

COVER STORY

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28 Builders of an interactive media museum—designed to evoke a newspaper, a television and a camera—are cobbling together 24 structural systems and 10 glass wall systems to put freedom of the press on parade in the nation's capital.

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Bolstered Pontchartrain crossing. Page 14

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WORK FORCE

Speed Interviewing Scores Big in Houston

Innovative process allows targeted job seekers to pitch skills directly to decision makers

The work force crisis sweeping the industry is prompting innovation in the way companies recruit needed personnel. In one novel approach, four engineering and construction firms in Houston banded together to participate in a 'speed dating' event in a local hotel that attracted over 600 engineering professionals.

Scores of the job seekers at the packed Dec. 2 event will likely find a new job with the firms after having only minutes with each company to present their qualifications. "We want experienced civil, mechanical, electrical and chemical engineers and piping designers," says Ed King, human resources director for Foster Wheeler USA, one of the firms at the event. "Typically, these jobs pay \$80,000 into six figures and we hope to hire 30 or more people within the next few weeks."

The idea and event was created by the local office of EPCglobal, an industry recruiting firm. Also participating were the local offices of Turner & Townsend, a construction and management consulting firm; AMEC Paragon, an engineering services and project and asset management firm; and SNC-Lavalin, an engineering and construction firm.

"We interviewed about 50-to-60 people, and at this point are reviewing resumes," says Gillian MacCormack, SNC vice president. "We are looking for about 12 designers and engineers in the oil and gas field."

The speed interviewing idea originated about six weeks ago with EPC operations manager Robin Wappler and was presented to client Foster Wheeler at a status meeting. "She got the idea from speed dating and it's so logical I'm amazed that it hasn't been done before," says Richard Spragg, EPC communications manager. "After talking it over, we thought

it would work real well if we had at least four companies in order to send a stronger message, provide a larger venue and give the applicants a wider range of options." EPC contacted three other clients. "Broadly speaking, all four companies do not compete for the same people," says Spragg.

After running an ad campaign and a direct mailing to 10,000 people in the region, EPC had 20 employees at the event. Two experienced consultants provided initial intake, reviewing resumes and directing applicants to one or more of the companies. "This was never about a one-step process but rather about linking all the relevant firms directly into the interview stage and speeding the recruit-



▲ Matchmaking. Applicants sorted by profession had a few minutes to state their qualifications.

ment process," says Spragg. "We basically provided the applicant and the resume and gave the firms the chance to establish rapport."

The experience was a first for Foster Wheeler, which is responding to a red-hot petroleum market. "Typically, we advertise in papers, hold job fairs, use employee referrals and send vacancy notices to recruiting firms, with mixed results," says King. "Speed interviewing was new and we didn't know what the response would be, but we are extremely pleased with the results."

Foster Wheeler had 17 staffers, including department heads, on hand. "The EPC folks screened the people and brought them to us by profession. We timed interviews so that each candidate had about five-to-15 minutes to showcase their skills and abilities, demonstrating why they should be hired," says King.

The firm did not have time to finalize offer letters that day, but managers indicated conditional interest. "We were too busy doing interviews," says King. Most respondents were from Texas, already have jobs and wanted to test the market and salaries, which means offers would have to be attractive, says King. "It could mean a challenging project as well as a 50-plus hour work week for extra income," he adds.

Some job applicants liked the process. "Speed interviewing allowed me to talk to three employers in about two hours," says Mark C. Couvillion, a local process development chemist. "It's hard to make cold calls. But here, you know employers are looking and they get an accurate view of what's out there while applicants get face time with decision makers they would normally not meet." He says the process was efficient and well thought out.

Applicants not hired on the first ground also will get another chance. "For those not selected, we are holding their resumes for possible use with other clients," says Spragg. "We had a real success and this now needs to be done again." ■

By William J. Angelo

WASTEWATER

Utilities, EPA and Environmental Groups Battle Over Pollutant Control Definitions

Wastewater treatment utilities and environmentalists are battling each other over recent appellate court decisions with different interpretations of how frequently U.S. law requires reporting of maximum "loads" of pollutants in impaired waters and whether the U.S. Supreme Court should decide which side is right.

The issue revolves around whether the federal Clean Water Act requires "total maximum daily loads (TMDLs)" for pollutants to be expressed on a daily basis or as infrequently as weekly, seasonally or even annually. The District of Columbia Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in April that two Anacostia River TMDLs approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency violated the act because they were not expressed as "daily" loads. But an earlier ruling by a federal appeals court in New York City held that "the term [TMDL] is susceptible to a broader range of meanings" than of loads calculated daily.

Following the D.C. court's decision, the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority filed a petition July 24 seeking high court review. The National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) supported the position in a separate high court filing. But on Nov. 24, environmental group Friends of the Earth asked the court not to take up the case. Caught in the middle, EPA has tried to mitigate the controversy in a Nov. 15 guidance memo. Observers expect more litigation to come.

In its petition, Friends of the Earth sees need for further court guidance on the issue and says utility legal arguments over added compliance costs are flawed



▲ Unhappy. D.C. wastewater agency wants supreme review.

because EPA or the states "remain free to determine how much pollutant loading a TMDL should allow as long as [it]...be daily and...implement the applicable water quality standards."

In a memo, EPA Assistant Administrator Benjamin H. Grumbles claims the Washington appellate decision does not need "any changes to existing policy...describing how a TMDL's wasteload allocations are implemented" in state pollution permits. He says the agency still "recommends" expressing TMDLs "in terms of daily time increments" but that there is also "some flexibility" in the state interpretations.

Adam Krantz, NACWA managing director of government and public affairs, believes high court justices will take the case. He says "it is important there be consistency, so utilities know what to expect." Adds Sharon Thomas, regulatory affairs manager for the Water Environment Federation: "If the Supreme Court does not review the case, we will work with EPA to improve the [TMDL] program, but the EPA approach also opens the door for future litigation." ■

By Debra K. Rubin

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