

November in Austin AGC History – Advancements in Workforce Diversity and the Launch of the Culture of CARE

A lunch meeting of general and specialty contractor members of the Austin AGC took place on November 17, 1965, at the Grotto Restaurant. The Chapter tradition at the time was to contribute \$5 each month as a door prize for one lucky company selected at random, though an employee had to be present at the membership meeting to take home the money. If not, the funds rolled over to the next month. On that November day, the pot has swelled to a (relatively) massive amount of \$45 – about \$400 in 2021 - but when the Calcasieu Lumber Company's name was picked, the prize went uncollected as nobody from the firm was in attendance.

Perhaps folks at Calcasieu were simply too busy running a thriving construction business to attend the meeting that day. By the 1950s, Calcasieu was already operating out of 19 buildings in Austin with 17 subsidiary lumber yards in Central Austin, employing over 300 people in its local plants. (Many business documents related to Calcasieu – including a brief video history of the company – are available online via the [Austin History Center here](#) and there's a [write up about the company here that includes an informative video](#) as well as other interesting stories about the history of downtown Austin.

According to those records, the company was founded in by the Drake Brothers who named it the Calcasieu Lumber Company after the lumber that came from Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana. The company eventually moved its operations out of the downtown area and by the 1980s was located in Southeast Austin with operations to 32 acres. Eventually in 2000, and with annual sales of over \$120 million, Carolina Holdings purchased the company.

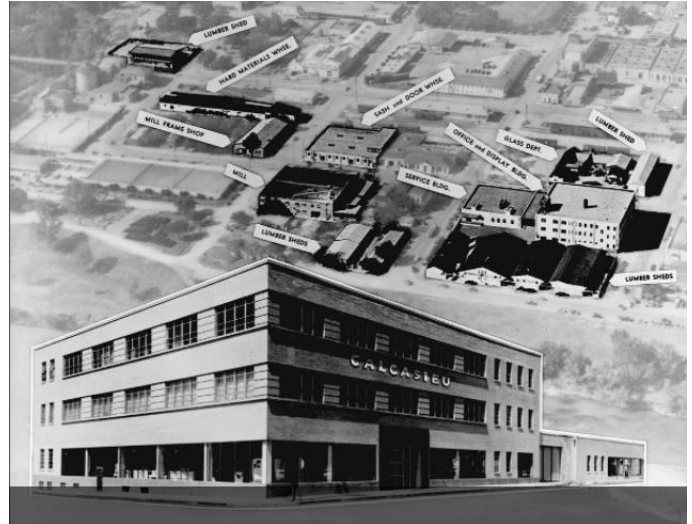


Photo (courtesy the Austin History Center) showing numerous Calcasieu offices in 1950s downtown Austin



Workers building Calcasieu Lumber offices in downtown Austin circa 1946 (photo courtesy Austin History Center)

One photo related to the company, among many [available in the Austin History Center files](#), serves as a reminder of how far our local, and national, community has come regarding diversity and inclusion in the construction industry. Taken in 1946, [the photo shows workers](#) building the Calcasieu offices at 301 W. 2nd Street (where City Hall sits today) and the jobsite has separate restroom facilities based on ethnicity. By today's societal standards, it's difficult to imagine a time in Austin when such practices were the norm.

As the Austin AGC celebrates our 75th anniversary in 2021, it's important to note that the construction industry is committed to creating opportunities for everyone to advance, prosper and succeed. In fact, many of our member companies have been proactive on the path of diversity and inclusion for

many years. [Austin Commercial, as an example, has been recognized by the AGC of America for excellence in this regard every year since 2018.](#) Over the years we've helped to help foster a diverse industry by supporting efforts such as the launch of the Austin Chapter of Women in Construction in 1958, the Community Mentor Protégé Initiative (CMPI) begun in partnership with Austin Independent School District (AISD) in the late 1990s to broaden the participation of small, minority-owned firms in local school construction, and we've worked consistently in collaboration with public owners in support of small and minority business programs. In 2021, we've also established a new Diversity and Inclusion

Committee where industry professionals can engage in conversation about opportunities to attract and retain new populations who perhaps previously never considered a career in construction.

We are fortunate as well that the AGC of America has established a [national Culture of CARE initiative](#) designed to advance construction as the industry of choice for diverse and talented workers by building inclusive work environments in construction firms nationwide. The Culture of CARE was created first by the AGC of Washington in 2018 and adopted nationally in 2020 in partnership with the AGC of America. The Culture of CARE pledge is a commitment by member companies and individuals to the following principles: 1) COMMIT to hire and pay based on skill and experience regardless of ethnicity, gender identity, nationality, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation; 2) ATTRACT prospective employees by creating inclusive workplaces that are free from harassment, hazing and bullying; 3) RETAIN high-performing employees by identifying and removing barriers to advancement; and 4) EMPOWER every employee to promote a culture of diversity and inclusion. [Hundreds of AGC member construction companies across the country have now endorsed the Culture of CARE.](#)



The AGC of America launched the Culture of Care in 2020 to assist companies in recruiting diverse populations into the industry

The construction industry has always risen to address challenges of our time. We came together in 2020, nationally and locally, to support the industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. We've prioritized safety on the jobsite, and the [Austin Chapter hired our first safety director](#) back in 1974. Over the years the industry has made significant advances toward diversity and, in keeping with the Culture of CARE, we will continue to progress with an even more welcoming and inclusive workforce. [Contact us](#) if you'd like to join the Chapter Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Learn more about the national AGC's [committee here](#).