

Lights, Camera, *Take Action!*

Union Construction's Portrayal in the Mass Media

By: Phil Cooney, Director – NJ Carpenter Contractor Trust

Pick up any newspaper or click on any news channel. If there is a story related to unions or construction, chances are it has a negative tone or spin. When there is a story of a positive nature regarding unions and construction, it is usually because a strategic public relations effort was carefully calculated in advance.

“For all the good things that happen every day in the construction industry, very few positive stories are reported in the mainstream media,” explained Robert Terreri, President of the NJ Regional Council of Carpenters and Labor Co-Chairman for the NJ Carpenter Contractor Trust (NJCCT).

There is no evidence to refute a negative media bias toward unions and construction - only mounds of evidence to support it. If an article or television spot covers a union or construction story, chances are the buzz words used throughout the piece are almost always negative. For example, “strike,” “dispute,” “walk-out” and “corruption” are the traditional nouns of choice. For those of us in this industry, it is frustrating to watch and read this daily barrage of negativity characterizing our livelihoods. At one time, we have all asked the question, “Why is the media so negative about unions and construction?” Is it an anti-labor bias, a political plot, or just general negativity in media? Whether the truth is based in conspiracy theories or clandestine industry practices, we as an industry need to respond and beat back this ever-present tide of negatively framed reporting.

The Board of Trustees of the NJ Carpenter Contractor Trust has taken the issue of mass media coverage seriously and decided to do its part to chip away at the portrayal of our industry, which has been dominated by stories of conflict, confrontation and graft. On February 6th of this year, NJCCT rolled out the first stage of a 52-week Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaign airing on New Jersey Network (NJN). More than 100 thirty-second PSAs will air during 2006, with spots wrapped around *NJN News*, *NJ Works* and the Sunday Morning Public Affairs line-up. The NJCCT campaign is designed to deliver a positive message about union carpenters and union contractors to New Jersey's business leaders in public and private sectors, political leaders and educators as well as the general public.

Based on the current campaign, the PSA will generate more than 3.6 million *Gross Impressions (Nielsen Diary Audience Measurement Data)* from the NJN viewing audience. While this Nielsen Diary Data information is impressive, both labor and management realize there is still a lot of work to be done.

“We see a constant misrepresentation of our industry every day in the mass media,” said Jack Kocsis, CEO of BCANJ and an NJCCT Board Member. “The only way to change the image is by controlling the message. That's what this NJCCT campaign is all about.”

NJCCT's PSA campaign is one of many efforts designed to highlight the benefits of hiring union carpenters and union contractors to New Jersey's construction user groups. In addition to this effort, NJCCT participates in trade shows, implements print media campaigns and has created the industry-acclaimed *Carpenter Workshop* program. So, whether it's a thirty-second television spot or a handshake at an industry event, every impression is important—make it positive and keep doing it!

To see the current NJCCT PSA and advertising schedule for NJN or to learn more about other programs and public relations efforts, log on to: www.njcct.org