



Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

Season 3, Episode 2

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Guests:

Keith Lashinger -- Executive Director, Cleveland Builds

Tim Linville -- Co-Chair, Cleveland Builds and CEO of the Construction Employers Association

Run Time: 26:29

Questions or Feedback: thefix@oatey.com

[music]

[00:00:44] Katherine Lehtinen: Wow, Doug, we are continuing the season with such an amazing lineup.

[00:00:49] Doug Buchan: I tell you, I don't know if I ever told you, but number two is my favorite number.

[00:00:52] Katherine: Oh, yes?

[00:00:53] Doug: Yes. I had number two on every baseball jersey I ever had. Today we have two phenomenal guests, okay?

[00:01:00] Katherine: Absolutely.

[00:01:00] Doug: From two different organizations that basically work together from all ends, from the employer who maybe has no skills, to maybe wanting to improve skills and get to a different level, to an organization that hey, connects them with employers up there.

[00:01:14] Katherine: Yes, absolutely. Well, today we have Keith Laschinger, the executive director of Cleveland Builds, and one of the board co-chairs, Tim Linville. Welcome, guys.

[00:01:24] Tim Linville: Thank you. Very impressive introduction there.

[00:01:29] Katherine: [laughs] We've worked on it a little bit together over the years.

[00:01:31] Tim: You were Jeter before Jeter.

[00:01:33] Doug: I think I was, yes.

[00:01:35] Katherine: I thought you were going to go somewhere else with the number too, but it was like, "He's going to start off already with plumbing?"

[00:01:41] Keith Laschinger: I think one of our sound effects should be a toilet flushing. That's what we think--

[00:01:46] Katherine: [laughs] Well, this is really fun. I'm really excited. Before we dive in to get to learn a little bit more about Cleveland Builds, can you take some time to give us a little bit of your bio, who you are, what you do? Keith, let's kick it off with you, please.

[00:01:59] Keith: I am, as you mentioned, the executive director for Cleveland Builds, and I come to that position really from a secondary education background. Worked about the first 15 years of my career in secondary education, first six years at my high school alma mater, next nine years at a school called Saint Martin de Porres High School. I'll skip ahead about four or five years. The thing that really directly led me to this position is the work that I was doing with the Friends of Max Hayes High School. I continue to do that work. That was really my first direct foray into direct workforce development.

[00:02:42] Katherine: Excellent. Tim, can you take us through a little bit of your background?

[00:02:47] Tim: Sure. Well, I'm originally from Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, married into Ohio, the Cleveland **[unintelligible 00:02:53]**, live on the west side of Cleveland for the last 20 years, and have been at CEA, Construction Employers Association for the last twelve years, since 2010. CEA is a 106-year-old trade association for contractors in the commercial industrial heavy highway industries of construction. We're here to serve contractors and the owners of construction companies that are out there, making it work every day. That's CEA mission is to serve those companies.

[00:03:21] Katherine: That's pretty impressive. Almost the exact same timeline as how long Oatey's been around. Yes, really pretty impressive. Keith, can you talk about Cleveland Builds? What is it about Cleveland Builds and how did it start?

[00:03:35] Keith: We started this thing basically-- there was a lot of legwork up to this point, but basically started it in March of 2020.

[00:03:44] Katherine: Great timing. [laughs]

[00:03:46] Keith: Awesome timing for a new organization. Didn't get a whole lot done in those first days and things obviously got put on hold for a little while. Basically, we've been running our program since about August of 2021. That's when

we hosted our first Apprenticeship-Readiness Program. I came on board officially in May of 2021, so we hit the ground running. We had to run a class and stand up a class very, very quickly. That very first class was actually hosted at one of your very close partners at the Plumbers Apprentice Training Center.

[00:04:24] Katherine: Oh, yes, great. At the local 55?

[00:04:26] Keith: Absolutely.

[00:04:27] Katherine: Excellent.

[00:04:27] Keith: With Jason Shank and Doreen Cannon leading the charge there and bringing folks in from other trades also to assist with it. Since that point, we've hosted now six Apprenticeship-Readiness Programs and placed close to 50 individuals in into the trades. Eleven different trades. Actually need to update that in my mind because I just found out yesterday that we've got our very first pipefitter. We're up to twelve at this point in time. Very, very excited about that, and it requires a ton of relationship-building with all the apprentice training centers, and obviously, with the contractors that employ those apprentices and employee union tradespeople.

In addition to the Apprenticeship-Readiness Program, which is a very important programmatic component of what we do, we're also just getting out to high schools and getting in front of as many young people as we can to spread the word about the opportunities that exist in the trades, and really, we have to educate educators too, educate parents, educate those adult influencers to let them know that college may be the right fit for a lot of folks, and I don't discourage anyone from going that path, and certainly, I mentioned already that that was a part of my work history.

A lot of the students from Saint Martin were first-generation college students, but a lot of the students also started college, and for whatever reason, it wasn't the right fit for them, and I felt like-- and I'm not disparaging the work that we did at Saint Martin or the work that's happening there now, but I felt in a lot of ways like we were caught flat-footed when somebody didn't make it through-

[00:06:23] Katherine: Yes, absolutely.

[00:06:25] Keith: -and earn that bachelor's degree and probably what we could've done is directed them to opportunities in the trades, maybe even proactively, but before they even gave college a try, and it would've been a better fit for some of the individuals that we had worked with.

[00:06:43] Katherine: We couldn't agree more, we think that that conversation around the dinner table in a counselor's office, just knowing what your options are, is something that we're trying to push for an advocate for in that it doesn't always have to be college, at least show all the options, and a way that you can continue to advance your career, your learnings, and continue to provide, so I think it's a great program. Can you talk just real quickly on the Apprenticeship-Readiness Program? What does that entail if someone's trying to understand how would I get into or how does that fit?

[00:07:13] Keith: Yes, how do you get into it, you just go to ClevelandBuilds.com, there's a career seekers button right at the top of the screen, you click on that, and you provide us with some basic information, and one of our team members will give you a call probably within 24 working hours. Over the weekend, we may not call you.

[00:07:30] Katherine: Yes, sure. [laughs]

[00:07:31] Keith: We'll get in touch very, very quickly. The classes are really efficient and we're not trying to help somebody necessarily to develop all the skills they're ever going to nature, we're trying to get somebody to work. We're trying to get somebody into a position where they can get paid better than they're getting paid right now. Most of our folks tend to be what we might describe as underemployed, not necessarily unemployed. They've worked a job maybe in retail, maybe kind of an Amazon job, maybe they're making \$14, \$15, \$16 an hour, no benefits though, and the work's not terribly fulfilling.

[00:08:14] Katherine: Sure.

[00:08:16] Keith: We find that those folks, maybe they're between the age of 25 and 34, not that we limit ourselves to that age range, but that tends to be our target market, and bring them into to our program, educate them a little bit about what all the trade opportunities are, we work with about 18 different trades, talk with them about how they would access an apprenticeship because the process itself can be a little bit confusing. A lot of times, it helps to know somebody to get in.

[00:08:47] Katherine: Yes, absolutely.

[00:08:48] Keith: We're that somebody. If you know Cleveland Builds, it's very, very helpful to getting young folks into a union. One of the guys that I worked with last year happened to be a college graduate, went through Cleveland State, and was successful there, but decided he wasn't going to be fulfilled with the opportunities that existed for him and he said, "I'd like to be a carpenter. I've been trying to do that on my own and figure out how to get in and I haven't figured it out." I said, "Well, John, come on into our program, we'll work with you, and if you do everything the right way, we'll get you placed." Now he's in the carpenters union and-

[00:09:30] Katherine: That's awesome.

[00:09:31] Keith: -has a successful career. Basically, to get back to the nuts and bolts of what the ARP looks like, it's six evenings, about 30 contact hours, a little bit of safety, introducing individuals to the different opportunities in the trades, try to do some hands-on training at a couple of different apprentice centers. A couple of things that we're achieving with that, one, we want to see if you-- to show up, if you show up on time with a good attitude. Then we get to see, are you somebody who's willing to work? Almost every person that we work with, they have next to no experience. We want to see, are you willing to learn by making mistakes?

[00:10:16] Katherine: Teachable.

[00:10:18] Keith: Exactly. Some people stand back and they're afraid to make mistakes, so they don't get involved. That's probably not going to make a very good

apprentice. You've got to get in there, mix it up a little bit, and not be afraid to make mistakes. The best trainers that we work with, and we really do try to set our participants up with really good trainers, the [unintelligible 00:10:43] journey people that they're going to be working with.

They remember what it was like to be an apprentice. They remember what it was like to not know what you're doing and to make tons of mistakes, but to learn from those mistakes. One of the guys that Tim and I work really closely with is our director of training and placement, A. C. Fenderson. He was a cement mason for 20 years and he said he wore more concrete home than he laid in his first couple of years.

[00:11:11] Katherine: [laughs] I bet.

[00:11:12] Keith: That makes him a good trainer.

[00:11:14] Katherine: Yes, that's a great summary, especially for those that are trying to understand how maybe Cleveland Builds could be a good fit for them. I want to flip it to the other side, and Tim, let's talk about how companies and individuals benefit from the important work that Cleveland Builds does.

[00:11:28] Tim: Yes, absolutely. CA's an association of companies in the construction industry, and everybody is short on people. It's not just construction, everybody knows all industries are short on people. Big time for us, not only because of the societal national issues that everybody's having but also because of disinvestment in trades education within public schools and private schools over the last 20, 30 years. No more shop classes, et cetera, everybody's heard that by now, but it's coming to roost in our industries.

The way Cleveland Builds helps employers is they can trust Cleveland Builds staff because the staff comes from the industry, AC's been in the industry 20-plus years. The trainers, the mentors that we have hired for Cleveland Builds have been in the industry for enough years to have the credibility already with our employer base. Our employer base already shares a workforce. We share the union trades workforces of all the 18 different trades. They're used to using a central hub of manpower to get their people.

To have someone that's from that ecosystem already that already has the credibility themselves to be able to vouch for someone else to say, "This kid or this young man or woman is a great candidate," that's gold.

[00:12:50] Katherine: Oh, slam dunk, right?

[00:12:51] Tim: To have the referral from somebody you trust is gold and that's what Cleveland Builds is unique. In terms of any workforce development provider that's out there, apart from the union apprenticeships themselves, Cleveland Builds is not only a hub to every single apprenticeship, but has the credibility to vouch for somebody, either for an employer to hire directly with some of the trades or for a union referral hall to be able to put into their system.

[00:13:18] Katherine: Sure. I want to talk a little bit too about not only on the employer side but then even the different generations that we have. The statistics

coming out about Gen-Z and how much there is that disconnect, and you touched on that from no longer having a shop within the schools and exposure to it, where do you think that major disconnect is, and do you have any thoughts about how we can as a community rally around to make that connection better for them?

[00:13:47] Tim: Well, we're doing our best. I think the disconnect, if you don't know a friend or a family member or a mentor who has some connection to our industry, how would you even know there's such thing as a glazer for instance, or the difference between the ironworker and a steelworker? Steelworker's not construction, that's inside of a factory somewhere. Glazer is a glass worker and not many people know that word. There's other trades. You probably to do a quiz and ask your listeners who could name the 18 different trades that Keith referred to. I might do it.

[00:14:21] Doug: I might do okay on that one.

[00:14:22] Katherine: Could you do it?

[00:14:23] Doug: I might. I don't know.

[00:14:23] Katherine: Yes, you'd probably do a lot better than I would.

[00:14:25] Doug: I'll cheat off Keith.

[laughter]

[00:14:28] Tim: On our website, ClevelandBuilds.com, all that information is there. That's our mission is to be the central hub to connect mentors, leaders, influencers, as Keith mentioned, students themselves, the young people themselves, to all the different options because most people don't even know what they are.

[00:14:46] Katherine: Yes. That's quite amazing.

[00:14:48] Doug: Yes. I'll be honest with you, Katherine. This is a three-episode guest thing here. I'm just going to make this short. I do recommend though, that you visit both of the websites for these folks.

[00:14:56] Katherine: Oh, absolutely.

[00:14:57] Doug: I was scanning through them, and I'll be honest with you, it was like 40 minutes later and I was like, "Wow, I didn't realize I was on here for 40 minutes." In saying that, I do have a couple of questions. People come to you, they look for opportunities. Do you offer the same opportunities or same resources out there to allow women to become interested in joining?

[00:15:22] Tim: For sure.

[00:15:23] Doug: What do you do to say, "Hey, this could be for you also."?

[00:15:27] Tim: Keith?

[00:15:28] Keith: Roughly a third of our participants have been women and we're really proud of that.

[00:15:33] Katherine: Yes. That's awesome.

[00:15:34] Keith: I think within the industry, it's about 8% nationally. We're obviously exceeding that. When we were off mic before we started the podcast, I mentioned that we've recently brought on Doreen Cannon who's-

[00:15:48] Katherine: Yes. Absolutely.

[00:15:49] Keith: -obviously an experienced tradesperson, and leader of the Cleveland Tradeswomen. We brought in Doreen with her 25 years of plumbing experience and really relationship-building experience, and that's going to be key for us. What I didn't mention is we also brought on a carpenter with about 20 years of experience, and her name is Darlene Glass. I tried to get Darlene and Doreen, one of them to change their names.

[laughter]

They seemed partial to those names, so they didn't quite-- but we're really excited. Darlene has worked with us previously-

[00:16:26] Katherine: That's great.

[00:16:27] Keith: -to do some training. What I really like about the mix that we're starting to establish is, I came to the Super Green, I didn't know the construction space 18 months ago, I've learned a lot, I still have a lot to learn, but Darlene is a carpenter, AC was a cement mason. I always like doing the past tense on AC because it riles him up. Doreen is a plumber. We were covering some of the different trades and getting to a lot of those relationships that are so important throughout the industry.

As Tim was talking, I was thinking about the fact that one of our I guess taglines that we use is "Industry-led and worker-centered". Both of those things are very, very important to us. About half of our board members are chosen by Tim and our contractors and management folks. The other half are chosen by Dave Wondolowski of the Trades Council and their labor folks. We're getting really good advices as we go through the process, and we can tap into the resources of those members.

Then the worker-centered piece is just a passion I think for all of us, we really want the young people that we work with to experience success. In addition, Doug, the roughly a third of the folks that we work with are women. We're also bringing in-- probably between 70% and 80% of our participants have been people of color, mostly African American. We're providing opportunities where maybe those opportunities weren't always extended in our industry. We're excited about that.

[00:18:17] Doug: One last thing Katherine. I also appreciate the fact that there is such good collaboration between these two entities here. Like I said, as I was reading through just briefly, the communication between both of them allow for that successful growth of that employee to help that contractor to then hire those successful people to make them even more successful.

[00:18:39] Katherine: Doug, we talk about this almost every season. Can you imagine when you had your own business if you had resources like this to help you? It would be just unbelievable.

[00:18:48] Doug: The only resource I had was my mom telling me, "Oh, it better work."

[laughter]

[00:18:54] Katherine: It did.

[00:18:55] Doug: Fortunately, for me, it did.

[laughter]

[00:18:59] Katherine: Tim, can we talk a little bit about what industries and companies, companies like Oatey, what can we do? How can we be a part of helping the initiative and helping support this cause? Because as much as it's important to all these different groups, brands, and businesses that supply the goods for this industry, it's really important for us as well.

[00:19:21] Tim: I appreciate it. This podcast featuring the program is helping the program spread the word. Any other channels you have to spread the word about Cleveland Builds, it's a resource for folks that go and get information and have a starting point to enter into the trades. Spread the word, help us spread the word. Obviously, we're-- well, not obviously, but Cleveland Builds is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. It depends on contributions from the industry almost exclusively, we do get some government grants, but the industry supports Cleveland Builds on a sustainable basis.

Any kind of support that could be generated out of this conversation would be awesome. The hands-on materials that you guys have for the plumbing aspect would be cool. I don't know if there's an opportunity for one of our classes to have some kind of hands-on aspect, but that'd be neat.

[00:20:13] Katherine: Absolutely. From donating product to someone who is been in the trades for a very long time, leading them in some-- [crosstalk]

[00:20:22] Doug: Why are we talking a lot about old today? Very long time. Over 50. I think there's something going on here right now. [laughs]

[00:20:28] Katherine: Sometimes you claim that. By someone taking them through how to solvent weld and the techniques behind it, either providing the product or doing that, here at Oatey University, we'd love to have and support you guys that way. Absolutely, count on it.

[00:20:43] Tim: If any of your employer listeners or contractor listeners that need folks from the **[unintelligible 00:20:50]** trade industry.

[00:20:49] Katherine: Chris **[unintelligible 00:20:50]**, that'd be you.

[00:20:53] Doug: We're calling you, Chris.

[00:20:55] Tim: There's a link on the website.

[00:20:57] Keith: It's pretty subtle.

[00:20:57] Tim: There's a way on the website for employers to get in touch with Cleveland Builds too and say, "Hey, I need people."

[00:21:02] Katherine: Yes. Absolutely. Well, we can tackle a handful of those things, so are there--

[00:21:08] Keith: Katherine, if I might, one thing that I think is really important is that we're all singing the same tune.

[00:21:13] Katherine: Absolutely.

[00:21:14] Keith: For so long, and I've confessed my sins to Tim that I was absolutely a part of the college for all movement, but that was really, I think, a decades-long mantra for a lot of folks. I think it's still wonderful if people want to get post-secondary education. I also think that these careers really do pay well. They offer fantastic benefits. I have the best benefits I've ever had being on the brick-layers plan, and these careers are really fulfilling.

Something Tim and I talk about as non-trades people is the jealousy that we have in a certain way about the folks who have worked in the trades and they can drive around town and say, "I helped build that. I helped build that. I helped make that happen." I can't even imagine. I pound a couple of nails in and I'm quite proud of that. [laughter] I can't imagine how tradespeople feel when they really look and say, "I helped build a city. I helped build such important structures for our community."

[00:22:25] Doug: You'll find that most technicians, they take pride in what they're doing because at the end, they can see those accomplishments and then other people see those accomplishments, and then it makes them more wanting to create more accomplishments. Sorry, Katherine, I'm moving my head over here.

[00:22:44] Katherine: You're fine.

[00:22:44] Doug: I think there is that fulfillment, there's that pride, and you'll find that the majority of technicians, they're not just out there to collect a paycheck, they're taking pride in what they're doing, and then that just cascades down. Everybody that they mentor at a later date, they take that same pride. I applaud you for that.

[00:23:04] Katherine: Absolutely.

[00:23:05] Keith: Thank you.

[00:23:06] Katherine: Let's talk future. What do you think is on the horizon 5, 10 years from now in the trades? Do you see that there is a movement and a wave with people having this conversation and how-- like we talked about, businesses obviously prepare, but what do you see happening in the next 5 to 10 years? I know, where's your crystal ball is the next question. [laughs]

[00:23:28] Tim: Yes. It's a guess, but what we see already happening is a ton of focus being put on the trades right now. The government has certain allocations of budgetary space for training people into the trades. The organized union trades have been funding themselves for years, for decades, and that's part of the system. Most people think of it as "union training". Those apprenticeship programs were put in place by contractors with the help of unions. Now they're half managed by contractors because it's them that are benefiting from the training programs.

They get a trained workforce from the apprenticeship program. They govern half of those boards. Each of those boards are governed half by contractors, which is what we do. We appoint those contractors to manage those training programs. Now, the federal government and lots of states as well are trying to fund programs because obviously most of the country is not unionized. Those unaffiliated contractors don't have a system like we have in our industry. Now they're getting public assistance to get back up to speed.

We as an organization will utilize some of those grant dollars to get to increase our organization, but our apprenticeship programs have been doing it all along and have a funding model in place that's supported by companies like yours building with our contractors who pay into the system that supports the whole ecosystem. One of the things that I wonder about and concerned about with just the national model, there's so many YouTube videos on how to do this and that, and Home Depot and Lowe's are bigger than any supply house that is out there for contractors, I worry about it because I do my own work sometimes, and it always is pretty bad when I do my work.

I'm worried about in a few years or a couple of generations, you're going to sell these houses having been done-- all the work has been done by do-it-yourselfers from Home Depot. I don't know if I want to buy those houses in the future. [laughs]

[00:25:43] Katherine: Sure. There's a wide range out there and we talk about this with our ambassador program and the work in the community they build on social media and then also those that are out there that are trying to do their jobs as well. There's a time and place for DIY and got a clogged toilet or need to make a simple repair, but there is that time where you're like, "No, we need to call in the professional." [chuckles] It's time.

[00:26:08] Tim: Right? One of the after-effects, I think, of the disinvestment in the trades over the last 30 years is going to filter down to this home repair and remodeling. People aren't available to do that kind of work in a professional way because they haven't been brought into the system with career-sustaining jobs-

[00:26:29] Katherine: Very interesting.

[00:26:30] Tim: -ahead of time.

[00:26:30] Doug: There's a lot of fundamentals that lead you to being the great technician that you hope to be someday. Everybody that ever worked for me, the first tool they ever learned how to use was the broom because, without a clean job site, I got some safety issues.

[00:26:47] Tim: Makes sense.

[00:26:48] Katherine: As we wrap things up, I want to ask one question to both of you. We'll start. Keith, what do you dream is the impact of Cleveland Builds? When you're off and retired and when you look back, what do you hope that that impact is?

[00:27:05] Keith: All right. As an almost 50-year-old gentleman myself, I--

[laughter]

[00:27:10] Katherine: Thanks for joining the club.

[00:27:15] Keith: Oh, gosh. I get really excited about the young people that we place in jobs and careers really. When I'm retired and 20 years or so, I'd love to be seeing those folks wrapping up their careers in the field and knowing that they were able to buy a home, maybe the first home that has ever been purchased in their family, knowing that they're going to have and have earned a secure retirement, knowing that they had a really rewarding and fulfilling career and they're probably boring family members to tears with stories about what they did to build the community.

I really am a very Cleveland-focused person too. I'm very hopeful, some of what Tim was just talking about, that we can establish a really great workforce development ecosystem. I think we've got a unique opportunity right now with some of the federal dollars that are flowing into our community here. If we can do this the right way in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County and adjacent counties, I really think we can have folks who are doing really fulfilling work for decades to come.

[00:28:47] Katherine: That's really exciting.

[00:28:48] Tim: That's one of my favorite parts. That probably is my favorite part about being involved with Cleveland Builds, is the personal stories. We have a family of father, his wife, and their son, all three have gone through Cleveland Builds and gotten jobs in the trades.

[00:29:03] Katherine: Very cool.

[00:29:04] Tim: Transformed the life of the whole family.

[00:29:06] Katherine: For sure. Same thing for you, what do you dream is the impact of this organization?

[00:29:14] Tim: Transforming lives of people that live in Greater Cleveland, their family, and community-sustaining careers that we're giving people access to and they've never had it before. It's just very cool to watch people better themselves, better their families, and by virtue of that, bettering their communities they're living in, and getting skills into the hands of people that live in Greater Cleveland that's going to benefit the whole region because things are going to be built better.

[00:29:41] Katherine: Absolutely. Well, I want to thank you both. This has been such a great opportunity and honor to have you on *The Fix*. We look forward to supporting your project and your organization and how you guys continue to move

forward. Obviously, with Oatey being here for some over 100 years in Cleveland native and staying in Cleveland, we look to always partner with those that are here. Thank you both.

[00:30:06] Tim: Thank you, Katherine. Thank you, Doug.

[00:30:07] Keith: Thanks for having us and thanks for everything that Oatey does to provide opportunities for young people. I mentioned my connection to Max Hayes earlier, and I'm aware that you all have helped some Max Hayes students get their start.

[00:30:19] Katherine: Actually, we have students that come in from Saint Martin de Porres as well.

[00:30:23] Keith: Oh, cool.

[00:30:23] Katherine: I had a couple on my marketing team one year, so it's a great opportunity. Always looking-- just as everyone else is, we're always looking for help and looking to partner, so thank you.

[00:30:32] Tim: Thank you.

[00:30:36] Katherine: Thanks for joining us on this episode of *The Fix*. Be sure to follow us on your favorite podcast platform, so you don't miss our next conversation dropping every Wednesday. If you have feedback about the show or a topic you'd like to see covered, send us an email at thefix@oatey.com or give us a shout-out on social media. We would love to connect with you. Don't forget, you can get your daily Fix by visiting oatey.com and we'll catch you next time.

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