

Evolution of the Industrial Contractor and Workforce

I began my career as an apprentice painter, working for the company that I would ultimately come to own. Hartman Walsh performed both commercial and industrial work, at a time when very few painters were able to do both. Back then, you were either a "steel painter" or a "decorator," both of which had amazing skills, but with different intentions for the end result.

Decorators painted to provide aesthetics and protection, while industrial painters were hired primarily to provide corrosion protection and only some aesthetics. Both fell under the painting trade, but one thing was sure – the training and skill sets were vastly different.

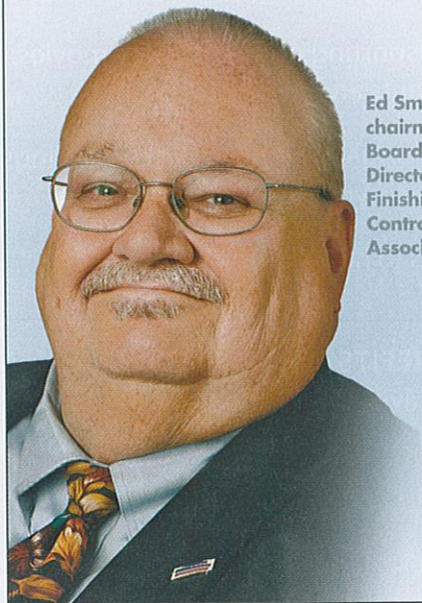
Over the years, Hartman Walsh matured into a national industrial painting firm. The reason we gravitated to the industrial market was due to the large concentration of refineries, chemical manufacturing plants, and power producing facilities that existed in and around St. Louis when we

began in 1950. From the beginning, we were willing and able to take on the more complex industrial projects that required an interest, knowledge, and an investment in that particular market.

We had an industrial market available at our doorstep, and over time, the industries began to move away from the metropolitan areas and moved to less populated areas. While the change was gradual, it was also constant; even today, the small amount of industry remaining continues to diminish. As our customer base moved further from the cities, Hartman Walsh, like many of the industrial contractors, was forced to provide its services beyond our local areas, so, we followed our customer wherever they needed us.

Many people ask "Why don't the owners of these industrial facilities hire local contractors to perform their work?" Sometimes they do, but quite often, there aren't any industrial contractors available locally to provide the skilled and experienced workforce. Plus, the work itself usually requires specialized and complex equipment, which is very expensive and difficult to maintain. Many smaller local shops simply cannot justify the upfront cost outlay to purchase the equipment needed to perform industrial work; therefore, the national contractor was borne out of necessity.

As the industry advanced, so did the requirements for training in both safety and skill sets. One of the biggest changes came about when OSHA recognized the need for clear procedures and training in the containment, removal, and disposal of hazardous materials such as lead base paint. On May 4, 1993, OSHA published an interim final rule for lead in construction that put in place a comprehensive set of rules and criteria to perform this type of work. This is just one example of the many ever-changing standards industrial painting contractors must understand and for which



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Ed Smith is chairman of the Finishing Contractors Association (FCA), the only international trade association devoted exclusively to serving the unique needs of U.S. and Canadian union contractors in the drywall finishing, glass and glazing, floor covering, painting and decorating, and signs and display trades. All FCA members are signatory to collective bargaining agreements with the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades. To learn more about the FCA, go to www.finishingcontractors.org, or call 301-215-7026.

they must take the necessary steps to remain in compliance with the law.

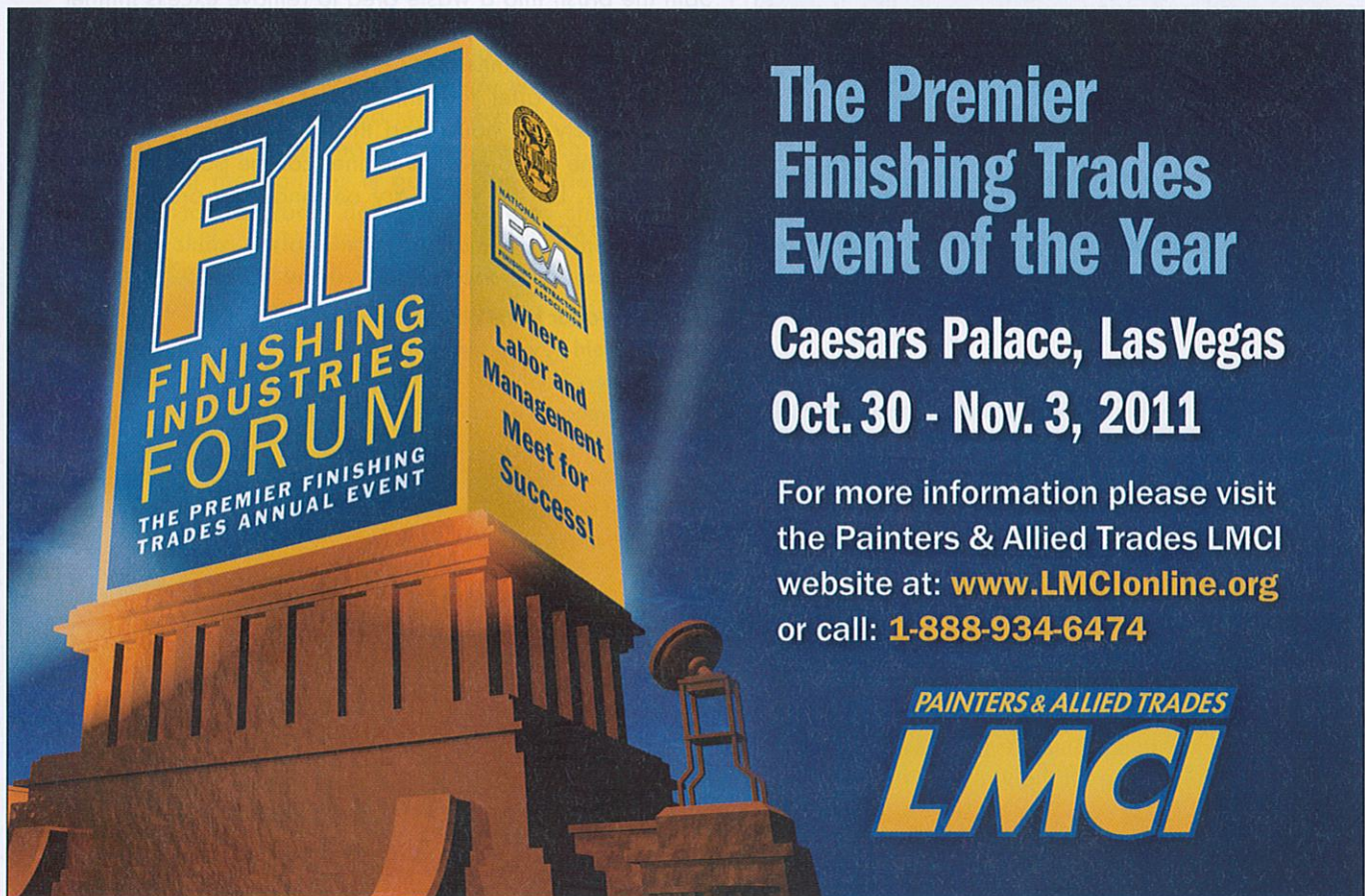
There was a clear need for a contractor certification process to assure contractors were prepared to meet the challenges of the regulations, and it became evident that we needed to provide specific training to our workforce as well. The bar had been raised to a height that many contractors and workers chose not to pursue. Nevertheless, the elevated standards provided a platform that was ideally suited for organized labor to move forward in providing the necessary training to our workforce. It is this type of training that reinforces how vital the Finishing Trades Institute (FTI), as well

as other training resources at the local district council level throughout the United States and Canada, is to our success.

As a union contractor, I believe that, despite the many challenges, we are now presented with one of our greatest opportunities to regain market share in the industrial sector. The challenge for contractors is that we must be willing and able to maintain the highest levels of integrity and to constantly perform our projects in full compliance with the rules and regulations that govern our industry. The union is faced with the challenge of providing a workforce with both current and comprehensive training in every

aspect of the safety and skill sets necessary to perform industrial work, as well as to provide the training where and when we need it. Our workforce faces a challenge of availability – making the time to obtain the necessary training.

We all must do our part. We must work together and work hard to regain our market share. It isn't easy, but nothing really worthwhile ever is. I urge you not to take the industrial sector of our industry lightly. It isn't easy what we do. There is no margin for error in this business. If you are willing to deal with the challenges and put in the extra effort necessary, it can be truly rewarding.



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