

Longtime Staker Parson Cos. Exec Mike Kurz Takes Over as 2017 Chair of AGC

AGC of Utah's 95th annual convention highlighted by myriad events; Jim Gramoll of Gramoll Construction honored with Eric W. Ryberg Award.

People from all facets of Utah's construction and design industry gathered January 19-21 at Little America Hotel in Salt Lake City for the 95th annual convention for the Associated General Contractors (AGC) of Utah.

The popular annual three-day event was highlighted by the installation of Mike Kurz – a longtime veteran of Ogden-based Staker Parson Companies – as the chapter's 2017 Chairman during the AGC Installation Banquet Jan. 21. Kurz takes over for Wadman Construction President Dave Hogan, and vowed to dedicate substantial time and energy into leading one of the largest and oldest associations in the Beehive State, founded in 1922.

"I appreciate working with Dave this past year and thank him for his leadership and how he's represented our association," said Kurz. "I owe a lot to this industry. I joined Staker Paving 38 years ago as a laborer...so many people and companies have stayed the same, which is remarkable. We (all) build complex projects – buildings, homes, highways, roads. The things we do on a daily basis, the people we touch in this industry is phenomenal...it's been a fabulous thing to watch over time. I thank you for the opportunity to serve."

Kurz talked about the merger of Staker Paving and JB Parson Companies into Staker Parson Companies in August 1995 when both firms were acquired by Oldcastle.

"To me, it's still a family business," said Kurz. "Many of my team members feel the same way. We've been allowed to run our



Mike Kurz, President of Ogden-based Staker Parson Cos. Southern Division, was installed as AGC's 2017 Chairman January 21. (photos by Dana Sohm)

businesses (the same); the true foundation of our success is people. I want to thank (AGC President/CEO) Rich Thorn and his fine team – they bring us all together to work through various issues."

Hogan expressed his appreciation to AGC members and staff for his experience as '16 Chair and vowed to continue to contribute to the association as Immediate Past President.

"This association is amazing," said Hogan. "As I traveled to various national AGC events last year, it was amazing to me how well we do (in Utah) with our elected officials and state agencies considering what other states go through with (prohibitive) technicalities and regulations. We're very fortunate to have people willing

to work with us and collaborate with us.

"This past year has been a good one," Hogan continued. "Our membership has grown and our retention is terrific. When we work together with elected state officials, construction works. It's amazing the companies we have in our state and their commitment to AGC and in helping things change in a positive way."

Hogan said the AGC either sponsored or participated in 140 events during the year, including the chapter's annual 'Community Giveback' program, where member firms donated money, time and other resources to a half dozen causes, including the Salt Lake City Fire Dept. and Honor Guard, The Road Home shelter in Salt Lake, Mitchell's Journey, the Children's

Justice Center in Cedar City, and Camp Kostopolous in Salt Lake.

"We've been doing this program 'officially' for the past five years – it's an actual line item in our operating budget," said Thorn. "At the beginning of each year we entertain proposals on who we can help through in-kind contributions, labor contributions, remodeling facilities for disabled people...the breadth and depth is across the board."

In addition to Kurz and Hogan, other 2017 AGC of Utah Executive Committee and Board Members include: Doug Welling, Jacobsen Construction – Vice Chair; John Trippi, Ames Construction – Secretary/Treasurer; Jim Golding, Geneva Rock Products – Highway Director; Brent Nielsen, Whitaker Construction – Highway Director; Troy Thompson, Okland Construction – Building Director; Sean Davis, Brahma Group – Building Director; Dan Pratt, Hughes General Contractors – Building Director; Joe Hurst, Tri-Hurst Construction – Southern Utah Director; Jim Gramoll, Gramoll Construction – National Building Governor; Bob Tempest, Tempest Enterprises – National Highway Governor.

Gramoll Earns Ryberg Award

Jim Gramoll was honored with the Chapter's highest individual honor – the Eric W. Ryberg Award – for his many years of loyal service to AGC of Utah. Gramoll served as AGC Chair in 2006 and has been an active member for more than two decades.

"There are so many great people in this industry – I look back at prior (Ryberg) award winners and they are such amazing people," said Gramoll. "My grandfather, Harry Clyde, I know he'd be proud of this moment, as is my father (Robert Gramoll) who passed away 10 years ago. They were great individuals. When I got into this business I was a newlywed and had just graduated from the (University of Utah). I had been interviewing for accounting jobs when my father called me one day, informed me that my older brother was leaving (Gramoll Construction) and asked if I wanted to take over the business since he was leaving it in five years. It was kind of out of the blue...but it turned out to be one



Jim Gramoll, President of Salt Lake-based Gramoll Construction, was presented with the Eric W. Ryberg Award during the AGC's Installation Banquet.

of the best decisions I ever made. There are a lot of challenges in what we do, but the good days far outweigh the bad days.

"It's fun to get to know the people in this industry and be part of the AGC," he added. "What we stand for is really amazing. Thank you for this award – it means so much to me. I don't know if I can get a higher recognition than that in my career."

"Jim is somebody I have looked up to, the way he handles himself and his company, and the genuine human being he is," said Hogan.

AGC Enjoying Good Economic Times

The Utah Chapter has gradually been adding to its membership since the recession set in nine years ago, according to Thorn, and currently stands at 512 members, it's highest number since the recession.

"The largest number I can recall is 525 members about 10 years ago," said Thorn. "We're also enjoying a 93% retention rate. Our goal is to be above 600 members in the next 18 months. We've rolled out some new programs, including a health insurance program that began in December with our partner Select Health. Not all AGC member companies will qualify for it, but we think it will be a terrific program."

Thorn said this year's convention

saw a spike in attendance from every event minus one, with total participation exceeding 2,400 people over the three days.

"Our membership is a reflection of their confidence in the state and the quality of the services that AGC provides."

Labor Shortage Remains Top Concern

One of the breakout sessions at the convention – which was attended by more than 75 industry professionals – featured a presentation from Sydney Jacques of Jacques & Associates and Katie Kourianos of Intrepid Group – both Salt Lake-based public relations firms who have been commissioned to help AGC and its members get the word out on potentially lucrative careers in the construction industry.

From many perspectives, both within and outside the construction industry, the opinions about the 'physical work ethic' of Millennials and their desire to seek employment (or a career) in the construction industry are wide-ranging.

Jacques currently serves as Chair for the AGC's Workforce Development committee and said she has been working on this topic for three years, with the AGC having a booth each of those years at a Summer Counselor Conference. Last year AGC secured a booth front and center >>



and secured four minutes for Hogan to speak about the merits of the industry.

“He did a fantastic job explaining that the AGC wants ‘fidgety kids, ones who can’t sit still,’” said Jacques. “Counselors are basing their success on the kids that go to college. We’re trying to open a paradigm that there are so many more opportunities (for high school graduates). The construction industry is aiming for that gap in the middle. Some kids will go to college...others will sit in their parents’ basement and play video games all day. The construction industry is looking for kids in the middle.”

Kourianos, who serves as Director of Public Involvement for Intrepid, said her firm is working to inform, increase awareness, change perceptions and

aid in recruiting the next generation of construction workers.

Counselors at the high school and even junior high levels are considered to be a significant target for these efforts, as they in general encourage and steer students towards the path to college, despite the fact that many don’t want that path, nor can afford it. Misconceptions about the industry abound, and it’s up to construction firms to funnel resources into recruitment efforts.

Kurz made a poignant comment to the group about a recent experience he had with a new employee who abruptly quit after two days on the job.

“We hired a young man and put him in the field. As he was exiting our office, I pulled him over because it bothered me

that he was leaving so soon,” said Kurz. The young man told him “I just didn’t fit in...it felt like the crews were mean to me, they shouted orders, and I just didn’t like it.”

“So I spoke to him and asked if there was anything I could do,” said Kurz. “He had made up his mind to leave the industry. As he left, I thought about all the work we’re trying to do to bring people in...and really we need to change our culture. We need to make their first experience memorable and enjoyable for them to continue. When you think of the new generation, we’ve got to keep them engaged and challenged. We have to change the way we do business. We have to make ways to make them feel a part of it. I don’t know all the answers, but doing nothing about it is not working.” ■

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