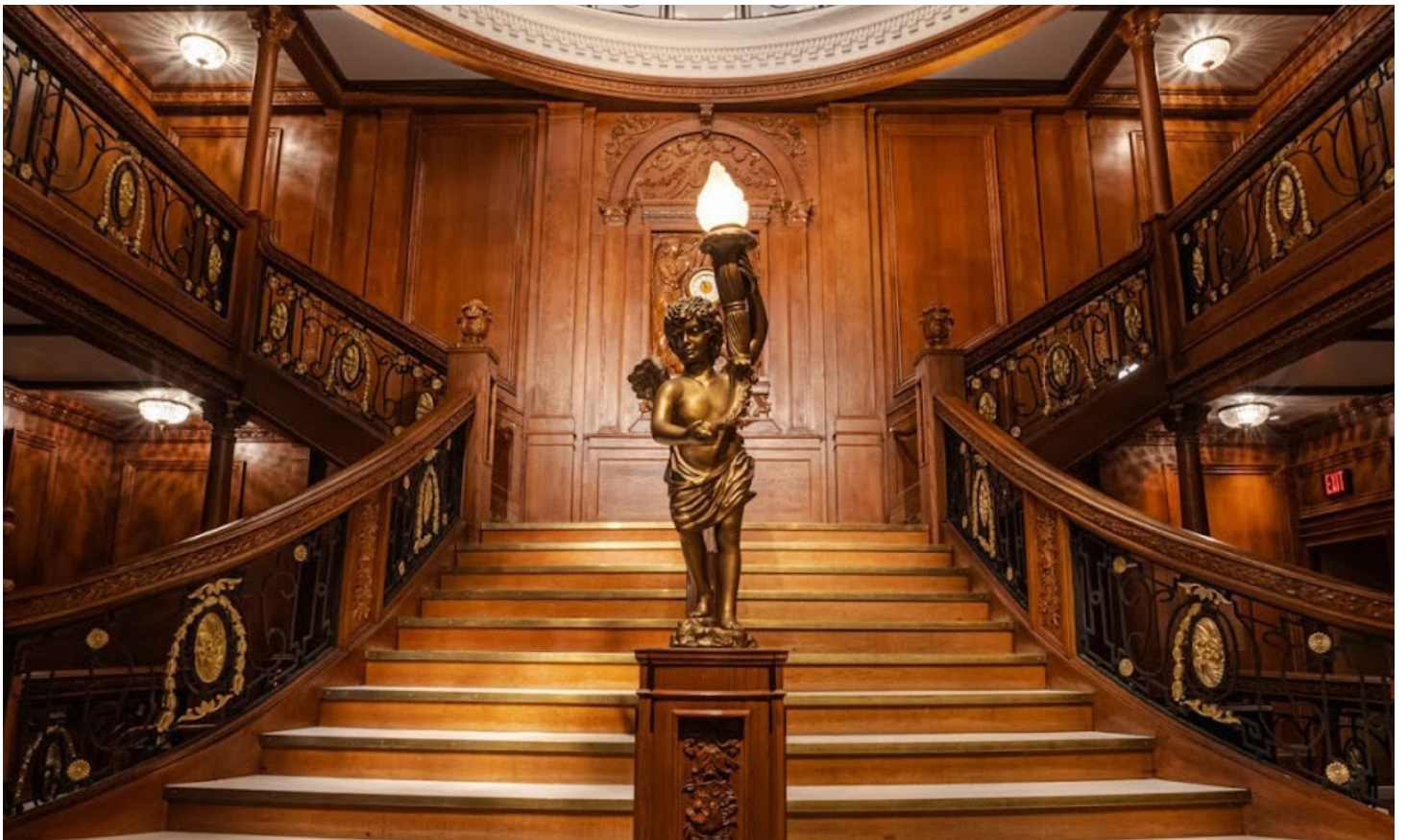
From there, the proceedings moved on to the work of the various committees throughout the day. To complement the new committee meeting format, the seating this time consisted of two rows of tables for committee members facing each other, with audience seating behind each side. This arrangement was generally better received than the layout used at the Mid Year Meeting. Committees both old and new spent much of the time discussing the formation of new subcommittees as they continue to redefine their mission statements and scope of work to better serve the DCA membership. Additional virtual meetings were planned by most of the groups to keep projects on track and moving forward throughout the year. All in all, the work of the Strategic Vision Committee and the Board of Directors to prepare DCA for the future could be seen in action, and everyone seemed eager to adjust to the new paradigms and hit the road running.

For the evening finale, the scene moved across the street to The Saunders Castle at Park Plaza, a historic building that was originally an armory for the First Corps of Cadets of Massachusetts when it was built in 1897. Featuring a six-story tower and numerous turrets, it looks

exactly as if someone had dropped a medieval castle in downtown Boston. Inside, members were first treated to a special private viewing of an exhibit featuring items recovered from the RMS Titanic. Upon entry, each guest received a ticket displaying information about a real passenger on the doomed ship. Castle rooms took guests through the ship’s revolutionary construction; recreations of accommodations in first, second, and third class (including the legendary grand staircase); stories of various passengers and crew; and the terrible events of that final cold night in the Atlantic. At the end, guests learned the fate of the passengers named on their tickets. Artifacts ranged from playing cards and tableware, shoes and toilets, to multi-ton mechanical gear and pieces of the hull. The display did a wonderful job of connecting viewers to the real experiences of people from another time and was deeply moving.

Finally, after finishing the exhibit, members rounded the corner to climb four flights of ornate iron stairs up to the restaurant in The Tower. Surrounded by elaborate Victorian woodwork, the room featured tributes to battles and heroes of the Civil War on the balcony above and shelves of historic books below. It was lit by cast-iron chandeliers suspended from a ceiling painted with clouds between the gilded beams. The members enjoyed steak and lobster and generous servings of wine before saying their farewells and heading off into the night.

The next DCA meeting will be the 2025 Annual Convention at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess in Scottsdale, Arizona, February 24 to March 1, 2025. ▲



Committee News

October 24 – 25, 2024 Meetings



The DCA Board of Directors (BOD) and seven working committees met at the DCA Fall Meeting, October 23-25, 2024, at the Boston Hilton Park Plaza, in Boston, Massachusetts.

Board of Directors

At the October 25 BOD meeting, board members approved the 2025 BOD ballot:

- President: Dan Carson, Carson Corporation
- Vice President: Doug Reeves, Primoris Services Corp.
- Treasurer: Andy Miller, Alex E. Paris Contracting Co. Inc.
- Immediate Past President: Mark Albert, AGI Construction Inc.
- Past President Director: Dale Anderson, Miller Pipeline
- Director nominees (three to be elected to a two-year term and one for a one-year term): Bill Colson, Pretec Directional Drilling, LLC; Chad Davis, Miller Pipeline; Nate Eastway, Gabe's Construction Co., Inc.; Pete Fojtik, MP Technologies, LLC; Rob Hotz, ECI Contracting; and Jim Lagios, Atlas Trenchless, LLC

- Directors (one year remaining on a two-year term): Dan Britz, Michels Utility Services, Inc.; and Stephanie Krabbe, InfraSource, LLC
- Director at Large: Randy Bunch, Eastern Utilities Services
- Senior Associate Member Director: Mike James, ISCO Industries
- Junior Associate Member Director nominees (one to be elected for a two-year term): Siggi Finnsson, Digital Control Inc.; and Ken Hugen, RDO Equipment Co.

A full write-up of the 2025 BOD nominees will appear in the January/February 2025 DCA News. Elections will take place February 26, 2025, in conjunction with the 64th DCA Annual Convention in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The BOD announced that the 2025-26 scholarship amounts for the DCA-Dale R. Michels Scholarship and DCA-Curtis H. Allen Scholarship will total \$137,000 based on the current allocation formula. The BOD also approved \$3,000 for the James R. Upton Scholarship.

Updates on DCA staff changes, the 2025 DCA Convention, and the current membership drive were given to board members.

Future Leaders Committee

The Future Leaders Committee meeting focused on enhancing member engagement and professional development within the DCA. Key updates included leveraging the DCA app and LinkedIn for connecting members and resuming informal “connector” programs to integrate new and experienced members. Initiatives such as member biographies, name tags, and branded items were discussed as conversation starters, with sponsorship opportunities being explored. The committee also planned professional development activities, including headshots, workshops, and virtual lunch sessions, emphasizing accessible, non-sales-oriented formats. The meeting concluded with a call for member ideas to continue fostering growth and collaboration.

Government Relations Committee

The Government Relations Committee covered a broad range of topics aimed at advancing legislative and regulatory priorities for the distribution construction industry. The recent regional fly-in to Washington, D.C., was praised for its effectiveness with calls to increase the frequency and volume of advocacy efforts. Key legislative goals included passing the pipeline safety bill with provisions to modernize damage prevention processes, encourage locator training, and expand the use of GIS mapping. The urgency to pass this bill during the lame-duck session was emphasized, given its bipartisan support and potential to create jobs while reducing emissions.

The committee also addressed challenges with OSHA's proposed heat exposure regulations, which include strict requirements for monitoring and worker safety. DCA, alongside other coalitions, is advocating for flexible, science-based approaches and will submit comments on these regulations by the December deadline. Updates on methane emissions mandates and the reclassification of pipeline classes highlighted the growing workload and the industry's commitment to reducing environmental impacts. Additionally, a discussion on Safety Management Systems (SMS) underscored the importance of proactive safety measures, with a survey planned to gather insights on SMS awareness and implementation.

The meeting featured an introduction to the Common Ground Alliance's Damage Prevention Institute (DPI), which evaluates damage-prevention practices across

the industry. DPI peer reviews were noted as particularly beneficial for small and mid-sized companies, providing a road map for improvement without punitive measures. The session concluded with updates on new legislative changes in Minnesota requiring as-built documentation for crossings, which will impact contractors statewide by 2026. The committee encouraged member participation in upcoming fly-ins and surveys to further advocacy and safety efforts.

Innovation & Technology Committee

The Innovation & Technology Committee discussed its focus on equipment, technology, and safety, emphasizing collaboration across DCA committees and external organizations. Subcommittees were established to address specific areas: equipment innovations, practical applications of AI, and safety advancements, including wearable technologies. Key initiatives include distributing a survey to gather member input, creating a resource repository, and preparing an AI-focused presentation for the annual meeting. The committee highlighted the importance of tracking advancements in the industry and increasing engagement from members and external partners to drive innovation and enhance safety practices.

Membership & Engagement Committee

The Membership Committee meeting focused on updating goals and addressing challenges in member recruitment and retention. The Recruitment Subcommittee is enhancing the DCA member packet and identifying a top-10 potential member list alongside key reasons why contractors should join, aiming to boost new member acquisition. The Retention Subcommittee prioritized reengaging inactive members through an outreach plan, engaging members in succession planning, and refining the exit interview process to better understand why members leave DCA.

Additionally, the Social Media Subcommittee is developing strategies to emphasize membership benefits, sharing the impact of social media on DCA's visibility, and increasing member involvement in social media initiatives. The committee also noted plans to redefine the mission statement to align with these evolving goals.

Safety & Risk Management Committee

The Safety & Risk Management Committee reviewed its mission statement, making plans to update it for greater alignment with its goals. Discussions centered on refining the Benchmark Study by adding metrics such

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as SIF, TRIR, operational site engagement, and safety training hours. The committee emphasized collaboration with other DCA committees, particularly on integrating safety and technology initiatives. Planning for the 2025 Safety Congress in New Orleans is underway with a call for suggestions and recommendations to enhance the event. Subcommittee activities and goals were also reviewed to ensure alignment with DCA's safety priorities.

Trenchless & HDD Committee

The Trenchless & HDD Committee reviewed its mission statement and provided updates from its five subcommittees, focusing on best practices, safety, innovation, bore planning, and education for engineers and planners. Highlights included plans for concise presentations at the 2025 Convention, a focus on damage prevention using the 2023 DIRT report findings, and strategies to reduce excavation damages by 50% over five years. Guest speaker Sam Hall from the Damage Prevention Institute and Dr. Sam Ariaratnam

from the Gas Pipeline Advisory Committee shared insights on damage prevention and pipeline safety innovations, including methane mitigation and hydrogen regulations.

Workforce Development Committee

The Workforce Development Committee discussed the upcoming Leadership Development Class scheduled for December with efforts focused on boosting participation and exploring post-holiday scheduling for a second-level class. Subcommittees were formed to build partnerships with Skills USA and technical schools, aiming to identify relevant energy-related certifications and training opportunities. Plans include attending the CEWD summit in Washington, D.C., and Skills USA's national competition in Atlanta to further align initiatives with workforce development needs. Action items include compiling resources on technical schools and exploring greater involvement with Skills USA programs.

The next meeting is scheduled during the DCA Annual Convention in February 2025, in Scottsdale, Arizona. ▲



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DCA Scholarship Applications Now Being Accepted

The application process for the 2025-26 DCA-Dale R. Michels Scholarship and Curtis Allen Scholarship is now open on the DCA website at: <https://dcaweb.org/page/Scholarship>.

All applications will be completed online.

Students should click on the link above, scroll down the page to find the scholarship they are interested in, click the button, and follow the instructions, including how to upload a transcript in PDF format.

Basic guidelines:

- The **DCA – Dale R. Michels Scholarship** encourages students *planning to pursue a **four-year bachelor, or post-graduate** degree* to apply.
- The **Curtis H. Allen Scholarship** focuses on those *planning to attend a **trade, technical or vocational school***.
- Applications must include an unofficial or official copy of a transcript. See the specific scholarship for the correct transcript that should be uploaded.
- All applications and supporting documents must be completed no later than **Wednesday, January 8, 2025**.

- If DCA receives more than three applications from a member company for either scholarship, the member company will be asked to review and select three for inclusion in the application pool.
- The winning applicants will be awarded an unspecified amount of financial aid for the 2025-26 academic year. This amount could be renewable for up to four years with proof of academic success for the Michels scholarship and two years for the Allen scholarship.
- Financial need, academic major, and community service will be considered by the scholarship committees.

The DCA-Dale R. Michels Scholarship Committee is comprised of the DCA President, Treasurer, Past President Director, Associate Member Director, and up to five members appointed by the DCA President.

The Curtis H. Allen Scholarship Committee is comprised of the DCA Vice President, DCA Director at Large, DCA Alternate Associate Member Director, two Halliburton Representatives, and one member appointed by the DCA President.

Contact tkorson@dcaweb.org if you have any questions. ▲

Industry News

Women Rising in the DCA



"The times, they are a-changing," as the old Bob Dylan song goes. For the first time in its 63-year history, the 2024 Distribution Contractors Association (DCA) Board of Directors (BOD) includes two women in position to steer the organization's future: Stephanie Krabbe and Sarah Mahlik. Prior to them, only one woman had held this honor: Linda Loftis-Vrooman, who served as DCA president in 2001.

To commemorate this milestone, we interviewed four women who are taking active roles as DCA transitions to a new generation of leaders in the post-pandemic era:

- **Sarah Mahlik** – national accounts manager for TT Technologies; associate member director on the BOD; previously served on the Strategic Vision Committee and as co-chair of the Future Leaders Committee

- **Stephanie Krabbe** – senior vice president, organizational development, for InfraSource; director on the BOD; current co-chair of the Innovation and Technology Committee; previous co-chair of the Workforce Development Committee
- **Laura Mason** – national account finance manager for Caterpillar Financial Services Corp.; new co-chair of the Future Leaders Committee
- **Linda Birkeland** – vice president-finance and treasurer, Hallen Construction; member of the Dale R. Michels Scholarship Committee and the Membership and Engagement Committee

Each of these women comes to the DCA with years of industry experience under their belts and positions of leadership at the companies they work for. We asked them about the career paths that brought them here, the challenges they overcame, and their thoughts on the current and future roles of women in construction. Despite their different backgrounds, the common thread among their answers is an optimism that construction is increasingly becoming an industry where women can thrive.

In the Beginning...

The women we spoke with followed one of two basic paths into construction: They were either born into it or came to it from other industries. Mahlik and Mason fall into the first category.

As the daughter of TT Technologies' founder, Mahlik grew up attending DCA meetings from the time she was a small child. She went her own way in college, majoring in finance and marketing and spending time working in banking and in sales for Kohler plumbing supply before coming back to the family business.

Mason grew up in a family that owned a heavy highway asphalt paving business out of Minneapolis. At 3 years old she was riding motor graders and bulldozers, and by 11 she was sweeping the shop and helping out in the mechanic's garage. She studied business at Purdue University and interviewed with a computer company, but found her calling when she snuck into an engineering job fair (where business students weren't allowed) and met a representative from Caterpillar.

Krabbe and Birkeland were not so well-acquainted with construction. Birkeland was an experienced CPA when she started with Hallen Construction, transitioning smoothly from one industry to another through finance. Krabbe was working as a real estate professional when the bottom dropped out of that market in 2009, and she found herself looking for a new way forward.

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Linda Birkeland
Hallen Construction



Stephanie Krabbe
InfraSource



Sarah Mahlik
TT Technologies



Laura Mason
Caterpillar

"I didn't know anything about the industry because nobody sees what we do at the end of the day," Krabbe said. "Everything we do is buried underground, so people don't see it. I had no idea that the industry was so large."

Krabbe took an accounting position with a DCA member contractor and soon started working her way through other roles in the company, from finance and business development to operations, project management, and later workforce development, progressing to her current position at InfraSource.

Earning Respect

As these women described their journeys to build a career, some common themes quickly became evident. In their first encounters with the DCA, all four were assumed to be "the wife" of a member, rather than a company representative in their own right.

"At the end of the day, I think that being taken seriously was probably the biggest challenge, because people assume that when you walk into a room, you don't know what you're talking about," Krabbe said. "There are not a lot of women in our industry, so people aren't accustomed to seeing anyone that looks like me come sit in a room."

Mason recalled similar experiences.

"Especially when I was younger, people would look at me and say, 'Oh, she doesn't look the type — She doesn't fit the mold of what is most populated within this industry.' And they were absolutely correct. So... people didn't take me as seriously, or they thought that I wasn't as educated, or I wasn't as experienced." That perception changed, Mason added, as people got to know her. Then the response was more like, "Oh, wow, we never expected you to know how to tear apart an engine on a dozer."

Mahlik also emphasized the importance of proving herself.

"I've had a few instances where people are skeptical of the knowledge I have and act like, 'How can she

train me?'" And then they realize I actually do have knowledge. So I think showing them, demonstrating the knowledge that I have is the most valuable tool, because then I build trust with them, and then they're able to look at me as an equal."

And that knowledge was hard-earned: "Yep, I definitely started out in the back in the shop, and I was helping pack orders and pulling parts off the shelf, so I knew where things go, what they want to do," Mahlik said. "I traveled around with all the different salesmen and the techs to see what they do. I worked inside the front office as well, so I've worked in a bunch of different hats and different departments of the company in order to gain respect and not just be, you know, the daughter of the owner."

Birkeland was quick to point out how things have improved since she broke into the industry.

"We've seen a significant change at Hallen for the better," she said. "We've had some young women that are really coming up into field operations, into training, into safety positions, and we've never had that before... It's a little bit of a change in culture, and I think it's been great. The generation that's coming through now, the younger women, they're really learning a lot. People are more open to teaching them about the industry. It's a little more accepted, and it's very exciting to see."

Achieving Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is one of those topics raised with women and rarely with men, and our interviewees were interestingly split on their opinions of the subject. Mahlik, who has two girls in school and a job that requires lots of travel, talked about the importance of family support, coordinating with her husband to avoid scheduling conflicts, and setting an example for her daughters. Krabbe and Birkeland, who both entered the business later in their careers with older or grown children, were understandably less concerned about it, although Krabbe pointedly questioned whether such balance truly exists,



since something is always going to be out of balance.

Mason, who has young children, agreed that achieving work-life balance may not be realistic.

"There's going to be times where you have to throw yourself more into a situation than not, or there's times you have to back off other responsibilities," she said. "I think instead of talking about balance, I think we should talk about trust. That is the thing that helps you. My boss trusts me. If I can't concentrate on this at this particular moment, he knows I'm going to be able to get back to that at a certain time."

Ultimately, Mason added, the most important thing to do is to surround yourself with good people, at work and at home, who will understand your priorities and support you in fulfilling them.

Essentials for Success

We asked the women what they believed were the most essential factors for women to succeed in underground construction, and all agreed that acquiring a solid knowledge base was critical.

"I can't tell you how many times people said, 'Hey, can you do this?'" Krabbe said. "I heard other people say no, and I said yes because I didn't know how, and I wanted to understand. So any opportunity that there is to learn a different aspect of the business from what you're doing, I think is critically important... even if you don't know how to do it, because you'll figure it out. That was probably one of the biggest keys to success for me; you have to absorb that knowledge, and you have to be willing to be outside of your comfort zone."

Mahlik reminded us that not only should your co-workers respect your knowledge, but your customers have to as well. Achieving that, she said, begins with hard work and believing in your product.

"I stand behind our product; I think it's a really great product," Mahlik said. "Talking to other people, staying abreast of new products that are coming to the market, competitive intelligence; That's really important. Just showing your customers that you're out there with them in the field providing support, even if they don't need it, and popping by consistently: all those things contribute to our success."

Birkeland said she's impressed with the level-headedness and determination she has seen in the women climbing the ranks at Hallen.

"I can tell you from the younger women that I see that are coming up, their qualities are just staying calm under pressure," Birkeland said. "We have some that are safety professionals; we have training professionals; and we have crew supervisors for the first time, which we've never had... They're just very hard working. They don't give up. They have a tough skin, and they need it."

Mason's thoughts followed similar lines.

"My number one thing is, just be curious, ask questions, don't assume things," Mason said. "Put yourself out there, be confident... You have to be coachable. If you're not coachable, then you're not going to go anywhere in my opinion. So, yeah, be curious, be confident, be happy, and find something that you love to do. Because if you're miserable, then you're probably not going to succeed."

Staying in the Know

If being knowledgeable is important for success, getting there requires constant effort in a field that is rapidly changing.

Solutions for sales, safety, mapping, record-keeping, and many other construction-related tasks are becoming

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increasingly complex and sophisticated every day, and each of the women we spoke with devotes a significant amount of time to staying on top of the latest developments. Krabbe and Birkeland strongly advocated for reading industry journals, newsletters, and other publications, and actively participating in industry associations (including the DCA). Mason mentioned the opportunities to learn from subject matter experts on unexpected topics such as artificial intelligence (AI) at the recent DCA convention in Hawaii. She also cited the importance of paying attention to the news and being aware of what's going on in the world around you. Blogs, podcasts, and social media are valuable sources for Mason and Mahlik, and Mahlik frequently queries her fellow salespeople and customers to learn what's in demand and attends trade shows to see what's new.

Krabbe, who is the co-chair for the DCA's brand-new Innovation and Technology Committee, is making it part of her job to help others with this never-ending task.

"We are making it a push to say, 'Here's everything out there for you, we've tested it; we've piloted it. This is what we found works and this is what we have found does not.'"

Advising and Mentoring the Next Generation

All of the women we spoke with are well-established in their careers at this point, having weathered the slings and arrows of pioneering a place for themselves in the construction industry and earning the respect of their peers, male and female alike. They are the ones the next generation of women will turn to for guidance and inspiration as they step through newly opened doors, so we asked each of them what advice they would give to those considering a career in pipeline or just starting out, and how they view their role as mentors.

Birkeland began by acknowledging that although the door is open for women, the red carpet hasn't been rolled out just yet.

"A woman starting out has to decide if she is in this for the long haul and whether she can withstand the ups and downs, highs and lows, that go along with the industry," she said. "Accept the fact that there will be insecure moments and times where you question whether you belong. Understand that there will be others that do not believe a woman can make it in this industry, but stay strong and true to yourself and learn as much as you can along the way."

She emphasized the importance of finding a good mentor, a sentiment that Krabbe echoed.

"Don't be afraid to step outside of your comfort zone," Krabbe said. "If you're not uncomfortable, you're probably not learning. If you're staying comfortable all the time, there's probably not a large opportunity for you to learn. I would say, find a great mentor, and someone that will champion you, and someone that has a lot of knowledge that they're willing to share. And I would also say just jump in and get started. Don't worry about not understanding everything, because that will come with time. You just have to get started somewhere."

Mahlik and Mason were equally enthusiastic about building relationships and support systems, but they also brought up the diversity of opportunities available in construction, "not just in the field getting dirty," as Mahlik said, "but also there's project management positions, there's things in engineering, and we are seeing more and more women do it," she said, adding that she'd like to see the construction industry do more to market these opportunities.

Mason illustrated her point with a story.



"I got asked to do a career day at my son's elementary school, and I had to speak to everybody from a kindergartner to a fifth grader," she said. "I took in a ton of different pictures of excavators, of parts, of mechanics, of all these things, and I said, 'You know, when you see Caterpillar, just don't focus on the excavator and the dozer. You have to think about it, every aspect. Who designed the Cat logo? Do you like to color? Do you like to draw? Well, maybe you could design logos one day and be in marketing. How do you buy these machines? What does it take? It takes money. Then you can be in finance, and you can be in the treasury side of the business. Do you like to build things? Do you like Legos? OK, great. Well, maybe one day you can design and build a bulldozer. Do you like to talk to people? Are you persuasive? You could be a salesperson. At Caterpillar, they even make shoes, so if you want to be a shoe designer one day, you can work for Cat.'"

On mentoring, Krabbe described the sense of duty she feels to help others follow in her footsteps.

"I think that it's creating space," she said. "I mentor any woman in our organization that asks; I don't ever say no. That's something that I promised myself I would never do, because I believe that they see me as an inspiration in where they could go in the industry that may not have been there before. It's my responsibility to mentor them and assist them and bring them up with me, because that's the only way we're going to grow."

Creating a pathway for women to succeed is also part of Krabbe's role in workforce development.

"I'm responsible for all of our learning and development programs, so diversity and inclusion are part of our initiatives, and really making sure that we're bringing in as many women into the industry as we can, just through knowledge and understanding, and there are programs

and scholarships and all those types of things."

Birkeland said she believes strongly in the value of a sympathetic — and sometimes protective — ear.

"I always say that I have an open-door policy, no matter what the topic is. I really do. I feel very strongly about moving women along in their careers. Whatever I can do to help, I do. A lot of times they may be hesitant to bring up topics because they don't want to be 'that person.' They don't want to rock the boat, so I give them just an open forum to talk about any of those issues, and a lot of times, I will check in and say, 'hey, how's it going?' and make sure that there's nothing lingering, and that they're not struggling or not putting up with anything that they shouldn't be."

In addition to informal mentoring, Mason established a field apprentice program at Caterpillar to show new recruits what it's like to be a field representative. Mahlik even advocated working across the aisle to build relationships with competitors, often through organizations like the DCA, increasing both her own exposure to valuable insight and her visibility to young women who might not have a role model at their own company yet.

Looking Down the Road

The pipeline industry has maintained a remarkable level of success in recent years despite a great deal of instability both at home and abroad over that same span, yet there remain challenges ahead that will affect the survival and growth of the industry. When asked for thoughts on the future, Mahlik was quick to identify natural gas bans as the industry's biggest political threat. "I think that's a huge challenge that we're going to have to figure out a way around it in the future," she said.

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Workforce was also on her mind. “A lot of younger people today are in tech; they don’t want to work with their hands, or they don’t want to get dirty...” Mahlik added.

Birkeland concurred that skilled labor shortages are a challenge for the pipeline construction industry overall.

“It will be interesting to see if this provides more opportunities for women to be part of that solution. We need to work harder toward encouraging more women to consider pursuing careers in the construction industry.”

Krabbe said she sees positive change in the wind.

“I know that it’s still a challenge for us to get enough of a workforce, but I think that you’re seeing a shift for people that don’t want to take on the debt of college, that aren’t willing to sit in a classroom for four years,” she said.

At the same time, Krabbe added, people are recognizing the upsides and value of careers in construction.

“It’s not just, ‘I’m going to get dirty and dig a ditch every day,’” she said. “There are drones. There are all these new things behind it, that are a lot of technology-driven things that the new generation that’s coming up appreciates.”

Mahlik also expressed concern about the structure of the industry itself, and the DCA by extension, as more and more acquisitions are announced.

“(With) bigger companies swallowing up the smaller companies, there’s not as many family companies here anymore. That’s a big thing... our family is a family company. We’ve got five family members who come here, who all work for the company. Look at Michels (Energy Group, also a DCA member), they have a family company. Phil Michels and I remember running around, playing while the parents were having dinner... What is that going to be like in the next 20, 25, 30 years for DCA? Is that still going to happen?”

Mason stepped back to look at the big picture.

“At the end of the day, I think the business equipment construction world — we’ve been around for 100-plus years; it’s very predictable. There’s always cycles of equipment and need and construction, right? It’s always needed. But there’s always those down turns. It’s happened several times in the last 100 years. It’s going to happen. But just keep preparing yourself for that, trying to keep the positive energy, and know that, guess what? There’s going to be an upturn coming up soon, too. I think it’s just about keeping a positive attitude, keeping good energy, keeping a long visualization of the future in front of you... You can’t just look a year or two down the road; you have to look 10, 20 years.”

Waves of Change

During their time with us, each of these women displayed the confidence, enthusiasm, and thorough professionalism that has brought them to prominence in both their own companies and in the DCA. They remained realistic about the obstacles they had to overcome and that other women still face while climbing the ladder in construction, yet their optimism shone brightly as they talked about the future. As they see it, the changes they are experiencing in the pipeline construction industry today are not just a solitary blip on the radar — they’re the front of a wave that is transforming the business landscape permanently, making space for new faces, new generations, and new perspectives in a once-homogeneous industry. As their stars rise within the DCA, so too, will those they pull up with them, and the gas industry cannot help but benefit from that. ▲

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”
-Mahatma Gandhi

*** Interview responses have been edited and consolidated in some places for clarity and flow.*

Calendar

2025 & 2026 DCA and Industry Events

2025

FEBRUARY 4-8

2025 PLCA Convention
Marriott Marco Island
Marco Island, Florida
www.plca.com

FEBRUARY 24 - MARCH 1

DCA Annual Convention
Fairmont Scottsdale Princess
Scottsdale, Arizona
www.dcaweb.org

MARCH 4-6

Underground Infrastructure Conference (UIC)
George R. Brown Convention Center
Houston, Texas
www.ui-conference.com

MARCH 24-26

DCA Safety Congress
Hyatt Centric, French Quarter
New Orleans, Louisiana
www.dcaweb.org

MAY 26-29

Pipe Line Contractors Association of Canada
(PLCAC) Convention
Fairmont Banff Springs
Banff, Alberta
www.pipeline.ca

2025 (cont.)

JUNE 23-27

SkillsUSA TechSPO
Georgia World Congress Center
Atlanta, Georgia
www.nlsc.skillsusa.org

JULY 14-17

DCA Mid Year Meeting
Grand Geneva Resort & Spa
Lake Geneva, Wisconsin
www.dcaweb.org

SEPTEMBER 16-18

Global Damage Prevention Summit
Hilton Anatole Hotel
Dallas, Texas
www.actsnowinc.com/globaldps/registration

OCTOBER 29-31

DCA Fall Meeting
Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center
Grapevine, Texas
www.dcaweb.org

2026

FEBRUARY 23 - 28

DCA Annual Convention
Trump National Doral
Miami, Florida
www.dcaweb.org

ATTENTION ALL DCA MEMBERS!

So you do not miss out on future meeting and event notices, please have your company's IT representative whitelist all emails from dcaweb.org. If you have any questions, please contact Teri Korson at tkorson@dcaweb.org.



FEBRUARY 24 – MARCH 1, 2025

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Member News



Volvo Construction Equipment

Volvo CE Brings Hybrid Technology to New Generation Excavators

Volvo Construction Equipment has introduced a new generation of hybrid excavators that utilize hydraulic hybrid technology. Among several benefits, there is a 17% increase in fuel efficiency, a 15% reduction in CO2 emissions, and lower fuel consumption.

The first hybrid models of the new series are the EC400 and EC500, size classes commonly used in pipeline projects. The hydraulic hybrid technology harnesses the energy generated by the downward motion of the excavator's boom, which charges an accumulator and then powers the assist motor when needed, reducing the reliance on the engine system. This principle leads to cost savings, fuel efficiency, and reduced carbon emissions. The new generation excavators from Volvo CE also feature a more spacious and ergonomic design, an enhanced operator environment, and an improved human-machine interface.

These advancements contribute to increased productivity and lower total cost of ownership. When combined with Volvo's smarter solutions like Volvo Active Control and Dig Assist with On-Board Weighing, these excavators offer unmatched precision and productivity. Overall, Volvo CE's new hybrid excavators offer a powerful and sustainable solution for customers, combining advanced hybrid technology with modern design and improved performance.



Vermeer

Vermeer Unveils the D24 Horizontal Directional Drill, Marking a New Era in Utility Installation

Vermeer introduces the D24 horizontal directional drill (HDD), the latest in utility installation equipment designed for urban contractors' evolving needs. This powerful 24,000-lb (110-kN) class drill, replacing the D23x30 S3 in the Vermeer utility drill lineup, boasts a 100-hp (74.6-kW) Cat 3.6L Tier 4F/Stage V engine. The D24 delivers impressive performance with a max peak thrust and pullback of 24,700 lb (110 kN) and a continuous thrust and pullback of 22,000 lb (98 kN). It also features 3,080 ft-lb (4,176 Nm) of rotational torque and a 45-gpm (170-L/min) mud pump. Packed with advanced features and technology, the Vermeer D24 HDD enables crews to efficiently install utilities — including fiber, power cables and water infrastructure in congested urban areas.

"The D24 represents a significant step forward in HDD technology," said Clint Recker, product manager for utility HDD equipment at Vermeer. "We've listened closely to utility contractors and incorporated their feedback into every aspect of this machine, resulting in a drill that sets new standards for ease of operation and maintenance simplicity."

Automated rod exchange for increased efficiency

A standout feature of the Vermeer D24 HDD is its automated rod exchange (ARE) system. This innovative technology increases onboarding velocity for new operators,

reduces workload for skilled operators and maximizes wear part component life through highly controlled processes. With a single button push completing the entire rod changeout sequence, ARE eliminates up to 19 manual steps, streamlining operations and enhancing overall efficiency.

With ARE, each rod change helps reduce wear on components and minimizes the risk of human error. This can potentially extend the life of consumables like sub savers and drill rods.

Enhanced diagnostics for improved productivity

The D24 features an advanced onboard diagnostic system, accessible via the machine's touchscreen display. This system offers operators and technicians comprehensive information about any issues and step-by-step troubleshooting guidance. It enables quick troubleshooting of issues, maximizing operational time.

For example, if a sensor detects a hydraulic system anomaly, the diagnostic display provides detailed information to minimize diagnostic time. If dealer support is needed, the system equips technicians with comprehensive data, helping them arrive better prepared. This approach helps keep projects on schedule by getting the machine back to drilling sooner.

Reliability and extended coverage

Vermeer has prioritized enhancing the D24's overall reliability. The machine features premium hydraulic components — typically found in larger pipeline equipment — that help protect the hydraulic circuit and extend its lifespan. These high-quality components improve the machine's durability and allow consistent performance across various drilling conditions.

Designed for urban work

The D24 is engineered to tackle the unique challenges of urban utility installation. Its compact design allows for efficient operation in confined city spaces while delivering the power and precision needed to handle diverse soil conditions. This balance of size and capability makes the D24 an ideal choice for contractors working in densely populated areas.

The D24 operates at just 88 dB(A) at the operator's ear with a guaranteed sound power level of 100 dB(A). This low noise output minimizes disturbance in sensitive urban areas, enhances onsite communication, and helps contractors meet certain local noise regulations. The D24's operational sound levels contribute to a comfortable

work environment, which can positively impact crew productivity and job satisfaction.

Features for efficient operation

Operators can choose between 400 ft or 480 ft (122 m or 146 m) of 2.375-in Firestick® drill rod for the D24, selecting the configuration that best suits their typical job requirements.

The redesigned vise system features sliding open-side vises, enabling easy cleaning and clear joint visibility. This sliding mechanism streamlines the breakout process compared to fixed open-top vises. With enhanced clamp force, the vises help extend the life of the vise die.

The D24's stakedowns feature tiered shark teeth and a rotation speed of up to 60 rpm — nearly triple that of its predecessors. This upgrade improves setup efficiency, especially in harder soils, allowing crews to begin drilling faster. This quicker setup is particularly valuable in urban areas, where minimizing disruption is crucial.

Contributing to its efficiency on the jobsite, the D24 boasts impressive speed capabilities. With a rotation speed of 198 rpm and a carriage speed of 181 fpm (55 m/min), crews can install more feet of product per day. The drill's 3.3 mph (5.3 km/hr) tracking speed enables quick relocation between work areas, helping further enhancing productivity.

"The D24 is the result of extensive research, development and customer input," Recker explained. "We're confident that contractors will see an impact in their operations when they use this machine in the field. It truly sets a new standard for HDD equipment. We believe contractors will be impressed when they put this machine to work in the field, as it truly raises the bar for what they can expect from their HDD equipment."

Vermeer has introduced a simplified model numbering system for its new drills. This system represents each unit's respective drill class, making it easier for customers to understand the machine's capabilities. The D24 replaces the D23x30 S3 HDD in the Vermeer utility drill line, with its name signifying its thrust capabilities.

For more information about the Vermeer D24 horizontal directional drill, contact your local Vermeer dealer or visit vermeer.com.

(continued on pg. 24)



InfraSource Becomes DOD SkillBridge Partner

InfraSource is proud to announce they have officially become a DOD SkillBridge partner. This partnership allows the company to contribute directly to the professional growth of transitioning service members while benefiting from their incredible expertise and dedication.

“Becoming a SkillBridge partner is not just an exciting milestone for InfraSource — it’s a meaningful way for us to support those who have served our country,” said Stephanie Krabbe, Sr Vice President of Organizational Development.

InfraSource is proud to be a part of this important program and look forward to welcoming service members onto their team so they can continue to make an impact.

What is DOD SkillBridge?


DOD SkillBridge is a Department of Defense initiative connecting service members nearing the end of their military service with civilian job training opportunities. Through this program, service members can participate in apprenticeships, internships, or industry training programs during their last 180 days of active duty. This provides them with a seamless transition to a civilian career by gaining real-world experience and skills.

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Caterpillar to Spotlight "The Next 100 Years" at CES 2025

Caterpillar Inc. will launch its Centennial Celebration during CES 2025, providing visitors the opportunity to reflect on the company's global impact over the last century as well as envision what's in store for the future. Caterpillar's exhibit, "The Next 100 Years: Experience What's Possible," will feature a powerful combination of technologies and expertise designed to highlight some of the ways Caterpillar is evolving with customers through the energy transition.

"Caterpillar was founded in 1925 with an innovative spirit, aimed at helping our customers overcome practical problems and challenges. Over the past 100 years, the company has built on a revolutionary legacy — creating industry-leading products, technologies, services and solutions," said Rob Hoenes, senior vice president of Caterpillar's Electrification + Energy Solutions division.

Taking center stage at the Caterpillar exhibit will be a 55,000-lbs. Cat® 972 Wheel Loader featuring a technical demonstrator **Extended Range Electrified Machine** hybrid

retrofit. The demonstrator maintains or exceeds performance similar to a diesel machine and does not require DC charging. The retrofit could eliminate the need for additional electrical infrastructure at job sites.

"What sets this demonstrator apart from other Cat battery electric machines is an additional power source," said Rob Janssen, vice president and general manager of Caterpillar's Electrification + Energy Solutions division. "In this case, it's a conventional diesel generator running AC power to a rectifier, which converts energy from AC to DC. The energy created is used to charge the battery, drive the machine or both."

Additional key features of the demonstrator:

- Cat machines nearing end-of-life can be rebuilt and repowered in a way that allows them to function as part of a reduced-carbon future.
- Can be driven on 100% zero emission battery power for several hours. For extended operation, the machine can operate on hybrid mode with electricity generated from an onboard gen set.
- An option for customers looking to lower emissions, but not ready to go all-in on battery electric.
- Charges overnight on a regular utility grid connection at 240V.

Visitors to the Caterpillar exhibit will also experience a virtual job site of the future showcasing examples of the infrastructure required to support electrified job sites, varying charging schedules, and the complexities of a job site powered by the full Caterpillar ecosystem.

Key technologies featured in the exhibit:

(continued on pg. 26)

Cat Command

A remote operating station on the show floor will allow attendees to operate Cat machines physically working at the Caterpillar Tinaja Hills Demonstration and Learning Center in Green Valley, Arizona, 445 miles away.

VisionLink®

The cloud-based software application is designed to take the guesswork out of fleet management by providing key insights to maximize performance — regardless of fleet size or equipment manufacturer. Actionable equipment performance data is delivered to a customer's desktop or mobile device to help customers make informed decisions geared toward analyzing performance and improving productivity.

"Our industry-leading digital capabilities convey a

distinct competitive advantage. Our customers have autonomous haul truck working 24/7 around the world and have moved nearly 9 billion tonnes," Hoenes added. "We also offer autonomous dozers, drills, wheel loaders and compactors. Our customers are using these technologies to increase the efficiency, output, safety — and ultimately, the value — of their operations."

Another exhibit feature, the **Centennial Corridor**, will allow visitors to experience the Caterpillar legacy first-hand. The company's first 10 decades will be represented, enabling attendees to recognize the significant role Caterpillar has played in building a better, more sustainable world and its contributions to society at large. CES 2025 runs from Tuesday, Jan. 7 through Friday, Jan. 10 at the Las Vegas Convention Center. The Caterpillar exhibit is in the center's West Hall, booth #6416. ▲



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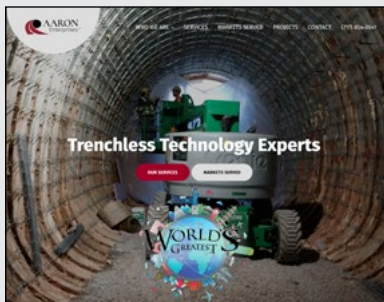
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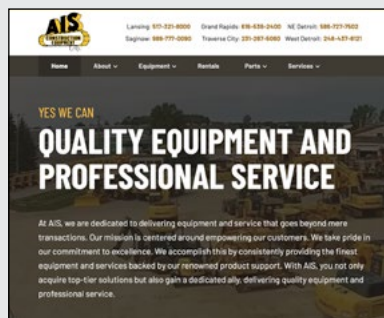


Aaron Enterprises

www.aaronenterprises.com

Established in 1976, Aaron Enterprises, Inc. has focused on trenchless solutions for the utility industry. As a specialty contractor/subcontractor practicing the various disciplines of trenchless technology, they have established a reputation for getting the job done.

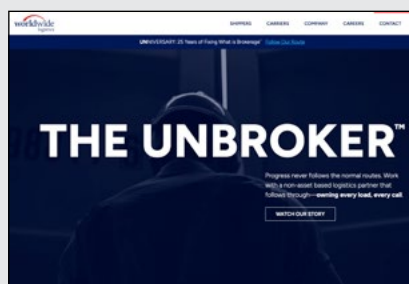
With over 45 years experience, Aaron Enterprises, Inc. has been an innovator in building trenchless projects, facing unique obstacles and challenges along the way.



AIS Construction Equipment

www.aisequip.com

The mission of AIS is to serve customers by helping them to become more profitable. The never-ending goal is to further improve the AIS reputation for parts and service support. AIS Construction Equipment Corporation, its subsidiaries and their employees serve contractors, municipalities and farmers throughout the state of Michigan and beyond.



Worldwide Logistics

www.worldwide-logistics.com

Specializing in the supply chain needs of pipeline contractors, this company offers comprehensive transportation management services across North America. Leveraging cutting-edge technology and a team of analytical supply chain professionals, the organization guarantees optimal synchronization of each step in the supply chain. Their holistic approach, honed through over two decades of industry experience, ensures that large machinery, pipe, and construction materials reach their destinations on time and within budget.



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