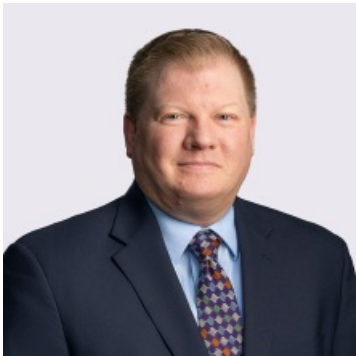


Architecture Firm Recognizes First Private-Sector Architects Union

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Meet the Authors



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Historically, unions have had success organizing the core manual laborers in the construction industry. The formation of the first union of architects at a private-sector architecture firm in the country suggests that union activity could spread to other types of workers.

Many construction industry employers regularly work with unions. Moreover, even employers without day-to-day collective bargaining agreements may have experience using union labor on construction projects. Unionization within this industry usually involves the operating engineers, electrical workers, plumbers and pipefitters, and other construction trades. Recent trends, however, suggest that union activity could spread beyond these groups.

Bernheimer Architecture, a private architecture firm, has voluntarily recognized a union seeking to represent its architects. The union will be part of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. From published reports, the unionization effort at the New York City firm resembles other recent trends in union organizing. Like other recent organizing efforts involving younger workforces and directed at socially conscious consumer brands, this organizing effort arose from internal discussions among employees about unionization, rather than active recruiting by large labor unions. This organizing effort refutes the stereotypical picture of traditional organizing in blue-collar workplaces and supports a trend among educated, younger workers who organize as part of a broader social movement.

While wages and benefits have traditionally been the foremost issue in organizing, younger workers today often focus on other issues. Work-life balance, social responsibility, pay transparency, and diversity initiatives may be important factors spurring union activity among this rising generation of workers. For some employees whose work allows it, the ability to work from home also could be important. Construction employers may not anticipate the importance of some of these issues to their employees. For example, they may not view the “work from home” issue as vital since actual construction work must be performed at a job site.

Current trends suggest that construction industry employers may see more union activity among their nonmanual labor departments with younger workers. For employers that wish to remain union free, it is more important than ever to demonstrate their values and commitment to employees so that employees feel valued and respected. It may no longer be enough to show that respect through competitive pay and benefits.

Please contact a Jackson Lewis attorney with any questions.

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