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## Commercial building boom kindles hunt for talent

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According to Associated General Contractors of America, the state's construction industry employed 134,000 workers in May, down 2.5 percent from May 2007.

It's a dreary statistic, but not as stark as the national scene. And local builders attribute Massachusetts' comparatively stable footing to the continued building boom in health care and education.

While new residential real estate development is coming to a screeching halt in most areas around Boston, billions of dollars of commercial developments will soon come out of the ground — from a \$2 billion biotech lab complex slated for Burlington to a 1.5 million-square-foot lab complex planned for Cambridge. On the education front, there's the \$129 million state leaders earmarked for college campus construction.

With a construction boom under way in Boston, local architecture, engineering and general contractors are strategizing to lure talent.

GEI Consultants has already hired 48 full-time staff members this year, as well as part-timers, temps and interns, and plans to hire between 20 and 40 additional staffers before the end of the year.

Engineers are the toughest to find, according Brian Mackey, national recruitment manager for the Woburn-based geotechnical, environmental, water resources and ecological science and engineering consulting services firms.

"We've noticed that the time candidates are on the market has significantly decreased, so we are constantly working to make sure we are on the ball with the process," Mackey said.

"We are using social networking Web sites to advertise and recruit, as well as increasing our presence at colleges and universities," Mackey

said. "We've also increased our recruiting bonus, and have been working to get all staff to be more involved with the process."

**In August, J.M. Coull, a Maynard-based full-service construction company, broke ground on a new 4,000-square-foot medical office facility for Acton Medical in Littleton. The firm has hired two new employees this year and plans to hire three more, according to Chris Oldham, executive vice president of the firm.**

Of course, it's not just construction companies and environmental engineers that see more business during construction booms. Interior design firms are also preparing for the growth.

Acentech, an acoustics, audiovisual systems design and vibration consulting firm in Cambridge, is finding a mixed bag of potential candidates to fill the gaps, said Jeff Fullerton, director of architectural acoustics at the firm.

Entry-level candidates aren't the problem. Fullerton points to a vibrant academic region that offers a continual supply of intelligent and creative candidates. Specifically, the rise of specialized academic programs that focus on acoustics has been a boon for the firm.

"The academic knowledge of students from these programs is very advanced from previous years and generations; in some cases, they are teaching us about the latest technology and theory," Fullerton said.

For senior level vacancies, the market is far less rosy for companies like Acentech. Appropriate candidates for these positions require experience in the specialized skills being taught in universities and that doesn't come overnight.

"These candidates also need to demonstrate managerial and entrepreneurial spirit of consulting, where you oversee your projects and seek new projects," Fullerton said.