

Sheet Metal Industry Leaders

Turn Visions into Reality

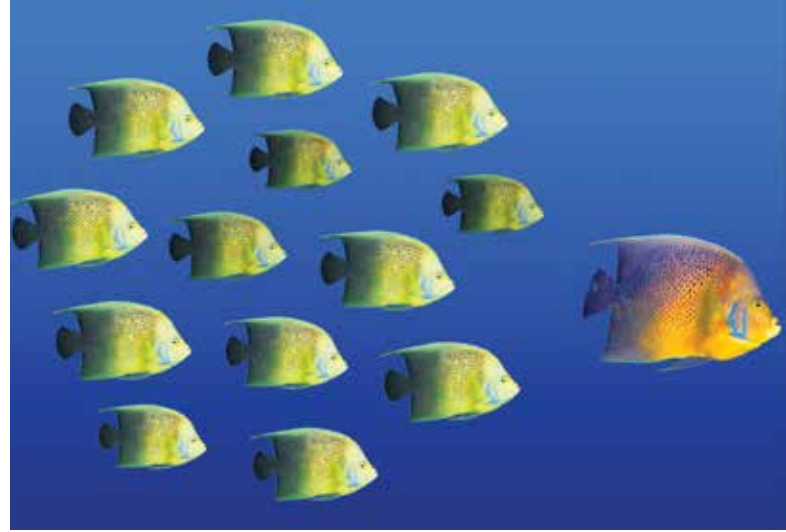
Warren G. Bennis, an American scholar widely regarded as a pioneer in the contemporary field of leadership studies, defined leadership as “the capacity to translate vision into reality”. We are fortunate to be a part of an industry that has more than its fair share of visionary leaders at the helm with SMACNA National, SMART International, the national trust funds—including ITI, NEMI, and SMOHIT—and in Locals, Contractor firms, Chapters, and local funds, including the JATCs.

In our cover story on page 4, learn how a leader translated her vision for a Heavy Metal Summer Experience (HMSE) Camp into a successful local program and launched nation-wide efforts to introduce sheet metal industry career opportunities to underserved teens and their parents. As president of SMACNA when the program was being developed, Angie Simon took advantage of all of her industry meetings and connections to share her vision and inspire others. Not only did industry partners step up to volunteer their time, but also, generous vendors and manufacturers offered financial support, tool bags, work boots, and other PPE for the students. Real leaders want others to benefit from their successes—that is why Simon and her peers from SMACNA-Western Washington, who also launched a HMSE program in 2021, developed a step-by-step *HMSE Playbook*, which details every aspect of operations, including a break-down of costs and daily itineraries.

Who wants the formula for increasing productivity, team cohesiveness, communication, and morale, while decreasing waste? We think pretty much everyone. “Leadership and Operational Excellence” on page 6 demonstrates how leadership training for every one of KSM Metal Fabrication’s employees led to tremendous operational improvements and a better work atmosphere. KSM President and COO Kathy Kerber describes how empowering her team allows her more time to focus on company growth. No surprise that this forward-thinking owner is a valued member of the SMACNA-SMART Best Practices Market Expansion Task Force (BPMETF).

At the BPMETF’s inception, members went directly to the customers who hire contractors to find out what criterion was most important when awarding work. The resounding answer was “Expertise”. They wanted to hire the most proficient contractors with the most productive and highly skilled craftspersons. This research led to the development of the Expertise industry branding campaign. Turn to “Make Your Mark” on page 8 to view the logos available to contractors, Locals, and JATCs to promote their capabilities, create work opportunities, and distinguish themselves from the competition.

“If you build it, they will come” is a great line, and we do not have to limit its use to those times when a corn farmer in



Iowa is convinced it is a great idea to build a baseball diamond for ghosts (*Field of Dreams*, movie, 1989). The line suggests that if someone puts effort and belief into a project, it is more likely to succeed. The state-of-the-art TAB lab envisioned by SMACNA Rochester and Local 46 provides an example of that principle. Read “TAB for the Future” on page 10 to see how the contractor and union leaders envisioned a lab where contractors could send their employees to earn certifications. The demand and need were there—all they had to do was build it, which became complicated when the pandemic forced shutdowns. Today, the lab is training and certifying employees for the upsurge in TAB work that has grown from increased concerns around proper ventilation.

We all strive to be better leaders. There is a lot written on what leaders *should* do and very often we focus on that while ignoring the things leaders *should not* do. Those things that leaders should avoid are called “leadership derailers”. Learning from your mistakes or those of others can be just as valuable as learning what has worked effectively. Turn to page 13 for the top ten leadership derailers and identify those that may be impeding your success.

Few would be surprised to learn that the “stories” we tell ourselves sometimes do not promote or achieve our best interests. In “Crucial Conversations Skill Summary: Master My Stories”, on page 14, Jantzen Pahl explains that a “story” is our rationale for what is occurring and our own interpretation of the facts. When stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions are running strong, we may confuse our story with what the facts really are. Pahl identifies three common pitfalls but provides questions we can ask to make sure we have a clearer understanding of what the facts really are.

Finally, we examine Joe Potesta’s career in the sheet metal industry in “My Journey” on page 16. Potesta went from apprentice to a national position with the ITI. He explains his proudest accomplishments and why he attributes his success to the leaders who encouraged him throughout his journey.

The *Partners in Progress* team wishes everyone a happy summer and encourages readers to tell us about the innovative leaders in their local areas. ■

Heavy Metal Summer is Back

The Heavy Metal Summer camp is a game-changer in raising youth awareness and changing lives

By / Natalie Bruckner • Photos courtesy of Western Allied Mechanical



Heavy Metal Summer Experience successfully connects young people and their parents to opportunities in the sheet metal industry. Now, thanks to the *HMSE Playbook*, the program is available to every local area.

Heavy Metal Summer Experience (HMSE) is a six-week summer program aimed at building interest in the sheet metal industry among young people. Its goal is simply to introduce youth between the ages of 15 and 19, as well as their parents, to opportunities in the sheet metal industry. In 2021, the pilot program was such a success that it has grown from one program involving 28 young people held in two locations (California and Washington) to 11 camps with around 180 youth. Next summer, it is expected to be even bigger.

“I have to admit, we’re pretty overwhelmed by the response,” says Angie Simon, advisor to the board at Western Allied Mechanical in Menlo Park, California. Little did Simon know when she had that lightbulb moment in 2020 that lights would start coming on across the country.

“It all started when I was having a conversation with my business partner. He told me that his eldest son, who was 14 at the time, wasn’t very engaged in school. The summer prior, he had taken an arts class in Oakland where he learned to weld.

He loved it. He ended up taking welding lessons and was great at it.

“It got me thinking—there are so many kids out there who don’t consider college. We should show them what a great opportunity we can offer. So, we talked about how awesome a sheet metal camp would be,” Simon explains.

The wheels were set in motion. The partners at Western Allied approved Simon’s budget of \$30,000 to run the camp. But, as with any successful venture, it takes a village, and people were quick to come onboard.

After hearing about the idea during a SMACNA Annual Convention roundtable discussion on workforce development, Jana Burbank, from Hermanson Company, and Julie Muller, executive vice president of SMACNA Western-Washington, asked if they could get involved.

“We created a committee with Western Allied Mechanical, SMACNA-Western Washington, SMACNA National, and Construction for Change,” Burbank explains. “We met every other week on Zoom to flesh out the details.”

Local 66 JATC Executive Administrator Jeff Reinhardt was next onboard. “Jana wanted to get the training center involved and use the facility,” Reinhardt says. “This would allow young people to learn about apprenticeship as part of their experience. We loved the idea.”

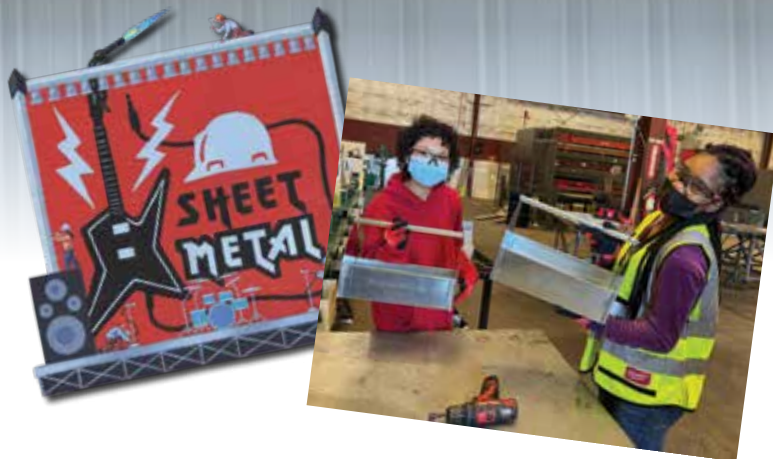
It was time to search for participants. Fortuitously, Simon mentioned the idea to one of her renters. “My tenant was explaining that her son wasn’t sure he wanted to go to college and asked if he could tour Western Allied. I said absolutely! I told her about my camp, and it turns out she works in East Palo Alto for Live In Peace, a charity that empowers young adults to reclaim the vision for their future. We teamed up with them. They are amazing!” Simon says.

Additional funding for the camp was made available when a local developer came forward with a \$16,000 donation that would be split between the youth as a stipend for going to camp. Milwaukee Tool donated tool bags and PPE, and other local vendors around the area helped offset the cost of the boots. Auburn School District provided transportation, resulting in limited liability to the program.

During the summer of 2021, 28 youth attended the six week camp every Tuesday and Thursday, for 2.5 hours. The camp consisted of an intro day, two tour days, eight working camps, and a graduation. The camp was such a success that Hermanson hired two of the students, and Western Allied hired one.

As with any pilot program, there were many lessons learned, and so the team created the *Heavy Metal Summer Experience Playbook*—a 125-page living document that details every aspect of the camp, even a break-down of costs and a daily itinerary. The team used this as a blueprint for subsequent camps, including three in San Francisco’s East Bay area and one in the North Bay, two in Seattle, two in Los Angeles, one in each of St Louis, Alabama, and Atlanta.

Keith Dias, business representative at District 1 Local 104, is involved in the camp in the North Bay area. “Les Peterson, president of Peterson Mechanical, called me at the beginning



of the year and told me about HMSE,” he says. “I’ve been involved in training since 2000, so outreach is important to me. HMSE raises awareness among the underserved youth. Les is taking the reins on this one, and we are here to help in any way we can through tours and education.”

This year the camp will also incorporate welding. “We learned that the virtual welding machines at the JATC created quite the buzz, so we will break out two kids in each sheet metal class so they receive supervised one-on-one experience,” Simon says.

HMSE continues to gain traction, not just with countless volunteers offering assistance within SMACNA and SMART, but with manufacturers, too. Earlier this year, Simon received a call from DEWALT. The company is now helping out Milwaukee with donations. “We applied for a grant from DEWALT’s mother company, Stanley Black & Decker, which runs the Global Impact Challenge and Grant and puts aside \$25 million to spend on workforce development. We received grant money to hire full-time person,” Simon explains.

“This year we are also working with the San Mateo Boys and Girls Club, as well as Live In Peace. I even got a call from the foster care system. We are now officially incorporated in the state of Washington, with me acting as president, Rick Hermanson as vice president, Jana as treasurer, and Julie as secretary,” Simon says.

The camp began June 14, and graduation wrapped up July 22. The team is excited to see where the program takes graduates, but as Simon explains, the camps are about so much more than outreach. “We had a mother come up to us at the graduation last year to thank us. Her daughter had entered a very dark space, lost and unsure of her future. The mother said she has her daughter back again after completing the camp. If we can save one kid every year and get them into a career that gives them a new life, it’s worth it.” ■

Natalie has more than 23 years experience as a journalist, editor, and brand builder, specializing in construction and transportation. When she’s not writing, you will likely find her snowboarding, mountain biking, or climbing mountains with her rescue dog.

