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Field Engineers at Harris Construction spend at least six hours a day walking a jobsite to check on all subcontractor work and the progress of the project. Photo: Pablo Cabrera, Harris Construction Field Engineer, on the new Central High School project in Fresno.

Becoming a “True Builder”

Training the Next Generation of Superintendents

It takes the right training to make a great Construction Project Superintendent. And Harris Construction has a training program to make sure its up-and-coming Interns and Field Engineers learn the job from the best – its own tried-and-true Field Management Team.

An experienced Superintendent can immediately see what’s needed on the job, and what’s missing. They pay attention to numbers, details, the subcontractors who are on- or off-track, checking that things are being built in sequence. They look at every detail and understand it.

But how does a person become a skilled Project Superintendent with experience and understanding about the process? Harris Construction has the solution and it includes very specific training, starting new Superintendent field staff as either Field Engineers or Field Engineer Interns. (There are also career paths for those wanting to become Project Managers and Craft Trades Foremen, all are shown on the chart to the right.) Here are three of the people who are on the Harris Superintendent Training Tract:

Pablo Cabrera, who is currently a Field Engineer at Harris, started as a Field Engineer Intern in 2019. In high school, he realized how much he enjoyed building things. His brother (who was already in construction) persuaded Pablo that Upper Management in Construction would be a good fit for him. Pablo’s mentor and high school counselor then suggested that the Construction Management program at Fresno State would be a good step for him. Pablo not only

got into the Construction Management program, but he loved and excelled in it. One of his favorite classes was a Construction Materials class, where they learned construction terminology, tools, methods, how to do take-offs in Blue Beam – all things he now uses every day. In his Senior year at Fresno State, he joined Harris with about a dozen other interns. In December, he became the Valedictorian of his Construction Management Program Class and was also offered a full time position at Harris as a Field Engineer.

Field Engineers are each assigned to a specific project for a certain amount of time. They spend about 75% of each day working the jobsite and the remaining 25% in the job trailer doing daily reports, owner’s punch lists, daily coordination of subcontractors, and other tracking and coordinating. When they are walking the jobsite, there may be 50, 100, or even 200+ subcontractor workers on the jobsite on any given day so the Field Engineers make sure all of the subs stay on task and they measure EVERYTHING. Are the steel beams the right length and are they being installed at the right elevation, and in the right location? Are the electrical outlets spaced exactly to the drawings? Is a sub working in the wrong building instead of on the part of the project that is more critical to the schedule?

“I enjoy seeing things being built in the field,” said Pablo. “You learn every day, from crafts people and project management alike; it’s great training. They all want us to learn their trade, their craft, their skill-set. Even after a year I still

tell subs I'm new and that I want to learn things – and to expect a lot of questions! We have great subs, they all say to ask as much as I want. I never stop learning – I learn every day no matter how big or how small!”

Pablo's favorite days are when he has to face challenges. He doesn't enjoy conflict, but he likes being engaged and problem-solving. He also likes walking the jobsite – walking, measuring, and confirming - every single thing, every single day. Plus he enjoys seeing how things are built minute-to-minute.

“Another thing I appreciate and enjoy is when the Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent, or Project Manager asks me for advice and/or input. It really makes me think and then I can compare my ideas or solutions with what they would do with their 15, 20, 25 years of field management experience. I've worked with many Harris Field Management people including Bill Bunch, Austin Nelson, Lance Boyer, Paul Morningstar, Courtney Miller, Geno James, Mike Marsh – and they are all really smart people and they all want to achieve the Harris goals; to provide quality and overall satisfaction for the project owners and to successfully complete every project. I have learned so much from each of them.

“I like talking with Superintendents and learning from their past, too. They'll even share mistakes they've seen and corrected in their career which teaches us so we can learn what not to do, and about the construction industry in general. I want to learn everything!”

Another Field Engineer at Harris is Nicolas Azua. He enjoyed the hands-on experiences in his Lemoore High School Wood Shop classes; so much so that he soon became the Shop Teacher's Assistant. He then went on to college knowing he wanted to be actively involved in construction, and finished his degree in Fresno State's Construction Management program. After graduation, Nicolas worked on a billion-dollar construction project for an out-of-the-area contractor in the Bay Area; including the recent San Francisco Airport Expansion.

Like Pablo, Nicolas enjoys being in the field more than being in the office and would like to be a Superintendent someday. He likes coming up with solutions to challenges and seeing how the construction is progressing every day.

“I am learning skills and techniques from Senior Superintendents – things that I've never seen before,” said Nicolas. “Some Superintendents have even let me run a small building or come up with a three-week schedule to compare to theirs. I am gaining real knowledge of construction from the ground up. I wish that everyone could see and appreciate the work that goes into the construction process.

“For me, it's really an adrenalin-rush working with multiple subcontractors all at the same time. Yesterday, for example, we passed a compaction test, and then seeing all of the activities commence and progress that take that step further down the construction process. It's all very exciting; I enjoy the process and looking at – and learning from – people's work.



ABOVE: This chart shows how Harris Construction employees gain experience and grow into management rolls. BELOW: Nicolas Azua, Harris Construction Field Engineer in front of an active school project in Fresno.



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"With all of this experience that I am gaining, I am even more excited to eventually move up to Assistant Superintendent, and then with even more training to become a Superintendent. Between my previous job experience and my CM degree, all of this hands-on experience is giving me such a great knowledge base and confidence. To be a great Superintendent is my career tract and I can't wait!"

One of the other Harris Field Engineers, Francisco Godoy, also found his love for construction during Wood Shop classes, at Firebaugh High School. His teacher, Bill Magnusson, was not only a motivating factor in his career direction, but also his Football Coach. By Francisco's Junior Year in High School, he was in the ROP program, and was helping Mr. Magnusson as the Class Manager of two wood shop classes - determining what materials were needed, what was ordered, planning assignments, and assuring safety for his fellow students.

"Mr. Magnusson pushed us to be better," said Francisco. "He even coached our class to earn first place on a Rafter-Making Competition put on by Fresno City College. He was also instrumental in helping get the Bond Measure passed so he could upgrade and modernize the Wood Shop, helping even more kids who will discover their future in construction. I have stayed in touch and now I am part of the management of his classes. We discuss curriculum and provide more hands-on projects for the students (i.e.: build a shed, pour concrete, reading construction drawings). I enjoy helping the next generation see the value and enjoyment in a career in construction."

After Francisco graduated from High School, he initially became a Union Carpenter. Over time, he transitioned out of being a carpenter to become a Field Supervisor for a small builder of tract homes. But he knew he wanted to work for Harris instead, not building the same home over and over again. Instead, he wanted to build school campuses and civic facilities throughout the valley. Francisco saw the Harris "Finding Your Career Path" chart and knew the Field Engineer-to-Superintendent training tract was for him.

"I kept applying at Harris," said Francisco, "until finally they hired me! I knew there was a lot of room for growth here - and I am looking for the first next step in front of me - Assistant Superintendent. The training through Harris is thoughtful and methodical, helping me prepare for that next step. I walk every building on a project, inside and out, from the foundation to the restrooms - honing my skillset and knowledge base every single day.

"I have worked on - and learned different things - on three Harris projects so far (Reedley High School, Madera County Health and Social Services, and Matilda Torres High School in Madera), which have all been a huge help as I have learned new ways of problem solving and managing multiple subcontractors. I've learned from different Harris Field Staff including Matt Davies, Courtney Miller, Bill Bunch, Austin Nelson, Danny Kenner, Lance Boyer, Brandon Rocha, Steven Barela and the list goes on. But I especially learned a lot from Harris Senior Superintendent, Jimmie Timmons.



Francisco Godoy, Harris Construction Field Engineer - At the newly completed Matilda Torres High School (Madera Unified School District) in Madera.

"Jimmie taught me to always do it correctly - as Harris always wants it done. Make sure everything is done right from the beginning. If you see something that's not right, get it fixed immediately. Keep your eyes on everything, each and every day. Document everything, measure everything. How to be involved in managing things. Getting things done on time, taking charge. There's always room for improvement. And Jimmie was big on Safety, as is everyone at Harris. He even recommended I personally take every safety training class I can. He'd say, 'You can never take too many safety classes or be too safe. Always learn more about safety.' My plan is to take another OSHA safety course as soon as I can, Jimmie was right! You can never be too safe."

Pablo, Nicolas, and Francisco - three field engineers who each started their career in a different way, but are all now at Harris Construction - and learning every day - on substantial, incredibly beautiful education projects including Matilda Torres High School (Madera), Sanger Education Center, the New Central High School, and many more. They are learning from their Superintendents and other Field Management, and one day will be helping teach the ropes to the next batch of Field Engineers. Thank you to all of the talented Superintendents, Project Managers, and other experienced Field staff at Harris for helping the next generation learn about this wonderful career journey on their path to Superintendent.

IN MEMORY OF A GREAT SUPERINTENDENT: Sadly, Superintendent Jimmie Timmons passed away three months ago after a brief illness. He will be missed by all, but we take solace in knowing the buildings he so proudly helped build over the past 26 years will stand and shine in his honor. And his lessons will help young people carry his knowledge, experience, and legacy to the next generation of Project Superintendents.