

## TABLE OF EXPERTS

## WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

**STEPHANIE GREEN**

*vice president and CFO*  
Atlas Iron Works

Meet Stephanie Green, a St. Louis native whose journey into the trades ignited at sixteen. Raised amid St. Louis's vibrant construction scene, Stephanie drew inspiration from her family's influence in the industry. Despite entrepreneurial uncertainties, she pursued her passion for trades.

Armed with an associate degree in Political Science/Government, Stephanie pursued further studies at Lindenwood University, earning a BS in Criminal Justice/Social Science, an M.B.A., and Supply Chain Management. Her academic journey reflected a thirst for knowledge and a knack for practical solutions.

Joining Atlas Iron Works five years ago, Stephanie revitalized the company with modern strategies, blending tradition with innovation. Her commitment extends beyond the company, impacting the steel industry and communities around her. Renowned for her hands-on approach, Stephanie remains deeply engaged in Atlas Iron Works and AISC Work Force Development Committee, driving progress, inclusion, diversity, and sustainability.

**MEREDITH GREENE**

*director of human resources and administration*  
BEX Construction Services

Meredith Greene, director of human resources and administration at BEX Construction Services, has been integral to BEX's eight-fold growth and success since 2019. Greene helps drive processes, systems and organizational development for BEX to align action with desired results. She leads the human resources department and staffing for rapid growth, organizes the firm's community engagement and giving, and strengthens the firm's thriving culture.

Greene previously led operations for retail stores in 14 markets on the west coast. She serves on the boards of the Maryland Heights Economic Development Commission and the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) of Metropolitan St. Louis. She also co-chairs the BOMA Golf Prize Committee, serves on two Maryland Heights Chamber of Commerce committees and volunteers with the Child Advocacy Center of Northeast Missouri. She earned her bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies with emphases in political science, history and communications from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

**ALICE C. BENNER**

*principal of McClain Construction and COO of Artori Group*  
Artori Group/McClain Construction

Alice C. Benner is a Principal of McClain Construction and COO of Artori Group.

Alice's more than fifteen years of experience began as a property manager of seventeen mixed-use properties across the St. Louis metro area. Succeeding this role, she became a financial analyst at a local developer overseeing new acquisitions and presenting strategic development recommendations to the investment committee. Alice continued her career as a licensed financial advisor to high-net-worth families nationwide, helping identify investment opportunities in hard asset classes such as real estate, energy, and natural resources.

Alice has a passion for mentorship and actively recruits talent via Artori Group's internship program. She has been a mentor for CREW St. Louis for many years running. Alice regularly speaks at industry events focused on ensuring transparency and collaboration in our community specially as it relates to redevelopment and adaptive reuse.

**LYNN GOESSLING**

*partner*  
Armstrong Teasdale law firm,  
Financial and Real Estate Practice

Lynn Goessling, a partner in Armstrong Teasdale's finance and real estate group, has over 25 years of experience in commercial real estate and business law. Lynn represents a diverse range of clients, from developers and landowners to privately held businesses and public companies. Active in all sectors of the commercial real estate industry she is often called upon to counsel clients in connection with projects in the St. Louis region and around the country. Lynn is a long-standing member of Commercial Real Estate Women (CREW), a professional association for women in real estate with over 14,000 members, holding various leadership roles for both the St. Louis Chapter and at the national level. She has earned countless accolades for her commitment to mentoring and advancing professional women. Lynn is a St. Louis native and serves on the Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority of the County of St. Louis Board of Commissioners.

**ELIZABETH ZUCKER**

*president, St. Louis Region*  
Clayco

As President of the St. Louis Business Unit, Elizabeth oversees all aspects of the local operations, including business development, marketing and sales, and serves as a mentor to the cross-functional teams within the business units working alongside her. She is most passionate about people and building places for individuals to bring their best ideas and be their best selves. She spent the first 25 years of her career at Herman Miller and then Interior Investments of St. Louis within the contract furniture industry creating great places to work and heal inside of buildings. At Clayco, she is doubling down on the next 25 years, inspiring the believers and the builders to continue growing their businesses in the St. Louis region.

Elizabeth currently serves as the Board President for Arch Grants, a non-profit committed to building the future economy in St. Louis by attracting and retaining entrepreneurs to the St. Louis Community.

By Bonita Tillman

Women hoping to excel in traditionally male-dominated career fields, like commercial real estate (CRE) and construction, must start early and gain as much knowledge as they can to succeed.

St. Louis Business Journal Publisher Robert Bobroff recently moderated a conversation with five of the region's top female CRE and construction professionals about "Women in CRE/Construction."

**Panelists included:**

- **Lynn Goessling**, partner, Armstrong Teasdale law firm, Financial and Real Estate Practice;
- **Stephanie Green**, vice president and CFO, Atlas Iron Works;
- **Alice C. Benner**, principal of McClain Construction and COO of Artori Group, Artori Group/McClain Construction;
- **Meredith Greene**, director of human resources and administration, BEX Construction Services; and
- **Elizabeth Zucker**, president, St. Louis Region, Clayco.

**BOBROFF:** What construction / commercial real estate opportunities do you see within the St. Louis market?

**BENNER:** At McClain Construction and Artori Group, we continue to see a lot of adaptive reuse projects that are driven by the older stock of buildings that St. Louis naturally has. These specific properties have a lot of rich history and good bones, but they're also tired. Our teams come in to make them functional again with new HVAC, windows, roofs and other capital improvements. We're breathing new life into aesthetics and making these properties beautiful again. Choosing to take on an adaptive reuse project is driven a lot by the cost of construction and interest rates. If choosing to do a ground-up project, it could be easier and have fewer surprises, but it's also much more expensive in comparison.

**GREENE:** We've seen partnerships develop that bring more amenities to existing buildings, for instance a gym that is two doors away and other cooperative relationships. Are you seeing those too in renovating buildings to deliver Class A amenities?

**BENNER:** Absolutely! What we're seeing is the price point of Class A is pricing out what our typical St. Louis tenant – a small



"One interesting thing I've seen is an uptick in joint ventures among developers. These create opportunities for our clients to pool their equity investments, diversify their portfolios and even share knowledge going into areas they might not have otherwise been developing."

**LYNN GOESSLING**  
Armstrong Teasdale law firm,  
Financial Real Estate Practice

or medium-sized business – can afford. The average business in St. Louis has fewer than 20 employees, and if you look at just the demographics, those types of businesses need to stay nimble with what they're committing to on a monthly or yearly nut of an expense. Their highest expenses are payroll and rent. And if you can provide a beautiful functional space that becomes a marketing, recruiting, and retention tool for their business at a price they can afford and feel comfortable with, those are the best projects. It's rewarding and sustainable.

**GOESSLING:** St. Louis is also ripe with opportunities for redevelopment projects in underutilized areas. I've been involved with the St. Louis County Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority (LCRA) as a board member since 2021. The LCRA, along with other economic development agencies, provide assistance to attract developers and implement community driven redevelopment projects in underutilized areas of St. Louis City and St. Louis County. There are some attractive incentives for redevelopment in these areas such as tax credits and remediation funding.

**BOBROFF:** What issues are you seeing with companies facing increasing construction costs and interest rates, and what's the outlook on such costs for the remainder of 2024?

**GOESSLING:** Alice mentioned construction costs and interest rates impacting projects. Those are big factors that are telling of the industry's need to be more creative in addressing those issues. We're working with our clients to structure loans and their equity

investments to reach the debt coverage ratios required by lenders. One interesting thing I've seen is an uptick in joint ventures among developers. These create opportunities for our clients to pool their equity investments, diversify their portfolios and even share knowledge going into areas they might not have otherwise been developing.

We can't do a lot about most material and labor costs. We're working with our clients to mitigate any additional issues that might further increase those costs or cause other unexpected costs and delays. I've had the opportunity to help our clients on real estate transactions across the country in negotiating everything from lease terms to construction and design contracts.

Lately I've come across long lead times for some materials like electric panels and switch gears. We're really having to be more thoughtful about the timing on these materials upfront and factor the lead time into the deal. For example, some of those materials need to be ordered upward of 18 months out, which might be before you even have your plans completed or permitted. This can have a real impact on how we structure the deal documentation. It's a domino effect from there if you have a delay, so we're being more proactive about how we manage a delay if it happens.

For example, if a client is delayed in occupying a new project, that could potentially cause them to hold over on their current lease. We're seeing more discussion upfront about the real potential for holdovers and negotiating extensions for those current leases.

As for the outlook for such costs, the increases have been high, and I don't think there's going to be a dramatic reduction, but there are projections indicating that increases are tapering a bit, closer to pre-pandemic levels.

**ZUCKER:** During the pandemic, we expanded CDC (Consolidated Distribution Company), a Clayco company that sources, procures, and expedites interior finishes, FF&E and MEP equipment. CDC allows Clayco to leverage better lead times and pricing with material manufacturers, giving us a significant strategic advantage, allowing more control over the project timeline. Post-pandemic, we are seeing the benefits, especially in our industrial business unit, when procuring electrical switch gear and substations in the pursuit of mission-critical projects nationally.

**GREEN:** I'm a structural steel fabricator, so for companies like us, material, labor and freight costs and interest rates pose significant challenges. Steel prices have been volatile due to supply chain disruptions, tariffs and fluctuating demands over the last several years. When material costs increase, it directly impacts the overall project budget and our profitability. Skilled labor shortages have driven up wages, increasing overall project expenses. The cost of freight for steel has gone up across the board, therefore posing other obstacles to constantly combat, as there still is a shortage of truckers. Higher interest rates can make borrowing more expensive; we are at a disadvantage here as we self-finance all our projects. This is due to AIA billing concepts.

It is difficult to reinvest capital when the cost of borrowing capital is too high. The outlook for construction is uncertain, and economic conditions, government policies and global events can all influence these factors. Strategic planning, cost management and flexibility to adapt and pivot your business helps you remain solvent during uncertain market conditions. What I've noticed is the lead times with structural steel are decent compared to prior years. Overall, our industry is strong and filled with hard-working people who are essential and know what it means to keep communities thriving. Steel has been able to bounce back where other trades have not been as successful. We also didn't get to pass a lot of our market impact expenses off to our clients for the overages we endured like the other trades. It's very different when you're the second subcontractor on a project; you don't get that luxury. It usually impacts us first and then

trickles down like a domino effect before people realize it or start to believe it.

**BENNER:** Something positive that came out of all of it is that now people lead with a budget, whereas before they were closely held to the vest. The tenant or developer was running point on the budget as opposed to the architect, designer, and contractor coming to the table with the budget and being more collaborative about it. Those are the projects we're still seeing go forward positively and that show up on time and on budget. That collaboration and transparency were needed in our industry, and that's what the pandemic helped push forward for us.

**BOBROFF:** What is Clayco's role and commitment to the St. Louis region, and why is St. Louis so important to your industry?

**ZUCKER:** Clayco was founded in St. Louis, and we have over 1,900 employees who call it "home." Almost half of these employees travel on a weekly basis to our jobsites all over the country. Our goal is simple - to create more opportunities for our employees to sleep in their own beds and positively contribute to the St. Louis region. Admittedly, St. Louis is not always the easiest or most profitable place to work, but as a region, we need to come together. We have challenges in the region, a declining population and a practical urban plan to name a few. We also need elected officials willing to actively work with businesses to solve real problem.

I'm sure everybody saw the article on the front page of The Wall Street Journal about the St. Louis "doom loop." As the article states, it is not for the light-hearted to get out of this vicious cycle, but with the right urban planning, it is possible. If you look at 6 Cardinal Way and specifically Spark's co-working space, you'll see an excellent example of what can be; it's beautiful and it feels safe. Big local companies like Clayco need to double down in a market like St. Louis, and that's exactly what we're doing. We want our employees to feel safe and be proud of where the company was founded. Honestly, if you're not willing to build in a market that's difficult and take on challenging projects with complex problems, St. Louis isn't the place for you. Our business is growing exponentially outside of St. Louis, yet we are committed to growing it in the St. Louis market. A perfect example is our new St. Louis headquarters building.

**BOBROFF:** What unique challenges and opportunities do women face in the construction industry, and how have these evolved over time?

**GREEN:** It's widely acknowledged that the construction industry has been historically male dominated. This presented numerous challenges for women due to limited access to leadership roles, unequal pay and doubts or skepticism about our physical capabilities. Women have faced many uphill challenges in our industry and have successfully carved out their place in this field. I've worked in construction since I was 16, but growing up, I didn't know that I could be in a leadership position like I am now in the trade industry. I was not encouraged to join a trade or pursue a leadership role growing up, it's just

"Strategic planning, cost management and flexibility to adapt and pivot your business helps you remain solvent during uncertain market conditions."

**STEPHANIE GREEN**  
Atlas Iron Works

not something that was taught at school, or I was exposed to, and I wasn't aware that trades were an avenue for me. I just kind of stumbled upon it. In today's construction industry, there is a noticeable shift towards promoting inclusivity within the trades, collectively as a whole. We are breaking down barriers, and it's been humbling and intriguing to watch them come down.

Men and women are reaching a point where we can appreciate and respect each other's diversity, perspectives, abilities and skills. It's crucial to recognize that women may excel in areas where men may not, and vice versa. By embracing these differences, we can collectively propel the industry even further. Technology has undoubtedly played a significant role in the evolution of the construction industry. From what

I've observed, the landscape has changed considerably. Our industry has transformed in many ways, such as increased focus on education regarding workplace diversity, harassment policies and other related issues. I think women can feel safe in construction now, where it might not have always been such a safe space before.

**GREENE:** I am a mom with two young daughters who come to job sites with me occasionally. They know our superintendents by name, our superintendents know them, they're in our office. Whether or not they want to go into construction, I want to

founded CCDI in 2015 in response to the aftermath in Ferguson, Missouri. Our program provides young adults in St. Louis the support to overcome barriers, pair them in long-term mentorship, offers financial aid and creates opportunities for job placement, not just at Clayco, but with our competitors and subcontractors.

Going into the trades is a secure career path. First-year electricians and carpenters make a great income, learn a skilled trade and have upward mobility. Many high school students have no aspirations for a four-year college education, and if they go into one of the construction trades, there are reimbursement opportunities for them to get a two-year associate degree through St. Louis Community College's workforce program.

Every month we host a "Saturday Academy" where we expose students to career paths in construction. Each session focuses on soft-skill and career development preparation, hands-on learning projects or community service activities, professional option and trade option guest speakers, field trips and site visits to construction projects to learn about companies and career opportunities in the St. Louis area.

CCDI is an independent organization within Clayco made possible by the generosity and support of our incredible community of subcontractors and competitors.

**GREENE:** And these are great jobs. If we're not feeding the trades as a general contractor, we're the ones that end up suffering. Our customers and communities suffer because we don't have the workforce. It just doesn't work. We're based in Maryland Heights, and I live in Maryland Heights, where the city's economic development board and staff foster partnerships within the Pattonville School District, with Ameren, Boeing and Mercy, and they put these kids on a four-year career path, which is great for some. But it doesn't fit others, and that's why we want to take part in making sure these students have exposure to the trades even before high school. When we welcome an elementary class on a field trip, show them construction in action and give them a chance to talk with craft workers, they're going to think it's the coolest thing in the world. The experience plants a seed they may never forget.

**BOBROFF:** Since communication and relationships are integral to the collaborative nature of construction, what differences and similarities do you see in female and male



educate them on what it can look like for a woman in the field and in the office. My oldest daughter is an avid artist and loves Legos, which calm her and enhance her focus. All the things that children do can play a part in our industry, and the more we can expose our children – both girls and boys – the more we can feed prospective team members to our trades and contractors. We don't know what we like until we're exposed to it, but if that exposure never happens, that opportunity is missed.

**ZUCKER:** Are you familiar with the Construction Career Development Initiative (CCDI), which brings diversity to the design and construction industry by mentoring and exposing minority/underrepresented and unemployed men and women to career development in construction? Clayco

## communication styles?

**GREENE:** We know men and women think and communicate differently. Typically we'll have a conversation with men that we work with, who are in our lives as co-workers or friends, and they offer a lot of statistical data and facts. If you talk to a woman, there are more frequent personal conversations with more anecdotal information. It's the way our brains work. In office conversations, one of our male engineers may be saying the exact same thing that I'm saying but it sounds different, and the person receiving that information benefits from hearing what's communicated in different ways. When we all work together and get used to each other, we're better able to interpret and understand with synergistic results.

Most people have done personality surveys to understand what type of communicator you are, which helps to facilitate those conversations and translate information. And it's important that we do communicate differently because our brains work differently. So if we can get that information out of someone's brain to that other person and it's digested and understood, then we can eliminate those

barriers and reach our ultimate goal.

**BOBROFF:** Can you share examples of successful strategies or initiatives implemented within your company to promote gender diversity and inclusion in traditionally male-dominated roles?

**GREEN:** We've always been diverse. We are in North St. Louis; it's not a heavily

desired area for people to want to work because of the crime. We're a union shop that is always looking for anyone highly skilled that wants a career, not just a job. As far as our hiring practices are concerned, we do blind interviews because I don't really care so much about what's on a piece of paper. I want to get you in front of me to see what you're all about and if we're a good fit for each other. What do your goals for five, 10 or 20 years look like? We're not hiring temporarily, we're hiring permanently. When I get referrals, I invite them for an interview so I can get to know them. It shouldn't matter what their name, gender or ethnicity is. I leave our hiring process blind until I'm interested, and then you must do your due diligence from there.

We have started implementing a leadership development program, and I am looking to promote from within my organization. If you're not nurturing the people that helped get your foundation started, you're doing yourself a disservice. They really get the company culture because they helped create it. We are tailoring that towards men and women and diversifying that with flexible work arrangements. I make sure our employees can get their kids off the bus. It's very important to me that they have parental figures at home. Employees start early, but I let them off 10 minutes early to get their kids. I think a work-life balance must be there first because if we're not nurturing and taking care of the people around us or ourselves, then you don't really get a whole lot done and you don't see change. You see complacency, and that's something I'm combating all the time. We are up to four women in our company now, which we've never had, so it's an amazing accomplishment. But as Meredith

said, we communicate differently, so I've had to change the way I view that dynamic and approach.

**GREENE:** Our company will celebrate its 10th year in June. We have 25% female employees and 50% of our company's leadership is women. During Women in Construction Week, we participated in a seminar and talked about issues that have arisen in other companies. This is my first construction employer, and our discussion focused on the cultural aspect of women in construction and the fact that women are still not widely accepted. But that never has been part of our BEX culture. We continue to bring more women in because there is great value in what both men and women bring - both complementary to getting our goals accomplished. If you create a culture that welcomes everyone, people will come. We're focused on getting the right talent to get each job done and to build a collaborative team. If you have to change the culture, then change it. It's not always easy, but the Constitution wasn't written one time. It's a process. Don't lose faith.

**GOESSLING:** Armstrong Teasdale's Women's Inclusion Network provides mentorship within the firm and can be a great sounding board for women lawyers. We provide both educational programming and social events to strengthen relationships internally and identify ways to better support our clients. These mentorship and leadership training opportunities are really important components to preparing the next generation of leaders so that ultimately, women have more seats at the commercial real estate table.

The legal industry is similarly a traditionally



# MCLAIN

Construction

Providing quality construction services for over 40 years.



male-dominated field, though I'm excited to see some of those shifts at the law school level with women now making up the majority of law school classes. From a gender diversity standpoint, we are dedicated to ensuring that our women have the support to "do it all" – personally and professionally. You don't have to choose between family and career, and we pride ourselves on giving people the balance and flexibility to do that.

**BOBROFF:** What keeps women from careers in construction and how is this changing?

**GREENE:** It goes back to exposure. About 10.8% of the total construction population is female, and that's only a 2% increase since 2010. With our diligence and efforts to expose young women to construction, we can raise that level of participation. Like Stephanie, many people that I know started within their family's construction enterprises. I had a different career path and when I looked to move back home to St. Louis from the west coast in 2019, it was a family friend who sent me to see Randy Bueckendorf, the founder of BEX.

My skill set was developed in a three-state retail operation where customer service, creativity and responsiveness were key, so I brought something different to our organization. I love people, and I can learn anything. Most people have that capacity if they are fed the information and have a drive and a passion to succeed and contribute. So bringing the right people in and having a vision that is shared with everyone is super important.

I implore my daughters to do whatever they want; be whatever women they want to become. I would welcome them taking the construction path because the opportunities are abundant. By sharing experiences, we help everyone grow smarter as we ourselves learn and grow. The more information and knowledge we can get, the better and stronger we'll be. We've got to keep our eyes open, both men and women, and look for passion in that person who is hungry and humble and who wants to contribute as members of the team, whatever industry you're in.

Mentorship is huge. In my career as I've hit certain milestones that I want to focus on and work for, I have found my job is not done until I look back and find who else is waiting for the gift of mentorship I just received. How do we bring others along the path of growth? It's not just exposure, it's those opportunities and pivotal moments.

**GOESSLING:** A big part of the challenge is to make young people aware of these opportunities. We've talked about some of the programs that companies are offering in grade school and high school, but internships at the college level are a big component of that process as well. Organizations are realizing that it's important to connect young people to these internship opportunities that can start them down these career paths.

I've been fortunate to be heavily involved in CREW St. Louis, the local chapter of a national organization for women in commercial real estate, for a very long time. One of the wonderful projects I've been involved in is the CREW 101 program. We bring in professionals in all the different industry disciplines, including architecture, engineering, property management, construction, law, accounting, banking and brokerage, and have them talk about how they got to where they are with a group of college students. From there, those students are free to set up meetings and network with these professionals. It has been a very successful program, and many internships have come out of it, which is so satisfying to see.

Sometimes these college kids are just trying to figure out their major and have no idea that these opportunities are out there. It is really impactful for them to hear how other people have gotten there even if that path has not been linear. They find that they don't have to decide when they're 12 years old that they want to be an architect.

**GREEN:** Perceived gender stereotypes still exist today, but as we change the perceptions, this will get better over time. Most youths change their minds multiple times, which is natural when figuring out what they want to be when they grow up. I advocate for shadowing experiences to help individuals explore their interests. We've invited students from Rankin and other technical schools to job shadow. However, during winter, it might not be as appealing due to the cold or the heat of summer and the nature of our work in extreme conditions. We speak at elementary, middle and high schools to draw more attention to our industry and let everyone know we're here and waiting for them. The construction industry is making strides towards greater gender diversity and inclusion. Ongoing efforts are needed to address remaining barriers and create more equitable and inclusive environments for women to have the full buy in and full effect of having more women in construction. I've partnered with

"There are a ton [construction companies] that employ people here and do work nationally. What comes out of that is the innovation that is then taken across the country in construction, whether it's technology, materials and more."

**ALICE C. BENNER**  
Artori Group/McClain Construction



AISC to bring additional awareness, and the organization is making tremendous strides to level the playing field for everyone who wants to be a part of our industry.

**BOBROFF:** How does St. Louis stand out in the construction and commercial real estate industry compared on a national level?

**BENNER:** I wonder how many people realize how many huge construction companies have headquarters here and were founded here -- Arco, Clayco, CRG, Brinkmann and McCarthy, to name a few. There are a ton that employ people here and do work nationally. What comes out of that is the innovation that is then taken across the country in construction, whether it's technology, materials and more.

**GOESSLING:** For being a flyover state filled with corn and soybean fields, that's incredible. We also have an amazing logistics concentration, which is a huge factor. I do a lot of national distribution warehouse development and leasing work and you cannot pick a better location that has a convergence of highways than what we have here in the St. Louis region. We have access to air, road, sea and rail transportation and some of the lowest shipping costs anywhere in the country. Although our cost of living went up a little, we're still in the top 25 cities for quality of life, which is why a lot of people stay and or come back.

**GREENE:** How could you not love St. Louis though? We even have a free Zoo and so many other public amenities that are accessible to all.

**ZUCKER:** Everything you said was positive. We all fall into the trap of being negative and are quick to point out what's wrong with St. Louis and forget about what's right. My favorite part about St. Louis is if you want to be introduced to a decision maker or know what you need, you can get there because there's only a degree of separation. That doesn't work in many markets. People here are so open-minded and friendly and they genuinely want to help. I don't know a better place to grow a business than in St. Louis.

**GREENE:** I think moving away from St. Louis helped me develop a greater appreciation for the advantages of St. Louis. I was born and raised in St. Louis, went to Mizzou where I got my degree in political science, history and communication. Before I started moving to Europe and the east and west coasts, I wanted to lobby for additional funding in public schools to support arts education and ended up on the East Coast, which was beautiful. Europe was amazing with so much history, food and travel, and it was family oriented.

Then life on the West Coast was awesome. But returning to St. Louis, I appreciated that it is a community, a big, small town where you can get to know and collaborate with other helpful people. And the charm of going to our Zoo is so amazing compared with the much smaller zoo in Seattle that costs \$30 a person. We get to work with subcontractors that all know each other and help each other get the job done. We can accomplish what we need to based on relationships. Other markets cannot deliver the quality of construction labor that we have here.

There is a work ethic and creative thinking here that matches the skills and knowledge among so many dedicated contractors, subcontractors, union construction workers and suppliers that is good for our region and enables growth. I am grateful to be raising my children here.

**BENNER:** That's created such a great community. We have fantastic restaurants. We have theaters, community parks, the St. Louis Zoo and the Aquarium. There are all these amazing things and endless choices of schools here, whether you want to go to private or public school.

What we don't have is the diversity of housing like townhomes. That piece is missing. As we go back to the creative financing conversation and joint ventures, I think an area of opportunity for St. Louis to grow or change our landscape is going to be the diversity of housing.

**GREENE:** That'll come, especially when we see other sectors of the market slow down. That is an opportunity that is being discussed, and we all agree it needs to happen. It not only requires bringing together the right investors, developers and builders, but a lot of community input and responsiveness to

expressed needs.

**GREEN:** I recently came across an inspiring article about a couple investing their own resources into the community, just like us. They're ordinary individuals, rolling up their sleeves and building homes, leading by example. We need more of this grassroots initiative because relying solely on the City of St. Louis to solve all our issues isn't realistic. As influential members of our community, we should take a more active role, organizing cleanup days and similar events. I also think it's essential for the City of St. Louis to engage with businesses like ours and collaborate to enhance the city's appeal. With my business located in the North Side, this cause is particularly close to my heart. By focusing on improving infrastructure, we can pave the way for positive change. Our environment shapes our experiences, and addressing issues like broken windows and litter sets a positive precedent for future development. Together, through grassroots efforts and partnerships with local businesses and the city, we can make St. Louis the best city around.

**ZUCKER:** I think it's our responsibility. It's easy to push it off on elected officials

and complain about the status quo, but ultimately, we all live here. As leaders, it's our responsibility to drive change.

**BOBROFF:** How do you go about recruiting top talent in the St. Louis area?

**ZUCKER:** Until I joined Clayco in January, I did not understand the culture. I worked with businesses to communicate their values and culture through interior space for 25 years, and I am absolutely floored by Clayco's culture. It is palpable within our spaces. I would describe it as an entrepreneurial, energetic community of hardworking, driven individuals with positive attitudes and a genuine desire to collaborate and win together. We are committed to safety, quality, diversity and giving back to the communities we serve in an incredibly authentic and meaningful way. The entrepreneurial spirit within a business of this scale is unheard of in my experience, especially within the construction industry. How did Clayco build such a unique culture? It embodies its founder and Executive Chairman Bob Clark. He is a caring, competitive, transparent and incredibly generous entrepreneurial leader, a true visionary who speaks the truth and cares about the people at Clayco and the

communities we serve.

We go about recruiting top talent in the St. Louis area by sharing our culture. Bob is the very best at it. If he met one of you at a networking event or sat next to you on an airplane and struck up a conversation and saw you as a fit for Clayco, he would find a way to get you there. And on the off chance you didn't engage, two years from when you said no, he'd circle back to you. He is relentless in his acquisition for top talent, and that permeates throughout the entire organization.

Clayco is a generous employer and during the pandemic, we couldn't wait for everybody to physically be back in the office together. We built a commercial kitchen and hired a chef to prepare a healthy lunch every day for all employees. Whatever is not eaten is given to the community. I feel like you get back tenfold when you invest in your workforce, so it's part of my responsibility to make sure our culture is well known in this market. If it were, I don't know why anybody would ever work for another builder. Clayco has more than 3,500 people who want to achieve, but not at the expense of another individual. They're humble, they're honest, they're open



# ATLAS IRON WORKS

Est. 1922

The Resilience of Steel, The Passion of Craftsmanship, For Over a Century.

## OUR SERVICES

- ✓ Industrial Platforms / Mezzanines
- ✓ Stairs, Ladders, Rail, Racking, Support Frames
- ✓ Residential, Commercial, Industrial Structural Steel
- ✓ Material Processing
- ✓ Custom Structural Fabrication
- ✓ Pre-Engineered Steel Building Systems
- ✓ Steel Plate and Connection Materials
- ✓ And So Much More

FOR A QUOTE CONTACT US AT [BIDS@ATLASIRONWORKS.COM](mailto:BIDS@ATLASIRONWORKS.COM)  
OR GIVE US A CALL AT (314) 383-7200  
PLEASE LIKE AND FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK OR LINKEDIN!

[atlasironworks.com](http://atlasironworks.com)




## RISE TOGETHER.

# CLAYCO RISING

Encompassing over 30 years of evolving diversity and inclusion programming, **CLAYCO RISING** compiles initiatives together to enhance commitment to drive lasting, equitable change and challenge industry standards. We will rise above to bring positive change within our industry by building a diverse, respectful and safe workplace for all.

BY WORKING TOGETHER, THERE'S NO LIMIT TO HOW HIGH YOU CAN RISE WITH CLAYCO.

[claycorising.com](http://claycorising.com)



“Our business is so collaborative, it would never ever work to be out of the office. The average person is not as productive working from home, and better ideas come from collaborating and talking to other people.”

**ELIZABETH ZUCKER**  
Clayco

and they communicate. I just feel fortunate to have found Clayco for the last chapter of my career.

**GREENE:** What do you think has enabled Clayco to build that culture while growing exponentially?

**ZUCKER:** Clayco is non-geographical, so we go wherever our clients take us. We are nomads by nature, so we have a bit of a different strategy. Where we've opened physical offices is where we have concentrations of talent, and we want to curate our culture in a larger, more meaningful fashion. We seed these offices with tenured employees to allow for our culture to organically permeate them. Our Phoenix office is a great example. We had five employees three years ago and list 350 this year. The culture is really similar to Chicago and St. Louis with some local nuances. A handful of people relocated there willingly and became stewards of our culture.

Another way we maintain our culture is through our director of Company Culture who has been at Clayco almost 30 years and is specifically responsible for the curation of our culture. Some examples of what she brings to life within Clayco are that every time a baby's born, she sends out an announcement, and we have cake on the first of every month to celebrate everyone's birthday within the enterprise.

**BENNER:** We celebrate and respect the individual. As an owner, you want your folks to feel like they own the place because

they're going to work that much harder. But the reality is a lot of people want to come to work, do their job, and go be an individual, whether that is being a wife, mother, volunteer, or coach. Respecting that piece of your team is important. We give employees 40 hours of company time every year to learn something about what they're doing now or what they aspire to be. It could be learning something about the guy down the hall from you so you can communicate better with him or learning a new skill. We also allow 40 hours a year to give back to the community, your church, your kid's school, or to help your neighbor do something to fill your bucket. It makes people feel much more connected when they're in the office doing the work we do.

**ZUCKER:** We had a young designer fresh out of college who came to work after amassing about \$100,000 in student loans. She went to Bob Clark and asked if the company had a loan repayment benefit. Bob went to the shareholders and put together a student loan program for Clayco employees because that's how much he cares. I think that's how you attract top talent; you listen to your people and identify the pain points. Every single person in your organization is not going to be a highly compensated employee, but it takes all types of people to make it work.

**BENNER:** Not everybody's driven by that conversation, which is a challenge. Some might want money, some may want a title, and others might want time at

home. Everybody has different desires and wants and it's our job to make them feel appreciated. As a bigger organization, you must have standards, but there are ways to honor the individual and give them the recognition that feels good to them.

**ZUCKER:** Sometimes it's words of affirmation.

**GOESSLING:** It's not just attracting the top talent; you have to retain them. We work really hard at Armstrong Teasdale to integrate our people. We have a total of 18 offices, with 13 of those markets being new in the past six years, and it requires an intentional focus on integration to ensure our 680-plus lawyers and business professionals internationally have the tools they need to best serve our clients. From offering competitive benefits and employee resource groups to professional development opportunities and 125 hours of DEI or pro bono work annually, we are committed to supporting our people in the areas that are most important to them. That investment cannot be overlooked.

**BOBROFF:** Is the impact of hybrid work raging on, or has it quieted down at all?

**GOESSLING:** The hybrid work environment is absolutely a permanent change and companies have accepted that they're not going to have 100% of their workforce in the office 100% of the time. We have companies that are trying to find that sweet spot for their business, but no one-size-fits-all option.

**ZUCKER:** I just don't know why you wouldn't want to come back, but not everybody can create that.

**GOESSLING:** It's not everybody's culture, and that's part of the challenge, especially as younger generations who want more balance enter the workforce. What I'm seeing and how that plays out in the workplace is that it's made employers strive to make coming into the office a fun and positive experience. We've all heard that collaboration is the missing link to working from home, so companies want to design their space and create meeting spaces that foster collaboration.

We're also seeing an incredible push for amenities in lease negotiations. Tenants are negotiating and demanding specific amenities important to their businesses – some are really into personal wellness and amenities like fitness centers and walking trails, others want food service options or outdoor gathering spaces, and convenient parking

has always been a huge issue. In response, building owners are investing in amenities to attract and retain employees and tenants.

**ZUCKER:** In many places, employees no longer have individual workspaces any longer because companies have reduced their corporate real estate. Nobody likes to walk in and not know where to sit. Nobody wants to be treated like everybody else.

**BENNER:** I'll just stay home at my dining room table. Through the pandemic we learned most people can work from home well enough, so the office has become a social destination; it's about the culture and the amenities.

**ZUCKER:** There are some industries that are not collaborative or some individuals within any industry that are not collaborative. Our business is so collaborative, it would never ever work to be out of the office. The average person is not as productive working from home, and better ideas come from collaborating and talking to other people. Even if you're an introvert and you don't get your energy from other people, you're better when you're bouncing ideas off someone else. And when it's prearranged, it's different than when it's organic and you get a cup of coffee and walk by someone in the hallway. I don't know how you get that if you have a remote workforce.

**GREENE:** When you're trying to mentor and lead someone from a more junior position to a senior position, it's so helpful to overhear conversations and witness how to work through each item to resolve issues. You need to brainstorm, work together and collaborate. We just did some month-end closeout meetings that included our vice president, controller and me sitting in. Did we each need to be involved in these meetings, going line-by-line through each job item and cost? Not necessarily. Does it make us better? Do we learn more about the project? Do we understand how that project manager thinks, how they communicate, what their strengths and opportunities are? Definitely. Could we do that on a Zoom? Can I read his body language from a Zoom? Not really.

**ZUCKER:** We have a gym and a trainer as another incentive to retain top talent. We want them to stay, but the flip side is that our people work hard. There's one speed and it's fast all the time. That's not a fit for everybody. Introverts recharge and get their energy from within. They need quiet time and space, but extroverts like me come out full.

**BENNER:** We are respectful when people

are out of the office on PTO or need to leave at three because they're coaching something for their kid. We are fast paced, but unless Rome is burning, don't call, Teams or email them.

**BOBROFF:** What's new in the market that we will see more of in the future?

**BENNER:** I think you're going to see a lot of innovation given all the costs that are coming up from the delays, new technology or materials. I talked about diversity of housing, particularly in St. Louis. There's going to be a lot of changes in how we get better, faster, nimbler and more cost conscious, but also how we respond to the demands of people working from home, whether it's a hybrid model, a flex model, or they don't have an office anymore. It's almost a requirement now for people looking for new homes or doing a renovation on their house to have a home office. I also think there will be more innovation in how we move projects forward. Given all the things that are forcing you to revisit your plan, is this project still even viable?

**BOBROFF:** As a national builder, how do you create a sense of community in St. Louis and the other markets where you work?

**ZUCKER:** You must think about the communities that you affect when you build. We are conscientious no matter if it's a rural area or in the city; we think about what's meaningful to the communities. We have a specific program called Clayco Rising, which is a community outreach program to help navigate through situations where we encounter opposition or concerns from local groups such as churches, schools or residents.

A lot of people struggle with change, but I think it's important to listen to the communities that you're in and make sure you're communicating the right message. St. Louis City is such a good example of this. It's important to understand and communicate the impact of what you're doing in those communities in a meaningful way that resonates with the audience. And not to talk above or over people. That's in the forefront of what we do when we're impacting or displacing someone because of our work.

**BENNER:** There's this inherent push and pull between a developer, the community, and governmental bodies. It all goes back to communication which we talked about earlier. When everybody goes in with this negative attitude rather than one of collaboration, we try to bring people, retailers



“When you're trying to mentor and lead someone from a more junior position to a senior position, it's so helpful to overhear conversations and witness how to work through each item to resolve issues.”

**MEREDITH GREENE**  
BEX Construction Services

and all these pieces together to make a viable project that boosts the community.

**GOESSLING:** That's a really good point, Alice, and has been an important consideration for me in obtaining zoning approvals for new projects. It is crucial to collaborate with governmental bodies, community groups and others who are interested in a project. We have pre-application meetings with the governmental bodies, talk to staff, find out what's going on, what they want and what's valuable to the community, talk to neighboring property owners and other interested groups. The path is so much smoother when you do that. And it just makes sense from a community involvement standpoint. It also helps you become a thoughtful developer who tries to hit the mark with your project and avoid some of the adversity you would encounter if you went in and just tried to force a project that you think works in theory.

**ZUCKER:** Because of social media, fake news and soundbites, unfortunately one piece of information may get shared and then there is a hyper focus on it. But it's our responsibility not to lose sight of the big picture. One hundred percent of nothing is nothing; you can't always take those huge leaps. You've got to take baby steps sometimes and recognize that a percentage of something is better than nothing at all. This isn't really about the communities, but the tax incentives. In this region, it's like a four-letter word. I often wonder if the average person understands a tax incentive. With interest rates where they are now, you cannot pencil a deal without tax incentives. They aren't a negative thing, and they're expensive to put

together.

**BENNER:** Ignoring the fact that you may or may not get them, think about how much work goes into just presenting the package to even be considered for incentives. There are 88 municipalities just in St. Louis County, which is a huge problem when you're trying to navigate that process, whether it's a tenant finish and you need a couple of permits for a thousand square feet or you're doing a million square foot of ground-up development. There are a lot of pieces along many different avenues. The developer takes a lot of risks trying to put these projects together, and until that becomes a bit more streamlined, I think you're going to continue to have these fits and starts that the average person may not understand.

It's also the lack of transparency that's not necessarily making it easier. Some of the regulations out there do protect what we're trying to accomplish, like the fire codes, but it's the transparency on how the process is supposed to be.

**BENNER:** We have more municipalities than anywhere else, so part of the challenge with any project is going in to identify and work with those folks up front.

**GOESSLING:** Absolutely, there's a ton of education involved up front in seeking incentives and other governmental approvals. When we have a new project at Armstrong Teasdale, one of the first things I do is reach out to my contact at the municipality to see how the pipeline looks and how long the approval will take because you might have to wait three months to even get on an agenda. There's a lot of planning that needs

to go into charting a path with the applicable municipality and understanding the different requirements for the project.

**GREENE:** We have built many relationships where we can pick up the phone and get a read on the expected pipeline or the best ways to navigate the path. We are willing to participate as mentors and mentees, a philosophy that continuously expands our connections and strengthens our network. We seek to build friendships with everyone we meet. That allows us each to pick up the phone and ask, “Hey, how do I do this?” If we can talk about it and get that information when it's needed, we can improve the process and speed timetables for everyone.

**BOBROFF:** What would help advance women in construction?

**GREENE:** We need more inclusive training programs to support network building and mentorship opportunities that allow you to put a name with a face of others who genuinely care about you. It doesn't matter if that's within your direct organization or getting involved in other organizations like CREW or BOMA or IFMA or anything. Marie Casey has been an amazing mentor to me. I absolutely love her, and she knows so much about so much. Without her, there are a lot of things that I wouldn't even know to ask, to question or to look in the right direction. It's the exposure, the education, the network and women building women.

**BOBROFF:** How do you see the role of women in construction evolving in the future, and what steps can the industry take to further support and empower women in leadership positions?

**GREENE:** The role of women in construction is undergoing a transformation, with a growing acknowledgment of the valuable contributions they bring to the industry. Looking ahead, we anticipate witnessing a greater influx of women not only entering but excelling in various construction roles, including leadership positions. To bolster support for women in leadership roles, the industry must take proactive steps towards continuously improving this approach.

Maintaining flexible work policies is essential for achieving work-life balance, enabling women to fulfill both their professional and maternal roles effectively. Mentorship, sponsorship and leadership development programs are invaluable tools



in nurturing women's leadership potential. Gender equality should remain a steadfast principle, continually cultivated within the industry's culture.

Embracing emotions in the construction sector represents a positive shift, adding depth and humanity to our work. However, swift action is imperative in addressing bias, discrimination or harassment whenever they arise. There's no place for such behaviors, especially in an industry as critical as construction.

Promotion processes should prioritize transparency, particularly concerning employment packages and benefits. Clear communication is key to engaging and retaining women in the industry, as they tend to pay attention to intricate details.

Creating an inclusive culture that champions gender equality is paramount for empowering women and fostering positive change and innovation in our sector. By striving for continuous improvement and inclusivity, we can unlock the full potential of women in construction, driving progress and advancement for all.

**ZUCKER:** This isn't specific to the

construction industry, but people have to be themselves. And if you're in a male-dominated industry, you ought to be yourself. If you happen to be more emotional, whether you're a man or a woman, you ought to lean into who you are and be vulnerable. Your superpowers come from being authentic with who you are and not trying to act like the people around you, but not specific to any gender or race or anything like that.

**GREENE:** I think a lot of what we talk about is not specific to women. I grew up with two brothers and I wore a dress and played in the river with them. I like girly things, but I like it all, and I was raised to believe that I could do anything I want to do with few exceptions.

**BOBROFF:** How can women best align themselves with women in commercial real estate for mentorship and sponsorship?

**GOESSLING:** You must show up where those women are showing up. As I mentioned earlier, I've been involved for most of my career with CREW, a global organization with over 14,000 members in over 80 chapters in nearly every major U.S. city and

abroad. I just spent two years on the global CREW Network board of directors, and we've experienced double-digit growth in membership and sponsorship year-over-year. It provides professional development, networking opportunities, education and an entire platform geared toward advancing women in commercial real estate globally, and I've been fortunate to extend those benefits to many of our women attorneys at Armstrong Teasdale through our support of CREW. The organization is multidisciplinary, so any professional who's involved in a commercial real estate career can participate. You have to attend those events and conferences and take advantage of the opportunity to connect with others through mentorship opportunities.

**BENNER:** There's a strong local chapter where you can get plugged in, but it's also a national network where you can get ideas and have more collaboration. They have a lot of conferences, and it's a strong network.

**GOESSLING:** CREW has impactful mentorship opportunities on every level, which has been a really important part of my career from day one and helped establish many of my long-standing relationships.

CREW St. Louis has a formal mentorship program that I helped establish when I was president in 2018, where we pair members in mentorship relationships; it can cross industry lines depending on what you're looking for. The curriculum-based program includes leadership training. In the first year of the program, we had more participants than we could accommodate. The program has been at maximum capacity every year since, so there is definitely an overwhelming demand for these types of opportunities.

At the CREW Network level, members can join CREW Councils – peer interest groups, which give members a way to establish mentoring relationships, access knowledge across geographic boundaries, learn from other markets, and explore business opportunities. I also supported the launch of a robust training program for emerging leaders. I think it's incredibly important that we have a variety of opportunities for people to engage with training and mentoring, because we all work differently and have different strengths. Programs like CREW help meet women where they are, understand their goals, and ensure they have opportunities to learn and advance.

# INVESTED IN YOU

In St. Louis and across the country, our skilled lawyers work across disciplines to offer comprehensive and creative solutions to our clients for their most complex commercial real estate projects. Our deep commitment to leading industry organizations ensures that our lawyers can truly invest in client relationships and provide targeted, interdisciplinary knowledge for every transaction, project and industry we take on.



Armstrong  
Teasdale

LEARN MORE AT [ATLLP.COM](http://ATLLP.COM)



**BEX**  
CONSTRUCTION SERVICES  
**BUECKENDORF**  
EXCELLENCE IN BUILDING

Service. Hard work. Integrity.  
Experience. Listens. Delivers.

**BEX10**  
bexstl.com