

Finding the Way Back, New York Style

In New York City, Building Trades Employers Association knows the show must go on.

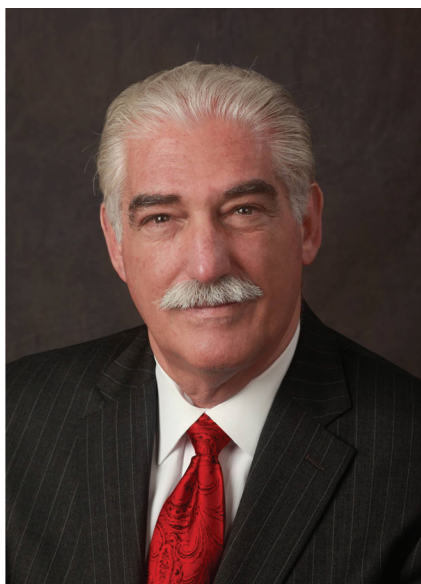
Real estate, new construction, building codes, safety: It's a complex network integral to commerce, economic development, and quality of life. Nowhere does it get more complicated than New York City, where a constant swirl of new builds and public and private improvement projects are part of the city's bustle. Contractors, trade unions, and bureaucracy engage in a not-always-happy dance.

Since 1903, Building Trades Employers Association (BTEA) has been a reactive and proactive mediator and motivator, helping NYC find its way.

Lou Coletti, BTEA's president and CEO, recalls the rebuilding process after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He remembers Superstorm Sandy's devastation. No less frightening and unexpected was the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even before the masses took shelter behind closed doors, Coletti and his team were meeting with the governor's office on a plan to minimize impacts and keep construction moving forward, anticipating industry losses in the billions.

"Whenever there's a disaster, all it takes is two phone calls, and everyone we need



Lou Coletti, President and CEO

is at the table working on the common challenge," Coletti says.

The resulting plan centered on convincing the government to keep public works projects on track, then doing everything possible to ensure the safety of contractors and workers. Mobile vaccine units were sent to job sites, masks and social distancing became the norm, and families were provided with a website full of information to help improve the number of workers on the job.

A SILVER LINING

In its offices overlooking midtown Manhattan, pre-pandemic, the BTEA conference room was overwhelmed by attendance at monthly safety meetings. City agencies, contractors, and union reps came together without animosity to discuss common concerns.

"Everyone wants to be around that table. One of the main concerns is insurance rates. We probably have the highest in the country," Coletti says. "It holds back development. We work on safety issues all the time because the safer we are, the lower those costs are, and that's good for us all."

When everyone is facing the same risks in a disaster, it puts new emphasis on working together.

"Everyone can now see how important it is to expedite the city's approval process—for city and state projects, and for the private sector—to rebuild our economy. It can be done without sacrificing quality or safety," Coletti says. "Now is the time to do it."

BUILDING FORWARD

BTEA also made a huge investment in an economic report and website, RebuildRenewNY.com, to address the dual issues of public health and economic



development. The response was tremendous: With over 1.5 million website visitors, the campaign targeted New York State and New York City elected officials, developers, the real estate industry, and the construction industry. This was precisely what was needed amid relentless fear and uncertainty.

BTEA scrutinizes state government affairs that impact the construction industry and heads to Washington D.C., as needed, to lobby for legislation such as the \$3.5 trillion infrastructure bill passed in 2020.

It's a win-win when the industry that drives economic development is also the fourth highest-paying employment sector in the city. When BTEA ensures a construction workforce, it builds the road to recovery and renewal.

