



BTEA's SAFEBUILD forum shines light on mental health in construction

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Manhattan, NY The Building Trades Employers Association (BTEA), representing 1,200 union contractors in New York, held its annual SAFEBUILD national industry forum designed to promote worker safety and salute firms with best practices. Noting that the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) cites construction workers as having one of the highest rates of suicides of any industry, BTEA leaders said going forward they would broaden their safety focus to include mental wellness and suicide prevention.

“Our annual SAFEBUILD conference has traditionally focused on preventing physical accidents that lead to physical injury,” said president and CEO-elect Elizabeth Crowley. “This year, post-pandemic, we are expanding the discussion to highlight the importance of emotional wellness as BTEA contractors see the need to push this conversation front and center.”

Addressing the 300-person crowd, Crowley said, “Substance abuse and depression have plagued

our workers more than most professionals. And we must be proactive to understand the warning signs and provide the resources workers need. For us, an industry known for its grit and dedication, acknowledging the need to address total wellness will make us even stronger.”

The conference featured welcoming remarks from governor Kathy Hochul, who told the packed room of contractors and union members: “I am so grateful that you’re enlightened enough to bring up this topic. For so long people have had to deal with the stresses of life, but there was a stigma associated with asking for help. I applaud you for being the leaders that I believe the rest of the nation will now follow.”

Several discussion panels included safety and mental health experts, government officials and management and union representatives. Crowley said the BTEA would conduct a campaign this year with construction firms and workers to provide helpful resources and encourage those in trouble to seek help.

Shown are BTEA president and CEO-elect Elizabeth Crowley and governor Kathy Hochul.

Conference leaders also saluted departing president and CEO Louis J. Coletti, who led the BTEA for 27 years. He is launching a consulting firm that will focus on strategies, processes, technologies, and the use of data to reduce real estate development and construction costs in New York City.

“This year’s SAFEBUILD Forum, with its focus on mental health and wellness, brings BTEA boldly into a new era of leadership,” said Coletti. “I’m confident that the BTEA will continue to grow in stature and value to its members.”

After thanking Coletti for his many years of dedicated service and leadership, Crowley said: “Lou has worked tirelessly, year after relentless year for the BTEA. He has earned the respect of industry leaders and policy makers, and in turn, advanced the contractors cause and the industry.

Attendees received hardhat stickers for workers with the message: “It’s Ok To Not Be Ok” along with the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline 988 phone number. September is National Suicide Prevention Month, and Crowley noted Construction Suicide Prevention Week is September 4-8.

Crowley said, “Today, we aim to shake the stigma regarding the topic of mental health. We want to empower and support you to confront emotional challenges with frankness, confidence and understanding.”