

Winning nomination by Choate Construction's leadership on behalf of Brian Keaton for AGC Georgia's 2019 Safety Leadership Award program.

Providing a safe work environment

A 30-year veteran of the construction industry, Brian Keaton has seen safety methods change, but throughout the years, and no matter the challenge, keeping his team safe has always taken precedence.

Choate's OneLife identity is the visual representation of Choate's unwavering commitment to worker safety, positively engaging everyone it encounters to make safe decisions for their life, their family, and their legacy. The pinnacle of OneLife is ensuring each worker returns home safely to their loved ones.

Prior to the start of a job, Brian develops a site-specific safety plan, focusing on any potential challenges that could affect the safety of the team. All work activities are preplanned and discussed at length prior to work commencing, with safety as the lead topic. This early planning sets the tone of the project and before setting foot on the jobsite, each worker understands commitment to safety is nonnegotiable.

"From before a project begins to the very end, rather than just relying on PPE, Brian ensures that all employees have a safe place to work. By doing this, Brian has assured that everyone on his projects return home safely to their families," explains Choate Safety Director, Paul Hanes.

From medical and senior living facilities to 800,000-SF megastructures, Brian has had the opportunity to work on a variety of jobsites. No matter the jobsite or scope of work, safety is consistently Brian's top priority and is never diminished because of the size of a job. Most recently, Brian has excelled in showcasing his dedication to safety and the OneLife initiative on the Holbrook of Decatur senior living facility currently in progress in Decatur, GA.

Al Holbrook, Chairman and Director of Solomon Senior Living Services stated, "Brian continually monitors safe access and egress to the Holbrook construction site. He is proactive to ensure all individuals onsite, whether they are workers or visitors, are wearing proper safety and protective gear."

Building a safety culture

Safety is more than a policy to Brian; safety is an identity. The OneLife identity conveys Choate's unwavering commitment to worker safety, reminding us safety isn't a set of protocols but a fundamental value. Not only does Brian currently have hundreds of workers on the Holbrook of Decatur jobsite each day, the project is located just feet away from a busy road, neighborhood, and pre-school playground. During the course of the job, Brian has taken active steps to build a safety culture within the jobsite, to ensure the surrounding area is kept safe. "Brian has emphasized tremendous respect overseeing the safety practices of uncharted Holbrook Developments in this urban setting," explains Holbrook.

Brian builds a safety culture by setting his job expectations during each project orientation. His expectations do not revolve around a set of policies and procedures but encourages his workers to think outside of the box to establish safer ways to accomplish tasks on the project. "He is extremely effective in mentoring and fostering close relationships with his team. Brian makes a great effort to attain quality safety training for not only Choate employees, but every person on the jobsite to ensure their safety," said Hanes.

Coinciding with Brian's safety training efforts, he takes multiple opportunities to hold stand downs in which he stops all work and spends time with the entire team on site for safety training on hazards like falls, noise, and heat. While working on the Holbrook of Decatur job, Brian invited Bill Fulcher, Director of OSHA's Atlanta East Office and Cherri Watson, AGC's Director of Safety and Health for a tour of the jobsite and to attend an electrical safety stand down. This event reminded everyone of the OneLife principles and the dedication to worker safety on Choate jobsites.

Brian's uncompromising approach to safety continues to affect his workforce long after the final punchlist has been completed. The message and culture Brian applies on his jobsites creates a lasting impression on his team, building better workers and raising the safety standard across the board and into the future.

Uncompromising leadership

Having led over 2.7 million SF of projects with Choate alone, Brian consistently upholds an excellent safety report. With his extensive background in the industry, he has the unique opportunity to guide and share his wealth of knowledge with the next generation of construction professionals, including Grayson, two-year-old preschooler from across the street.

Grayson was fascinated with the Choate project from the time the first crane went up on the Holbrook jobsite. Brian was informed of Grayson's interest in construction and with the approval of his parents, invited him to visit the jobsite during Choate's topping out party. Brian shared the OneLife message with Grayson and his family and even provided him with his own hardhat and Choate safety shirt. Designated Choate's honorary junior superintendent, Grayson is an excellent example of Brian's passion to share his knowledge and continue to build the next generation of leaders.

Additionally, Brian understands the importance of his title as a leader on the jobsite. Whether a trade has 1 worker or 100 workers, Brian goes above and beyond to instill the importance of safety. Brian does not rely on each subcontractor's supervisor to build a culture of safety on the jobsite but instead works diligently himself to involve individual workers. On a fast-paced job like the Holbrook of Decatur, Brian's exceptional leadership is required to ensure each of the hundreds of workers onsite are safe at all times. His hands-on approach and positive reinforcement program guaranteed each worker knew the importance of the OneLife identity and was proud to practice it each day whether they were at home or on the job. "Brian has established standards for himself that are reflected on everyone working on and visiting the jobsite," explains Holbrook.

Brian is passionate and vocal in expressing his opinions in a positive way. Potential challenges are discussed with the team, and Brian holds his workforce accountable for upholding the standards he expects. When a question comes up, Brian is known for leading workers through the issue to find a solution themselves rather than immediately giving an answer.

Caring for others

Upon walking onto one of Brian's projects, the genuine care and respect he has for his workforce is evident. The ultimate goal on all of Brian's projects is to make sure his team is safe so they can return home to their families. Brian's greatest endorsements come from his team on the job. "Brian is passionate about the safety and wellbeing of all Choate employees and subcontractors on his projects. His open communication, mentorship, and relationships are excellent examples of his care for his fellow workers," explains Robert Langford, Choate Safety Manager.

Brian approaches every worker personally and takes the time to solidify his relationship with the team. His passion for safety goes beyond the gates of a jobsite. "Not only does Brian care for the workers safety, he also cares about those waiting at home for their safe return," says Hanes.

Beginning with the site-specific safety plan and continuing through the daily interactions Brian has with his staff, the personal interest he takes in the wellbeing of others inspires and motivates his team to work better. Investing in training and mentoring Choate personnel as well as trade contractors, Brian goes above and beyond to ensure his staff is engaged and committed to working safely.

With thousands of man hours clocked and three decades of experience, it is apparent Brian believes safety is a personal value. Al Holbrook summarizes Brian's impact throughout the industry, "Brian is compassionate about those that work for him and truly cares about their interests especially regarding safety. Brian's leadership is reflected in the high safety outcome measurements on each jobsite."