

THE LICA CONTRACTOR

Volume 19, Number 2

Summer 2026



Filco Industries: The “Special Forces” of Construction

Behind the Wheel of the GM Fleet Program

The Workforce Challenge



The Official Publication of the Land Improvement Contractors of America

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The LICA Contractor is the official publication of the Land Improvement Contractors of America, dedicated to the professional conservation of soil and water. LICA was founded in 1951 and is today comprised of twenty-four chapters across the continental United States.

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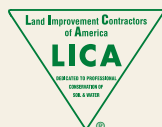
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A Message From the CEO

As we move into the heart of summer, I want to take a moment to reflect on where LICA stands today and, more importantly, where we are headed.

The first half of 2026 has been a period of momentum, collaboration, and renewed focus across our association. Throughout the country, our members continue to demonstrate the professionalism, expertise, and dedication that make LICA the leading voice for land improvement contractors. Whether advocating for our industry, supporting conservation efforts, investing in workforce development, or strengthening local communities, our members are making a difference every day.

At the national level, we have been focused on building a stronger foundation for the future. We are evaluating our governance structure, enhancing communication with state chapters, expanding membership opportunities, and developing new partnerships that deliver greater value to our members. Our goal is clear: to position LICA as one of the most respected and effective trade associations in America.

As we look toward the remainder of 2026 and beyond, our priorities remain centered on growth, member engagement, education, advocacy, and long-term sustainability. We are committed to creating more opportunities for contractors, strengthening relationships with industry partners, and ensuring that every member sees value in their investment in LICA.

None of this progress happens without the dedication of our state leaders, volunteers, board members, partners, and members. Thank you for your commitment to this organization and to the industry we proudly represent.

The future of LICA is bright, and I am excited about what we will accomplish together.
Dennis Mikula Jr.,
CEO, National LICA



LICA CEO Dennis Mikula, Jr. and EVP Allison Hack at the GM Fleet Solutions Summit in San Diego.

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Behind the Wheel of the GM Fleet Program

By ALLISON HACK, Executive Vice President, National LICA



Left: National LICA Executive Vice President Allison Hack takes the new Chevrolet Corvette for a spin during the GM Fleet Solutions Summit Ride & Drive.

vehicles from Chevrolet, GMC, and Cadillac were displayed on stage, giving attendees a first look at what is coming next from GM Fleet.

As Dennis and Allison heard more about the vehicles, technology, and fleet tools available through GM, it became clear how many different ways LICA contractors could put this benefit to use. A company may be looking at trucks for crews, SUVs for sales staff, or technology that helps with safety, tracking, and day-to-day fleet management. The benefit is not limited to one type of contractor or one type of vehicle.

For many LICA contractors, the truck is also the office. It is where calls are made, plans are checked, crews are directed, parts are picked up, projects are reviewed, and the next stop is already waiting. As GM walked through the lineup, it was easy to see how the right truck or SUV can support more than transportation. It can support the way contractors actually work.

Once attendees were behind the wheel at the Ride & Drive, the Summit took on a different energy. Dennis and Allison drove the new Corvette through San Diego. No one was pretending the Corvette was the fleet vehicle most contractors are adding to the work lineup, but it brought some fun to the day and showed a different side of GM.

Attendees could choose from a wide variety of GM trucks, SUVs, and EVs and take them through a mapped route in San Diego. Dennis and Allison drove the brand-new Cadillac Escalade EV, along with a Chevrolet Tahoe, giving National LICA a broader look at the lineup beyond the vehicles featured on stage.

The most intense ride of the day did not happen on the streets of San Diego. GM staged a closed-track police chase demonstration with two SUVs and a car moving through the course. Allison was in the front seat of the lead SUV while a professional driver handled the wheel. Dennis watched from the sidelines, which turned out to be the calmer place to take it all in.

The demonstration was controlled and impressive, but it was not exactly a quiet ride from the passenger seat. The driver handled the course without hesitation. Allison's reaction was slightly less composed.

Between the sessions, the vehicle reveal, the mapped drives, the closed-track demonstration, and the vendors showing how trucks can be outfitted for the job, the Summit gave National LICA a clearer look at what sits behind the GM Fleet Program. It was not just about seeing new models. It was about

There is a difference between reading about a fleet program and seeing it firsthand.

Before the GM Fleet Program was shared with National LICA members, Dennis Mikula and Allison Hack attended the GM Fleet Solutions Summit in San Diego, California. The Summit gave National LICA a closer look at the vehicles, the program, and the direction GM Fleet is taking for businesses that depend on trucks and SUVs every day.

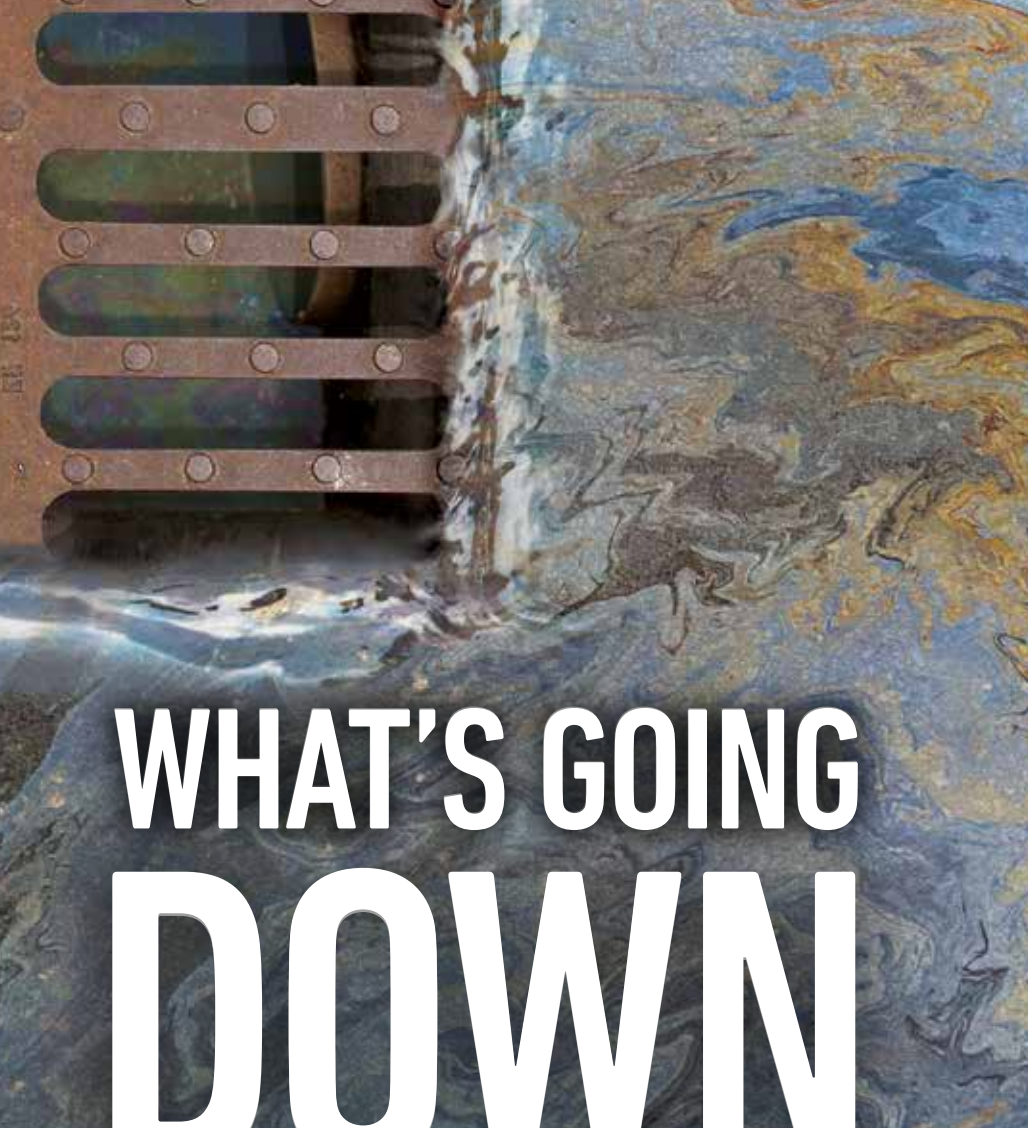
The event took place May 11-13 at the Gaylord Pacific Resort & Convention Center. Much of the Summit focused on the bigger picture behind fleet operations, including safety, risk, dealer support, and the decisions businesses make long before a vehicle ever reaches the lot.

Sessions included conversations with GM Fleet leaders, dealer representatives, and fleet professionals on topics such as building fleet safety, reducing risk, and using dealer expertise as part of the process. It was not just about what GM is building next. It was also about how businesses choose, manage, protect, and maintain the vehicles they rely on every day.

Then came the part of the Summit everyone had been waiting for.

Before the final session, attendees were asked to leave their phones outside the room. No photos. No videos. No sneak peeks.

Inside, GM unveiled new truck models with Ian Hucker, Vice President of GM Fleet, in attendance. Bright, polished



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INSIDE THE DRAIN



ABOVE THE DRAIN



BEYOND THE DRAIN





A Chevrolet Silverado equipped with a dump body demonstrates one of the many commercial upfit options available through the GM Fleet Program.



From pickups to SUVs, GM's Ride & Drive lineup gave attendees a first-hand look at the breadth of the GM Fleet Program.

understanding how the program can fit into the real decisions contractors are already making about their businesses.

That includes the vehicle itself, but also what happens after it is purchased. For many contractors, a truck does not stay standard for long. It may need storage, shelving, a service body, tool access, or a setup that makes sense for the crew using it every day. Seeing those options alongside the GM lineup helped connect the benefit to the way work vehicles are actually used.

Some members are replacing trucks. Some are adding vehicles for employees. Some are thinking about safety, tracking, or how to manage a growing fleet. The Summit gave Dennis and Allison a better understanding of how broad the program is, and how many different ways it may be useful to LICA members.

For contractors already thinking about the next truck, SUV, or company vehicle, the GM Fleet Program is worth having on the radar before the buying process gets too far down the road. ■

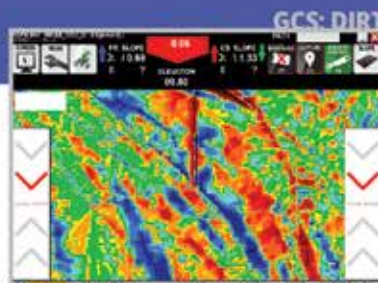
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Where Others See Impossible, Filco Sees Opportunity



How one New Jersey contractor built a reputation by embracing the jobs no one else wants.

By CAROLINE KRUG, Editor *The LICA Contractor*

Most contractors have a comfort zone. They know the types of projects they pursue, the equipment they'll need, and the challenges they'll face before the first piece of iron ever leaves the yard.

Filco Industries has never been interested in comfort zones. If anything, they've built an entire company around avoiding them.

Steep rock faces towering more than 200 feet above busy businesses. Controlled demolition inside occupied buildings. And even marine salvage operations recovering cargo from overturned ships. If it sounds complicated, dangerous, or downright impossible, there's a good chance someone has called Filco.

Becoming the "Special Forces" of Construction

For President Colin Machleder, the story didn't begin with construction. It began with curiosity.

"My family's background is in chemicals, manufacturing, and medical," Colin says. "No one in my family had any connection to construction."

Yet from an early age, he found himself fascinated by heavy equipment. While other children collected baseball cards or dreamed about becoming professional athletes, Colin wanted to understand how machines worked. That fascination only deepened in high school, where classes in metal shop and computer-aided drafting introduced him to fabrication, machining, and design. He still credits his teacher, Greg Quaglio, with helping shape the way he approaches problems today.



The Machleder family: Jack, Colin, Kate, and Filomena.

While attending the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Colin intentionally sought out jobs that would broaden his experience. He worked in a machine shop building pumps for sewage treatment facilities, spent time with demolition contractors and construction companies, and even worked at a concrete plant with a Class B recycling facility. Each position exposed him to a different corner of the industry, gradually building the knowledge that would eventually allow him to step out on his own.

When that day came, there was no elaborate business plan or fleet of equipment waiting for him. There was a Ford Econoline van, a collection of hand tools, and one employee named Marco.

More than twenty-six years later, Marco is still with the company.



Filco's first projects weren't glamorous. They were the small demolition jobs that larger contractors passed over because they were too confined or too complicated. Colin didn't see those conditions as obstacles. He saw an opportunity to build a reputation by saying "yes" when others said "no." Looking back, those "nuisance jobs," as competitors called them, became the foundation for everything Filco Industries is today.

As the work continued, so did the opportunities. The company purchased its first skid steer, followed by a 1999 John Deere 200LC excavator when Colin hired his first equipment operator, Helio. Like Marco, Helio remains with Filco today, and remarkably, so does that first excavator. It still has a place in the company's fleet more than two decades later, a reminder of how far the business has come without forgetting where it started.

Those early years also established a pattern that would shape the company's future. Every time Filco accepted a project that others considered too difficult, another customer called with an even greater challenge. Today, that reputation extends well beyond New Jersey.

Colin describes Filco as "the Special Forces of the construction industry," and the comparison is fitting. When conventional contractors run out of options, Filco is often just getting started.

Never Stop Learning

One of the most striking aspects of Filco's story is that the company refuses to define itself by a single specialty. Every unusual project becomes another opportunity to expand its capabilities.

It's also a lesson for every contractor, regardless of company size. Growth rarely comes from doing the same thing year



Compact equipment allows Filco crews to work inside occupied buildings.



Teamwork and ingenuity are part of Filco's culture on every job.



The Filco team "hanging out".

after year. Sometimes it begins with taking on one project that pushes your team just a little beyond its comfort zone, then doing it again. And again.

Before long, yesterday's impossible project becomes tomorrow's routine work.

Where Preparation Meets the Impossible

One project perfectly illustrates what makes Filco different.

A massive rock slope overlooking businesses in North Bergen, New Jersey, had become unstable. Rocks were breaking loose and falling hundreds of feet toward the properties below.

The slope stretched roughly 400 feet long and climbed more than 210 feet high. Heavy equipment couldn't simply drive to the top and begin working. Businesses below needed to remain open throughout construction. Every decision, and every moment, mattered.

Much of the work was completed using rope-access systems as the team installed nearly 100,000 square feet of protective netting, 180 rock anchors, and deep rock bolts extending up to 60 feet into the mountainside.

This project protects thousands of people every day without drawing attention to itself.

"What we're installing doesn't necessarily make something prettier," Colin explains. "It makes everything safe."

This sentiment resonates with LICA members across the country who know the work isn't always glamorous, and safety always comes first.

No two Filco projects look exactly alike. Over the years, the company has modified obsolete coal-mining equipment to recover vehicles from a cargo ship upset by a storm in the North Sea, maneuvered custom drill rigs along a narrow mountain roadway to stabilize a section of Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park, and installed a multi-ton sculpture by first leveling it on a large slab of ice before allowing it to melt into place.

The common thread running through those projects isn't adrenaline. It's preparation.

Nearly every unusual assignment begins long before crews arrive at the jobsite. In Filco's fabrication shop, specialized tools, drill rigs, lifting systems, and custom attachments are designed, built, and tested before heading to the field. For par-

ticularly complex projects, the team even constructs mock-ups to verify procedures before work begins. Safety, Colin says, is never sacrificed to solve a difficult problem.

Equipment Doesn't Build a Company

Ask Colin what he is most proud of, however, and he doesn't mention the impressive projects, the fabrication shop, or the more than 100 machines in Filco's fleet. He talks about people.

"I've known my men longer than I've known my wife," he says. Then he pauses before adding something every contractor understands.

"I can buy and sell equipment all day long. You can't put a price on employees."

That simple statement may explain Filco's success better than anything else. The specialized work they perform requires trust, communication, and willingness to work as a team.

The Filco Family

Filco has always been a true family business. Colin's wife, Filomena, has been involved from the beginning, and their children, Kate and Jack, quite literally grew up around the company. Colin laughs that when teachers asked what they had done over summer break, the answer wasn't carnivals and swimming pools. "They went to Labor Camp."

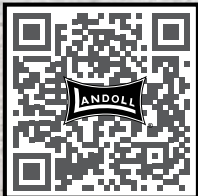
Those childhood experiences have come full circle. Even family vacations reflected their shared passion for construction, with trips to CONEXPO becoming a tradition that continues today. Kate is now pursuing a civil engineering degree at NJIT while programming Filco's CNC plasma table, and Jack, still in high school, is already comfortable operating nearly every machine in the fleet. Colin looks forward to the day when the family can work as a team full time.

The LICA Difference

Stories like Filco's are exactly why LICA exists. Across North America, LICA members represent every corner of the construction industry, and every company has its own story. What connects them isn't the type of work they perform. It's a shared commitment to craftsmanship, professionalism, safety, and helping one another strengthen the industry.



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Colin and his family are regular participants in New Jersey LICA meetings, educational programs, and events. Nearly half of Filco’s work comes from other contractors, making collaboration an essential part of the company’s success.

“We joined for the camaraderie and networking,” he says. “The majority of the members are there because they want to be there. They value their businesses and realize LICA is an incredibly useful tool.”

Whether that means sharing best practices, advocating for the industry, developing future leaders, or simply celebrating

each other’s accomplishments, LICA continues to champion the people behind the projects.

Along the way, Filco was recognized as New Jersey LICA’s Contractor of the Year, an honor that reflects not only the company’s technical capabilities but also its commitment to the industry and to the people who have helped build it.

Loving the Challenge

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from Filco Industries is its mindset.

It’s about looking at a problem that intimidates everyone else and asking, “How do we make this work?”

That spirit has always defined the construction industry. It’s the same determination that built highways through mountains, utilities beneath cities, and communities across North America.

Every LICA contractor knows that feeling. The satisfaction that comes from standing back after completing a difficult project and knowing your team accomplished something that once seemed impossible.

Around the Filco shop there is a common phrase: “We love ugly.”

It’s a fitting description for a company that has built its reputation on solving the kinds of problems most contractors would rather avoid. But after spending time with Colin and learning the story behind Filco Industries, it’s clear that the phrase isn’t really about difficult jobs.

It’s about embracing challenges, believing there is always a solution, and trusting the people beside you to help find it. ■

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The Workforce Challenge: Who Will Build What's Next?

By CAROLINE KRUG, Editor *The LICA Contractor*

Ask any contractor about their biggest challenge today, and workforce development will likely top the list.

Across the country, contractors are struggling to find skilled workers, from equipment operators and mechanics to foremen and field supervisors. Demand for land improvement projects remains strong, so for many companies the greatest obstacle to growth isn't a lack of work. It's a lack of people.

As experienced workers retire, fewer young people are entering the trades to replace them. For decades, students were encouraged to pursue four-year degrees at the expense of vocational education, leaving many unaware of the rewarding careers construction offers.

The good news is that contractors, associations, and educators are finding creative ways to change that narrative.

Reaching Students Earlier

New Jersey LICA has taken an innovative approach by bringing a heavy equipment simulator directly into schools throughout the state. The simulator gives students an opportunity to experience operating construction equipment in a safe and engaging environment.

As students line up to try the simulator, conversations naturally follow about equipment operation, surveying, project management, mechanics, and the many career paths that support land improvement projects.

"We can't wait until students are graduating to introduce them to our industry," says Hugo Castillo, Apprenticeship Coordinator for NJ LICA. "The simulator gives us a chance to spark interest early and show students that construction offers rewarding, technology-driven careers with tremendous opportunities for growth. Every student who climbs into that seat leaves with a better understanding of what our industry does and the impact it has on their community."

Programs like this are helping students see construction as a career with advancement opportunities, strong wages, and the satisfaction of building projects that strengthen America.

Looking Beyond Traditional Recruiting

Many contractors are discovering that the best recruits don't always come directly from construction programs.

Experience gained in agriculture, trucking, manufacturing, warehousing, military service, and other industries often translates well to construction. Many workers already possess the technical skills, work ethic, and safety mindset contractors are looking for.

Successful companies are expanding their recruiting efforts beyond traditional channels and looking for candidates with the right attitude and aptitude, even if they lack direct industry experience.



Hugo Castillo, Apprenticeship Coordinator for New Jersey LICA, introduces students to careers in the land improvement industry.

Creating Opportunities to Experience the Industry

For many young people, construction remains something they see from the highway rather than a career they actively consider.

Internships, job-shadowing programs, equipment demonstrations, career fairs, and field tours can help bridge that gap. Even a single day on a jobsite can change someone's perception of the industry. The same approach can also attract adults considering a career change.

Land improvement contractors perform work that often goes unnoticed by the public but is essential to everyday life. From improving agricultural productivity through drainage and conservation practices to preparing sites for homes, roads, and infrastructure, the industry shapes the land that supports our communities and economy.

Helping prospective employees understand that impact can be a powerful recruiting tool.

Showcasing Modern Construction

Jobsites have changed dramatically over the past generation.

Machine control systems, drones, GPS, telematics, and digital plan management have transformed the way contractors operate. Yet many potential recruits remain unaware of the technological side of the industry.

Highlighting these innovations helps younger recruits see construction as a technology-driven career, not just equipment operation.



Students try New Jersey LICA's heavy equipment simulator, gaining a hands-on introduction to careers in construction.



Recent Lehigh Career & Technical Institute (LCTI) graduate Frank Damiano trains on a backhoe as he prepares for a career in the land improvement industry.

Turning Employees into Ambassadors

Employees who enjoy their work are often a company's best recruiters. Referral programs, mentorship opportunities, and employee recognition encourage them to share their positive experiences with friends and family members, giving prospective employees an authentic look at the opportunities available.

Preserving Knowledge Through Mentorship

While much of the workforce conversation focuses on attracting new employees, many contractors are also finding value in reconnecting with experienced professionals who have spent decades in the industry.

Retired operators, mechanics, foremen, and superintendents possess a wealth of knowledge that cannot be learned from a manual or training video. While many may no longer be interested in working full-time, some are eager to remain involved in the industry through mentoring, training, safety instruction, or equipment demonstrations.

By pairing experienced veterans with newer employees, companies can transfer institutional knowledge, reinforce safe work practices, and help younger workers develop skills more quickly.

For contractors struggling to train the next generation, some of the best teachers may already be in their communities.

Building a Career, Not Just Filling a Position

Competitive compensation remains important, but today's workforce is also looking for opportunities to learn new skills, advance into leadership positions, and contribute to meaningful projects.

Land improvement and construction offer something few industries can match. At the end of the day, workers can point to a road, terrace, conservation project, or commercial development and say, "I helped build that."

The workforce challenge won't be solved overnight. But by introducing students to construction earlier, embracing inno-

vative recruiting strategies, investing in training, and promoting the value of skilled trades, contractors can help build the next generation of industry professionals.

The future of this country depends on it. ■



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Weathering the Storm: Summer Safety Starts Before the First Warning

By DOUG BUCHAN, CHSP, CHEP

Principal, Synapse Safety Solutions

Summer is construction season. Longer days and favorable conditions make it one of the busiest times of the year for contractors across the country. Yet those same months also bring some of the greatest safety challenges crews face, from oppressive heat to severe thunderstorms, high winds, flash flooding, and tornadoes.

This year has been another reminder that Mother Nature doesn't always follow the forecast. Across many parts of the country, contractors have experienced repeated rounds of severe weather that have delayed projects, damaged equipment, and created dangerous working conditions. While no contractor can control the weather, every contractor can prepare for it.

The best safety plans begin long before dark clouds appear on the horizon.

Make Weather Part of Every Morning

Just as crews discuss daily work assignments and equipment inspections, weather should be part of the morning safety briefing. Forecasts change quickly, particularly during the summer months, and assigning one person to monitor changing conditions throughout the day can provide valuable lead time if storms begin to develop.

Mobile weather apps, radar services, and emergency alerts are excellent tools, but they only help if someone is paying attention.

Know the Difference Between a Watch and a Warning

Many people use the terms interchangeably, but they require very different responses.

A tornado or severe thunderstorm **watch** means conditions are favorable for dangerous weather to develop. It is time to stay alert, review emergency procedures, and prepare to act.

A **warning** means dangerous weather has been spotted or detected by radar. At that point, work should stop immediately, and everyone should move to a designated shelter.

Waiting until the storm is visible often leaves little time to react.

Have a Shelter Plan Before You Need One

Every jobsite should identify where workers will go if severe weather develops. Permanent buildings are always the preferred option. If no permanent structure is available, identify the nearest suitable shelter before work begins.

Heavy equipment, trucks, storage containers, and highway overpasses are not safe tornado shelters. Likewise, drainage ditches and culverts may quickly become deadly during flash flooding.



A tornado touches down near Jordan Township, Illinois, on May 23, 2020. Severe weather can develop quickly, making emergency planning essential on every jobsite.

Every crew member should know where to go and how they will be notified.

Secure the Jobsite

Strong winds can turn ordinary construction materials into dangerous projectiles. Loose plywood, barricades, fencing, traffic control devices, and lightweight equipment should be secured whenever severe weather is expected.

Taking a few minutes to prepare the site before a storm arrives can prevent injuries and significantly reduce property damage.

Don't Ignore Lightning

Lightning remains one of the most underestimated hazards on construction sites.

If thunder can be heard, lightning is close enough to strike. Outdoor work should stop immediately until at least 30 minutes after the last clap of thunder.

Metal equipment does not attract lightning, but it certainly conducts electricity. Operators working on cranes, excavators, dozers, and other heavy machinery should move to safe shelter when lightning threatens.

The Dangers Don't End When the Storm Passes

Returning to work too quickly can create new hazards.

After severe weather, supervisors should inspect the site for downed power lines, unstable trees, damaged structures,

washed-out access roads, flooded excavations, and shifting soil conditions. Standing water may conceal holes, debris, or energized electrical hazards.

A careful post-storm inspection should always occur before normal operations resume.

Don't Forget the Heat

While dramatic storms often make headlines, heat illness remains one of the most common summer hazards in construction.

Workers don't have to be in record-breaking temperatures to experience heat exhaustion or heat stroke. High humidity, direct sunlight, heavy protective equipment, and physically demanding work all increase the risk.

Simple practices can dramatically reduce heat-related illnesses:

- Encourage workers to begin hydrating before they feel thirsty.
- Schedule the most physically demanding work during cooler morning hours whenever practical.
- Provide shaded or cooled rest areas.
- Allow additional breaks during periods of extreme heat.

- Train supervisors to recognize early signs of heat illness.
- Encourage crew members to watch out for one another.

Confusion, loss of coordination, slurred speech, or unconsciousness may indicate heat stroke, a medical emergency requiring immediate treatment.

Safety Is Everyone's Responsibility

Construction professionals take pride in working through difficult conditions. It's part of the industry's culture. But experience also teaches that good judgment is one of the most valuable tools on any jobsite.

Schedules can be adjusted. Equipment can be repaired. Materials can be replaced.

People cannot.

Whether facing extreme heat, severe thunderstorms, or the possibility of tornadoes, preparation is the best defense. A few minutes spent planning before the weather turns can protect workers, minimize downtime, and ensure everyone goes home safely at the end of the day.

Because at the end of every successful project, the most important thing built isn't the road, bridge, or utility line. It's a safety culture that values every member of the crew. ■

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SUMMER 2026 ■ 17

Insights from CONEXPO-CON/AGG 2026

Doing More With Less: How Equipment Is Changing the Way Work Gets Done

Productivity on a jobsite used to mean working faster. Today, it is about getting more done with fewer people and less downtime.

That shift was evident throughout CONEXPO-CON/AGG 2026. Rather than focusing on bigger machines or more horsepower, manufacturers emphasized helping contractors reduce downtime, keep equipment running and take on more work without adding headcount.

"Everyone is looking for ways to improve uptime and get more out of their equipment," said Dana Wuesthoff, show director for CONEXPO-CON/AGG. "That came through clearly in what exhibitors were showing this year."

A few patterns stood out.

One Machine, More Jobs

One of the biggest changes is how much work a single machine can now handle.

Tiltrotators are a good example. Widely used in parts of Europe, adoption in North America is beginning to grow. By allowing an excavator attachment to rotate and tilt, they give operators far more flexibility in tight or complex environments.



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"Productivity can improve by around 30 percent with a tiltrotator," said Krister Blomgren, CEO of engcon. "In some cases, even more."

That flexibility means fewer machine moves and fewer pieces of equipment on site. Tasks that once required multiple machines can now be handled by one.

The same idea is showing up in other categories. Diamond Mowers introduced a multi-purpose platform that operates on both sides while supporting a wide range of attachments.

The common thread is simple: if one machine can do more, crews can stay lean.

Downtime is Becoming Less Acceptable

Productivity depends on equipment staying in service.

That is why more manufacturers are approaching maintenance and durability differently.

Conn-Weld, which builds vibrating screens, highlighted a modular design that allows operators to replace only worn sections instead of an entire system, reducing repair time and keeping equipment in service longer.

Component manufacturers are also developing seals and materials that perform in harsher conditions.

"Equipment is being pushed harder than ever," said Ravila Moodley of Hallite. "The expectation is that it keeps running with minimal downtime."

That expectation is driving design decisions focused on keeping machines productive longer between repairs.

More Output in Less Time

In areas like aggregates and recycling, productivity often comes down to how much material can be processed in a given window. That is where higher-throughput equipment is making a difference.

Edge Innovate introduced a shredder designed to handle large volumes while automatically adjusting to changing material conditions. That kind of consistency helps keep production on track.

In vegetation management, companies are also rethinking how work gets done. Dipperfox, for example, drills vertically rather than cutting horizontally, reducing debris and improving efficiency.

What This Means on the Jobsite

Taken together, these innovations reflect a broader shift in how contractors define productivity. Success is no longer measured only by machine specs or speed, but by versatility, uptime and overall output.

For contractors dealing with tight labor markets and increasing pressure on margins, those factors matter more than ever.

The goal is no longer simply to work faster. It is to get more done with the equipment you already have. ■

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Are Emails and Texts Taking Over your Construction Projects?

By CRAIG MARTIN, Construction Attorney with Lamson Dugan and Murray

Email and text messages have become the primary means of communication on construction projects. While these tools improve efficiency, they also create a written record that can become critical evidence in litigation, arbitration, or mediation. Owners, architects, contractors, and project managers should therefore communicate with care.

First, assume every email and text message will eventually be read by a judge, arbitrator, or opposing counsel. Avoid emotional responses, personal attacks, sarcasm, or statements made in frustration. Communications should remain professional, factual, and focused on project issues.

Second, document important project events clearly and promptly. If a conversation occurs by phone or in person regarding schedule delays, changed conditions, safety concerns, or scope modifications, follow up with a written summary.



Contemporaneous documentation often carries significant weight in resolving disputes.

Third, be precise. Vague statements such as “we discussed this before” or “you approved it” can create confusion. Identify dates, participants, locations, and specific decisions whenever possible. Accurate communication helps prevent misunderstandings and strengthens credibility.

Fourth, establish and enforce a written email and electronic communications policy. Employees should understand that project-related emails and text messages are business records that may be discoverable in litigation. A clear policy should address appropriate language, preservation requirements, and the prohibition against deleting project communications without authorization. Regular training and consistent enforcement help ensure that electronic communications support project objectives rather than create unnecessary legal risk.

Finally, organize your emails and text message records. Emails, text messages, photographs, and attachments should be preserved in the project file and according to company document-retention policies. The inability to locate critical communications can be as damaging as unfavorable communications themselves.

Thoughtful, professional communication practices not only improve project management but also reduce risk and place parties in a stronger position if disputes arise. ■

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Craig Martin is a construction attorney with Lamson Dugan & Murray, LLP law firm in Omaha, Nebraska, and a member of the collaborative Johnson Team. The Johnson Team consists of a group of specialists serving LICA members on matters of significance – planning, protection, and preservation of their businesses and families. If you have any questions, Craig's e-mail is cmartin@ldmlaw.com.

Calling All Contractors: Share Your Expertise in The LICA Contractor!

Have you ever wanted to share your insights, experiences, or innovative projects with the broader LICA community? Now is your chance! The LICA Contractor magazine is calling for submissions from our valued readers like you. Whether you're a seasoned professional, a passionate newcomer, or an industry enthusiast, we invite you to contribute your article ideas and photos for a chance to be featured in an upcoming issue.

Why Submit to The LICA Contractor Magazine?

1. Showcase Your Expertise: Share your insights, experiences, and best practices with fellow land improvement professionals across the nation.
2. Gain Recognition: Get your name and your work in front of a dedicated readership of industry insiders, contractors, and enthusiasts.
3. Contribute to the Community: Help cultivate a vibrant exchange of ideas and knowledge within the LICA community.
4. Inspire Others: Your stories and photos have the power to inspire and educate others in the industry, sparking new ideas and approaches.

What We're Looking For:

- Feature Articles: Share your expertise on topics such as best practices, industry trends, project highlights, and innovation in land improvement.
- Case Studies: Dive deep into specific projects, challenges faced, solutions implemented, and lessons learned.

- Photo Submissions: Capture the beauty and complexity of land improvement projects through striking photographs.
- Success Stories: Inspire others with stories of triumph, innovation, and collaboration in the field.
- Tips and Tricks: Offer practical advice, tips, and tricks to help fellow contractors excel in their work.

How to Submit:

- Article Ideas: Send in a brief outline or description of your proposed article.
- Photos: Share high-resolution images capturing the essence of LICA
- Contact Details: Include your name, contact information, and a brief bio.

Email Your Submissions to:

Caroline Krug, Editor, editor@licanational.org

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Selected submissions will be featured in upcoming issues, so don't miss out on this fantastic opportunity to be part of The LICA Contractor magazine!



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Major Legislation Impacting LICA Members Must Be Completed by Year's End

By BRIAN DEERY, LICA Director of Government Relations

As the first session of the 119th Congress enters its final quarter, several pieces of legislation that impact LICA members still need to be addressed. Waiting until the second session begins in January would create significant uncertainty. Overshadowing all congressional action in the coming months will be the upcoming midterm elections. The outcome could change the majority in the House and alter the makeup, if not the majority, in the Senate, with unpredictable impacts. The three major issues for LICA that should be addressed before year's end are the highway reauthorization bill, the farm bill, and the Fiscal Year 2027 budget.

Highway Bill:

The current authorization for surface transportation programs expires on September 30, 2026. Allowing that deadline to pass would cause significant disruption to the transportation construction market. While leadership in both the House and Senate has indicated its intention to complete the bill on time, the clock is running. The current authorization, enacted as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), provided historic, generational levels of funding for highway, bridge, transit, and rail construction. Providing the revenue needed to maintain those funding levels, however, will be a major challenge.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has begun the process by approving its version of a reauthorization bill. Under that proposal, funding levels would increase modestly over the next five years. Significantly, the committee took bold action to in-



crease revenue into the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) for the first time since 1993. The bill would create a new \$130 annual registration fee on electric vehicles and a \$35 annual fee on plug-in hybrids. Those fees would increase every other year beginning in 2029 and would be capped at \$150 and \$50, respectively. The proposal is expected to generate just under \$10 billion during the first five years and approximately \$29 billion over the next 10 years.

The next step in the House is for the Ways and Means Committee to consider extending and possibly increasing the federal gas tax, the most politically challenging component of the reauthorization. Complicating the debate is the recent increase in gasoline prices following the start of the Iran conflict. President Trump and some members of Congress have called for a gas tax holiday to ease the burden on drivers. Voting for a gas tax extension, much less

an increase, when the average price per gallon is \$4.32 is politically difficult.

House Democrats continue to push back on the proposed EV fees, while some Republicans believe the funding levels are insufficient. Senate committees have also begun negotiations to address these and other challenging issues.

Farm Bill:

While the One Big Beautiful reconciliation bill extended many agriculture programs, the last full five-year farm bill was enacted in 2018. The House recently passed its version of a new multi-year bill, which reallocates nearly \$20 billion in conservation funding provided through the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The legislation would make that funding permanent within the Conservation Title while removing the "climate sideboards" that previously limited its use to greenhouse gas reduction projects.

Attention now turns to the Senate. While Agriculture Committee Chairman John Boozman, R-Ark., has expressed interest in passing a bill soon, disagreements with Democrats over pesticide regulations and proposed reductions to food assistance funding remain unresolved. The Senate may also address year-round sales of E-15 ethanol-blended gasoline and additional emergency assistance for farmers as part of the legislation.

FY 2027 Budget

The FY 2027 budget carries significant ramifications for the agriculture construction market. The Trump Administration has submitted a proposal that targets the Department of Agriculture for significant downsizing, describing USDA as a “bloated Washington, D.C., bureaucracy.” The proposal would reduce USDA funding by \$4.9 billion, or 19%, from current funding levels while eliminating several international food aid programs.

Significant staffing reductions are also proposed for both the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The budget calls for 6,009 full-time equivalent FSA positions in FY 2027, a reduction of more than 25% over two years from the 8,135 positions authorized in FY 2025. NRCS staffing would be set at 9,241 positions in FY 2027, the same level as this year but down 2,301 positions from 2025. The proposal would also shift significant funding from the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to support remaining NRCS staff.

In addition, the Administration has requested zero funding for conservation technical assistance, sustainable agriculture research and education programs, the Rural Energy for America Program, and Rural Business Development Grants.

The next step is for the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to develop their own spending proposals and determine where federal dollars should be allocated. After a difficult 2026 for the ag-

ricultural community, many are hopeful that the Administration’s budget request will be significantly revised.

LICA members have much at stake in all three of these legislative battles. Now is the time to remain engaged and stay in contact with your elected representatives to ensure they understand how these proposals will affect your businesses. ■

Brian Deery brings over 40 years of experience advocating for highway, heavy, and civil construction contractors before Congress and federal agencies. As LICA’s Director of Government Relations, he keeps members informed about legislative and regulatory issues that impact the land improvement industry. If you have any questions, Brian’s email is Deery5@gmail.com.

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Schweiss Doors Joins Western Fun at Greeley Stampede

A sudden summer downpour would have washed out the Jon Pardi concert in the SuperStar Concert Series lineup for the Greeley Stampede's 100th anniversary in Greeley, Co. Prior to the centennial, the Stampede had been using a portable stage for its outdoor nighttime concerts in the rodeo arena, an inconvenient setup when one had to prep the stage for a concert during a pouring rain.

The 100th Greeley Stampede was memorable for another reason – the inaugural season of the JBS Stage. A new permanent stage building, it includes three Schweiss Doors bifold doors that protected the stage, the band and the expensive electronics and instruments from the deluge. Instead of a washout, there was only a one-hour rain delay.

"We were able to shut the doors, do the stage change and go on with the show once the storm moved on," said Justin Watada, CEO of the Greeley Stampede.

The Greeley Stampede is the summer place to be in and around Greeley, Colo. A celebration of Western heritage and



The JBS Stage at Island Grove Regional Park in Greeley, Colo., home of the Greeley Stampede, is the new permanent stage structure at the park. The building includes three Schweiss Doors bifold doors. The doors are wide open to display a large American flag prior to a rodeo at the arena.

A vertical advertisement for Schweiss Doors. At the top, the Schweiss logo is in red and white, followed by the phone number 507-426-8273. Below this, the text "HYDRAULIC & BIFOLD DOORS" is written in large, bold, yellow letters. Underneath, the phrases "ANY APPLICATION...", "ANY SIZE...", and "ANYWHERE!" are written in yellow. The main image shows a large, white, hydraulic and bifold door structure with its doors open, revealing a blue sky and a white truck. At the bottom, the website "SCHWEISSDOORS.COM" is displayed in white on a red background.

the nation's independence, the Stampede has brought together generations of family and friends for days of food, games, rides, parades, rodeos and live music around the Fourth of July holiday.

"We are the community class reunion," Watada said.

The heart of the Stampede is the rodeo arena, where cowboys and cowgirls show off their skills among the broncos and bulls. The arena also hosts exciting demolition derbies and concerts. Since the 1970s, some of the biggest names in rock and country music have provided the soundtrack for the Stampede.

At first, the portable stage, which was pulled into the arena by two tractors, worked well. However, the production logistics of concerts, with high-tech audio and visual needs, started to outgrow the old setup, making it difficult for the Stampede to book the level of talent officials wanted.

"We decided we needed a permanent stage," Watada says.

The stage building was designed and manufactured by American Buildings, with Big Johnson Construction of Fort Morgan, Colo., acting as the general contractor. The structure was engineered to provide the acoustics required for a live music venue and hold up to 100,000 pounds of audio and visual equipment, a must to accommodate high-quality concert productions. The building has green rooms, restrooms, an audio-visual control room and a stage loading dock.

It was also important that there be a way to close off the stage when not in use. The arena normally has a dirt floor for rodeos and demolition derbies, so being able to protect the stage from clouds of dust, grime and the weather was a must.



The Schweiss bifold doors on the JBS Stage are opened a bit during a demo derby at the Rodeo Arena as part of the Greeley Stampede celebrations.



Horses and their riders wait around the JBS Stage as they get ready to take part in a rodeo at the arena at Island Grove Regional Park in Greeley, Colorado as part of the Greeley Stampede.

Ultimately, the decision was made that bifold doors fit the project best. When closed, they provide the required protection. When open, the doors wouldn't get in the way of any lights or speakers mounted above the stage while creating a bit of a canopy. It was the team from Big Johnson Construction that recommended Schweiss Doors.

"We've worked with many brands of doors and Schweiss Doors has been pretty much the most consistent across the industry with quality of their product," said Trevor Fehseke, vice president of Big Johnson Construction.

The stage has three bifold doors, two measuring approximately 18 feet wide by 30 feet high and another measuring 78 feet wide by 30 feet high. Together, the doors stretch out over 114 feet.

Each door can be opened independently, providing flexibility for those using the arena and stage. If an event needs to use the audio equipment, one or both smaller doors can be opened to uncover the speaker system while the stage door remains closed.

The doors installation was a bit of a novel job, Fehseke said, due to the size of the doors and elevation of the stage. He says the stage building was constructed on top of an eight-foot high concrete platform. That meant the installation crew from Big Johnson

had to lift the door about 38 feet above the ground before it could be attached.

"That presented a bit of a challenge from an installation standpoint," Fehseke said. "Once our installers figured out a gameplan and got it going, I think the install went fairly smooth."

The doors have taken some time to get used to and Watada says there was some nervousness about operating such large doors, but overall, the doors have been a success.

"The construction of the Schweiss doors has been top quality," Watada says. "The doors have been great and are serving their purpose."

The entire stage structure has been a massive upgrade for the arena. It increased capacity for concerts and now makes it possible for more music acts to perform at the Stampede. There is also the goal of growing the number of events that are held at the park, which, of course, is a positive for the city of Greeley. ■

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Cook's AGPS announces the release of TopoPro, the next evolution of the "Compact Rover" series. The TopoPro is a high-performance RTK GNSS smart antenna capable of utilizing all modern satellite constellations and frequencies for maximum reliability in the field. While the original Compact Rover brought low-cost surveying and guidance to the farm, the new TopoPro streamlines that technology into a single, cable-free antenna-on-a-pole. This design brings portable, sub-inch surveying to the agricultural job site in a rugged, "grab-and-go" format that eliminates the clutter of external receivers and wiring.



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Landoll Company Donates 40,000th Traveling Axle Trailer to International Towing & Recovery Museum



Landoll Company announces the completion and donation of its 40,000th 440 Series Traveling Axle Trailer to the International Towing and Recovery Museum, where the one-of-a-kind trailer will be auctioned in October 2026 during the museum's 40th anniversary celebration.

The October 16, 2026, auction will be held by Peak Auto Auction: peakautoauctionstn.com

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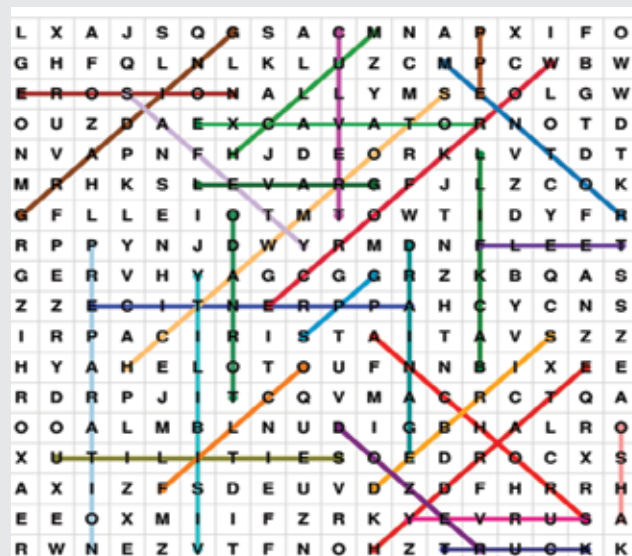


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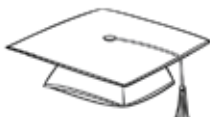
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National LICA | 630-548-1984

National LICA

3080 Ogden Ave., Suite 107, Lisle, IL 60532
benefits@licanational.org | LICANational.org

BUSINESS & FINANCIAL SERVICES

Business Succession & Exit Planning



Strategic planning for contractor business transitions

- Free initial consultation
- Contingency planning and business continuation planning
- Key employee retention strategies

Greg Greco | greg@grecofinancial.com

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- Competitive payment processing rates for members
- Simplified invoicing & payment solutions
- Reduce or offset credit card processing fees

Titanium Payments | support@titaniumpayments.com

World Insurance Programs



Insurance & employee benefits for LICA contractors

- Commercial insurance coverage tailored for contractors
- Surety bonds, risk management, & claims advocacy support
- Employee benefits including retirement plans, health plans, & HR solutions

Mike Coughlin | mikecoughlin@worldinsurance.com

Membership Application

Company Name _____

Member Name _____ Spouse's Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____ Cell Phone (_____) _____

Fax (_____) _____ Email: _____

LICA Sponsor _____

Contractor (Type of Business)

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ CH Concrete/Hardscaping | ☐ PD Ponds/Dams |
| ☐ CR Crane Service | ☐ RP Roads/Paving |
| ☐ DB Directional Boring | ☐ SP Site Prep./Demolition |
| ☐ DW Drainage/Water Mgmt./ Irrigation | ☐ SS Septic Systems/
Onsite Wastewater Treatment |
| ☐ EM Earthmoving/Grading/Land Leveling | ☐ TH Trucking/Hauling |
| ☐ EX Excavating/Land Clearing | ☐ TW Terraces/Waterways |
| ☐ GR Gravel/Rock Production | ☐ UU Underground Utilities |
| ☐ LS Landscaping/Seeding/Sod | |
| ☐ OD Open Ditch Work/Dredging | |

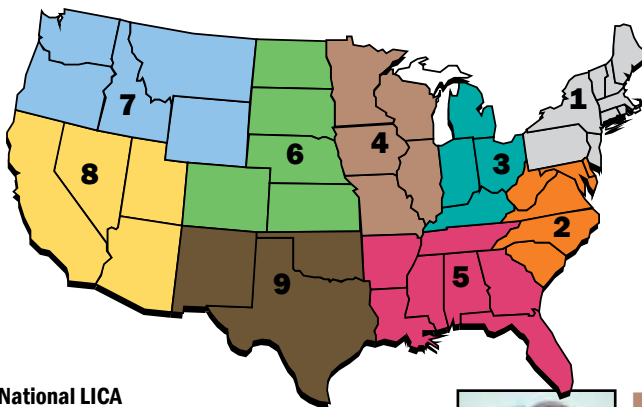
Application is for (Check One)

- ☐ Active Contractor Member (Annual Dues)..... Vary by State Chapter
Active Land Improvement Contractor.
- ☐ Company Associate Member (Annual Dues)..... Vary by State Chapter
Person or companies manufacturing or selling materials, equipment or services to active contractor members.
- ☐ Supporting Member (Annual Dues)..... Vary by State Chapter
Person(s) or associations interested in LICA.
- ☐ National Associate Member \$395.00
- ☐ Member-At-Large..... \$195.00
Contractors in state without chapters

Signature _____ Date _____

Please contact your state chapter for annual dues and additional information. See page 33.

To become a national associate please contact:
National LICA, 3080 Ogden Avenue, Suite 107, Lisle, IL 60532
Phone 630-548-1984
Email: membership@licanational.org • Website: LICANational.org



STATES WITH MEMBERS-AT-LARGE

Arkansas
Montana

North Dakota
Oregon

National LICA

3080 Ogden Ave., Suite 107
Lisle, IL 60532
Phone: 630-548-1984
Email: ahack@licanational.org



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INDIANA LICA

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Email: kira.cooney@nelica.com



NEW JERSEY LICA

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Phone: 973-630-7600
Email: buddy@govisionstrong.com



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Email: nylica@rochester.rr.com



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Joanie Micsky
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SOUTH DAKOTA LICA

Toby Crow
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Sioux Falls, SD 57101
Phone: 605-274-8689
Email: Sandie@sdagc.org



VIRGINIA LICA

Millie Gallahan
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Hillsboro, VA 20132
Phone: 703-431-9081
Email: valica2018@icloud.com

WISCONSIN LICA

National LICA
3080 Ogden Ave., Suite 107
Lisle, IL 60532
Phone: 630-548-1984
Email: ahack@licanational.org



JOBSITE JUMBLE

WORD SEARCH

L	X	A	J	S	Q	G	S	A	C	M	N	A	P	X	I	F	O
G	H	F	Q	L	N	L	K	L	U	Z	C	M	P	C	W	B	W
E	R	O	S	I	O	N	A	L	L	Y	M	S	E	O	L	G	W
O	U	Z	D	A	E	X	C	A	V	A	T	O	R	N	O	T	D
N	V	A	P	N	F	H	J	D	E	O	R	K	L	V	T	D	T
M	R	H	K	S	L	E	V	A	R	G	F	J	L	Z	C	O	K
G	F	L	L	E	I	O	T	M	T	O	W	T	I	D	Y	F	R
R	P	P	Y	N	J	D	W	Y	R	M	D	N	F	L	E	E	T
G	E	R	V	H	Y	A	G	C	G	G	R	Z	K	B	Q	A	S
Z	Z	E	C	I	T	N	E	R	P	P	A	H	C	Y	C	N	S
I	R	P	A	C	I	R	I	S	T	A	I	T	A	V	S	Z	Z
H	Y	A	H	E	L	O	T	O	U	F	N	N	B	I	X	E	E
R	D	R	P	J	I	T	C	Q	V	M	A	C	R	C	T	Q	A
O	O	A	L	M	B	L	N	U	D	I	G	B	H	A	L	R	O
X	U	T	I	L	I	T	I	E	S	O	E	D	R	O	C	X	S
A	X	I	Z	F	S	D	E	U	V	D	Z	D	F	H	R	R	H
E	E	O	X	M	I	I	F	Z	R	K	Y	E	V	R	U	S	A
R	W	N	E	Z	V	T	F	N	O	H	Z	T	R	U	C	K	K

WORD BANK

ANCHORS	HYDRATE
APPRENTICE	MENTOR
BACKFILL	MULCH
CULVERT	OSHA
DEBRIS	PPE
DOZER	PREPARATION
DRAINAGE	SAFETY
EROSION	STORM WATCH
EXCAVATOR	SURVEY
FILCO	TORNADO
FLEET	TRUCK
GPS	UTILITIES
GRADING	VISIBILITY
GRAVEL	WORKFORCE

Answers to Jobsite Jumble on page 28.

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