

## **The Biggest and Best Year Yet: CareerExpo and SkillsUSA State Championships Sees Significant Growth in 2010**

*By Stephanie DiLorio / CEFGA Feature Writer*

2010 was record-setting for the CareerExpo and SkillsUSA State Championships. In its sixth year, the two-day event drew well over six thousand attendees, a six-percent increase from 2009. “These results,” says CEFGA Executive Director Scott Shelar, “are nothing short of amazing.”

Despite a tough economy, representatives from nearly three hundred organizations reached out to high school and technical college students at the Georgia International Convention Center on March 11-12. The shared goal of raising awareness of careers in construction, engineering, architecture, transportation, and energy, united these organizations, including private companies, trade associations, universities, and government agencies, and inspired collaboration on creating 19 interactive exhibits (Worlds) for Georgia’s students.

At times, the 150,000 square feet of the Convention Center’s main exhibition hall felt like close quarters as students, totaling almost 5,000 over two days, explored the 19 Worlds. Hands-on activities engaged students in learning about both fundamentals and cutting edge advancements in various fields.

Competition and challenge captured students’ interest—a Lego building contest in The World of Architecture and Engineering; a recyclable materials sorting tournament in The World of Green Building; and vigorous bike pedaling to light a bulb in The World of Energy.

Teamwork and try-it-yourself tasks sharpened students’ skills and sparked their questions—wall and bridge building in The Worlds of Masonry and Highway Construction and Maintenance; ditch digging in The World of Utility Contracting (with real excavators); and mosaic making in the World of Tile Contracting.

Conversations with industry professionals provided students with valuable knowledge and insight for career planning. In The World of Safety and Health Jefferson County High School junior, Rachel Chance, who wants to become a Certified Safety Professional (CSP), had the opportunity to speak with OSHA representatives. “They told me I needed an associate degree in safety and health to be come a CSP,” said Rachel, “and told me the programs I should look into.”

R.W. Johnson High School junior Dave Harkins hopes to work for Georgia Power when he graduates next year. “I went to their career table today and talked to them about lineman work,” says Dave. “I think there is opportunity in a job with Georgia Power.” Dave’s construction technology teacher, Mr. Rodney Presley feels the CareerExpo gives students and teachers great opportunities to connect with industry professionals and learn from them. “The more students know, the better,” says Mr. Presley.

From his two years of participation, Will Jones, District HR Recruiter for Teton Industrial and organizer of The World of Industrial Contracting, has observed that the CareerExpo helps to validate teachers' messages to students. "Direct contact with industry people," says Mr. Jones "goes a long way. Sometimes you say something and students' eyes light up. You know then that you've confirmed something they have been taught in school."

The SkillsUSA State Championships on Friday, March 12, was the centerpiece of the event, showcasing 500 of the best students from Georgia's high schools and technical colleges. Students competed in 27 different skills contests ranging from carpentry and plumbing to architectural drawing and design. State Director of SkillsUSA Georgia Gayle Silvey was impressed by this year's competitors. "As business and industry become more involved in our competitions, we are able to truly connect the standards and competencies of what is being taught in the classrooms across the state to real world work situations," says Ms. Silvey. "Because of the strengthening of these alliances, our competitive field has become fiercer and students have expanded their skills sets and leadership abilities."

Roderique Hayes is one of the many students who has been motivated by the competitions. Now a senior at Hardaway High School, Roderique competed in the carpentry championship. He was disappointed when he didn't medal, and decided to study harder and come back next year. "I was ready for this year's competition," says Roderique. His advisor Mr. Ben Lowe, who has taught Roderique for three years in construction and coached him in football, says "he has gone above and beyond in preparing for this competition. He comes in after school to work and even on school holidays."

Applied Software's Jody Brookshire, who organizes The World of Architecture and Engineering, met Whitfield County Career Academy student Lee McFarland several years ago at the CareerExpo. He wanted to develop his technical drafting skills for competition but didn't have an instructor. Ms. Brookshire agreed to help, so when Lee needs a new challenge, he contacts her. "He's very motivated," says Ms. Brookshire. "He emails me all the time for new projects to work on."

Cooperation sets the tone for the CareerExpo and SkillsUSA State Championships and takes shape in new changes and innovations each year. In the World of Construction Management, participating companies such as Holder Construction Company, New South Construction Company, Hogan Construction Group, Brasfield & Gorrie, and Manhattan, decided to do things differently in 2010. "Instead of each company having its own booth in the World," says Holder Construction Company's Brad Hutto "we decided to work together and create a common focus [on sequencing and safety] for the event."

2010 also saw the greening of the CareerExpo and SkillsUSA State Championships. After the World of Green Building's successful debut in 2009, the planning committee, decided to introduce plastics recycling at the next event. MBA Waste Enterprises

volunteered to take on the recycling and proposed expanding the effort to include building materials. “The greening of the Expo is part of ‘walking the talk’ of sustainability”, says Amy Norman, Senior Engineer at Holder Construction and World of Green Building organizer. “We wanted to model this for our students.”

The CareerExpo offers companies an opportunity to strengthen client relationships and build their industry contacts. “The Expo provides great exposure for Teton. It keeps our name out there and gives us a chance to network with our clients,” says Mr. Jones. Networking was one of the reasons entrepreneur Spencer Gordon accepted Southface’s invitation to participate in the World of Green Building. “I think Perfect Circle Renewable Energy will benefit from being here. I’m excited to talk to students about biofuel and I hope to expand my network over the next few days and maybe meet some people in the school system—we could recycle cooking oil from its cafeterias.”

The continued growth of the CareerExpo and SkillsUSA State Championships is a result of all stakeholders in the construction, engineering, transportation, and energy industries taking a seat at the table. Commitment to developing a pipeline of talent in Georgia has kept the process focused on students and delivered record numbers in 2010.

Participating organizations credit students for energizing the CareerExpo and SkillsUSA State Championships with their enthusiasm and interest in learning. “Meeting these students gives me hope for the future,” says Todd Hawkins, Training Director at Independent Electrical Contractors Atlanta. “We’re planting seeds at this conference.”

*The 2010 CareerExpo and SkillsUSA State Championships were organized by CEFGA – the Construction Education Foundation of Georgia and TEFGA – the Transportation Education Foundation of Georgia. For more information, visit [www.cefga.org](http://www.cefga.org) or contact Scott Shelar at 678-889-4445.*