

Construction

PBX finding its way in Central Pa.

Pittsburgh-based trade organization forging new partnerships to help fill MABX void

By **Jason Scott**, January 8, 2016 at 3:00 AM

It's been nearly 10 months since Mid Atlantic BX, a trade association that tracked the construction industry, suspended operations in Harrisburg.

Other organizations pounced, hoping to fill the void for **about 600 MABX members**.

Some failed to make inroads and pulled out of the commonwealth, while others are pushing forward and hoping to expand relationships with general contractors and others seeking information about project bidding opportunities.

The **Pennsylvania Builders Exchange**, or PBX, is among those that stuck around.

John Alexander, a former MABX employee and current director of membership services at PBX, said the Pittsburgh-based organization now has almost 1,200 members, with about 140 in the Harrisburg area.

"The PBX helped those left hanging by expanding the territory," he said of the organization's move into Dauphin County. "Most people are joining us because they want to work with a regional company."

However, he admits, many in the industry still see the PBX as a significant source for the Pittsburgh area. That has limited growth in the midstate since the PBX arrived in April, but it is making inroads.

"We are starting to get known and get referrals. People are talking about us now," Alexander said.

Getting the general contractors to buy in brings along subcontractors, which is the largest group for system activity, he said.

To boost its local appeal, the PBX is partnering with the Keystone Chapter of the Associated Builders & Contractors and the American Subcontractors Association of Central Pennsylvania.

Networking events with those groups could be added this year, which should help boost membership.

Valuable service

The social side of the builders exchange is important for Beth Peiffer, owner of Susquehanna Township-based **Ralph E. Jones Inc.**, a commercial painter that was a member of MABX.

“We got more involved in committees on craftsmanship and safety awards,” she said.

Peiffer is a PBX member now but doesn't often use its bid-tracker service. As a subcontractor, she relies more on the relationships she's built with general contractors that get a lot of the private-sector work in the Harrisburg area.

Robert Leahey, president of **G.M. McCrossin** in Centre County, said his company has found the PBX to be very valuable. McCrossin, a general contractor that does its own mechanical and electrical work, looks for multimillion-dollar projects.

McCrossin often used the MABX system and “panicked” when it went away, but Leahey said several companies offer comparable data. Most tend to cover smaller projects, and they aren't as thorough as the PBX, he said. “I absolutely feel I'm getting my money's worth.

“We have six different people in our firm that use (their system) at least once a day,” he added.

'Weren't comfortable'

Maryland-based **Survey Data Information LLC** expanded its online plan service to include Pennsylvania back in May, hoping to cash in on the loss of MABX.

But the company was a little late to the party, said Sherry Brown, the company's president and owner. Survey Data found that many former MABX members were “so scorned” and they “weren't comfortable trusting folks new to them.”

Survey Data primarily covers construction activity in Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C. It picked up Pennsylvania customers interested in jobs in those surrounding markets, Brown said, but was unable to maintain tracking resources for projects in the commonwealth.

But she understands it, she added.

The company's primary customers are in the D.C. area, where it works with manufacturers' representatives, suppliers and subcontractors.

Still, Survey Data is not totally giving up on Pennsylvania. Brown said the company might try again to expand into the commonwealth “perhaps when folks have tried other services and realized they are not a good fit for them.” She also has West Virginia and New Jersey on her company's radar.

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