



Gray & Son

Gray & Son sponsors mikeroweWORKS Foundation's Work Ethic Scholarship Program.

When asking any business in the building trades about the most difficult part of the job today, you should expect to receive a pretty similar response.

It is very difficult to find and keep workers.

It is a challenge that workforce development experts around the country both in government and in the private sector have come to recognize as "the skills gap." The phrase refers to the significant disconnect in the labor supply of skilled workers and the demand for jobs that require them. The result is millions of good paying jobs without people to work them.

"Each and every day, there is an open position for a good paying job at our company which could provide someone the income and benefits needed to comfortably support a family," said Bob Webbert, chief executive officer and chairman of Gray & Son, one of the leading construction companies in Maryland. "Our problem is the same problem being faced by companies like ours everywhere across the country, and we want to help solve it."

Many experts suggest that the problem itself is a complex matter rooted in a somewhat simple issue. Over the past half century, the focus for education has shifted away from vocational training to college readiness. Along the way, generations of teachers, parents and students began creating or reinforcing negative connotations for building trades professions. Meanwhile, very few people bothered challenging the logic.

Executive producer, host, and bestselling author Mike Rowe has been one of those few people. Rowe is best known as the 'dirtiest man on TV' from the hit TV series *Dirty Jobs*, which featured him working as an apprentice on more than 300 jobs, many of which were in the skilled trades. Since then, Rowe started the mikeroweWORKS Foundation as a PR campaign for skilled labor and has become the country's leading advocate for vocational training.

For the seventh year in a row, the mikeroweWORKS Foundation launched its Work Ethic Scholarship Program, a program that provides financial assistance to the next generation of skilled workers who show that they are willing to work smart and hard. This year, the mikeroweWORKS Foundation would like to give away \$1 million dollars in scholarships to qualified applicants. "The skills gap is not only real, it's a reflection of what we value, and that's got to change," said Rowe. "My foundation is focused on closing America's skills gap by highlighting the opportunities that require specific types of training. In other words, we're not looking for people who wish to earn a four-year degree, or individuals in pursuit of their 'dream job.' We're looking for the people who demonstrate work ethic, personal responsibility, a positive attitude, and a desire to master a trade. And I'm grateful for to have Gray & Son's support of this year's program."



Gray & Son has contributed \$50,000 to the mikeroweWORKS Foundation's Work Ethic Scholarship Program, an initiative that the company described as a calling.

"I was very fortunate to see Mike speak at a conference a ways back, and was just so moved to see that someone like him understood and was actually working to make a difference," said Webbert. "It is a distinct honor and privilege to be able to support them in this cause, and one that we hope many other companies like ours take on as well."

The program was launched this year with a new campaign being called "Make Work Cool Again." The foundation's website describes it as a mantra for their belief of who they "consider rock stars... The hardworking people who keep the lights on, water running, and air flowing- the next generation of skilled workers who will work smart and hard."