

EDITOR'S PICK

Carley Hill's new way to support construction industry is an academy, accelerating workers into the field



"It's not just about the projects of today, like the stadium, which is multiyear, but will have an end, it's about making sure there is job security," said Carley Hill, founder of Cahill Tech, which offers training for construction jobs.

Joshua Bessex/Buffalo News

Michael Petro

Alex Preisch was working at Niagara Chocolates when the candy manufacturer closed its Cheektowaga plant for good last year.



Clarence startup CaHill Tech targets next generation of construction workers with app

It was a tough pill to swallow for Preisch, who had spent several years working his way up from the bottom to become a supervisor.

But, soon after, he heard about a training program catering to those interested in working in the construction industry – regardless of prior experience and education – and then promising to quickly place them on jobs as an apprentice.

Preisch, who lives in Buffalo, went through Clarence startup CAHill Tech's aQuiRe Construction Academy, a two-month hybrid training that combines in-person and online learning and offers mentorship, exposure to emerging technologies, certifications and stipends for child care and transportation costs.

By early December, he was a construction worker on the site of the Buffalo Bills new stadium project in Orchard Park.

“When I lost my job, I went home and told my wife that I didn't know what I was going to do next. I was completely lost,” Preisch said. “But the only negative for me was that day I heard about Niagara Chocolates closing. Every day after that has been positive and exciting.”



What's next for CAHill Tech after 43North contest?

Preisch's journey after Niagara Chocolates led him to CAHill Tech, a Buffalo startup that offers an online training and compliance tools for construction companies.

Carley Hill, CAHill's founder, has made it her mission to bridge the gap between folks looking for good paying careers and employers seeking to hire them.

Her goal in starting the academy last year was to accelerate the transition for people like Preisch who are interested in getting into construction work by changing the way knowledge is shared to get them there. It is helping rewrite the script of how to open the doors for workers in this industry.

Hill intends to get more than 300 people trained through the initiative by the end of the year.

Being a woman business owner who grew up in a family-owned construction business, Hill understands the challenges to entering and finding a place in the industry.

“It’s been my objective to capture that knowledge and pack it up into a fast and accessible platform,” said Hill, who owns a site construction services company, as well as running CAHill Tech, the startup she founded in 2019. Three years later, Cahill was a 43North finalist.

“But then, there are the folks interested in these careers that are the key part of it. We can only do so much without the people with the motivation and gumption,” she added.

There are millions of dollars’ worth of construction projects in Western New York that will require skilled workers, including the new stadium – which promises to put about 10,000 people to work.

But at the same time, the construction industry is facing a critical labor shortage, with an estimated 2 million new workers needed by 2025, studies show. Local developers already are saying that the Bills stadium project is delaying other Buffalo Niagara construction projects because so many workers are involved with the new football stadium.

CAHill Tech developed the aQuiRe app, which is designed for construction workers and contains thousands of safety and training videos. The company adds new modules regularly, while, at the same time, creating custom content to meet the specific needs of construction companies.

Hill has furthered those efforts by creating the academy to help more people take advantage of the opportunities in construction.



Clarence-based startup CAHill Tech receives \$250K in additional investment

Empire State Development provided a \$1.1 million grant that helped start the academy. It has also been backed by organizations such as the state Department of Transportation and partners from the State University of New York.

Employers throughout the region are now committed to getting workers into jobs and making that process a little easier than it has been in the past, Hill said.

“Construction is a pride-oriented industry,” Hill said. “There are a lot of salt of the earth people who are really excited to share what they know. It’s just getting people in the door can be cumbersome.”

Preisch said he had tried to get into the construction field 15 years ago, but found the process to get into a union too daunting at the time.

The academy serves as a direct entry provider for the industry. Graduates coming through the program can go directly into union apprenticeships.

“You could be as excited as you want, for a change, and you can get all this knowledge, but if there isn’t that next step and that door to walk through, then we lose people,” Hill said. “And we don’t have that luxury in this industry.”

There are other heartfelt stories of the initiative’s impact. The program recently graduated two Ukrainian refugees who do not speak English after they recently came to this country with their families, along with young men and women fresh out of school looking for opportunities and people who were formerly incarcerated.

The next cohort starts Monday. With the spring construction season about to begin, graduates of that cohort should be able to get right to work, Hill said. Another cohort will get started May 6.

Preisch is one of eight people from the program who have been placed on the job site of the new Bills stadium.

“Alex is the like comeback kid. His company shuts down, but he’s rewritten his life with a positive turn,” Hill said. “It is a testament to his commitment to a career change.”



Carley Hill, founder of CA Hill Tech, and Alex Preisch, photographed near the site of the new Bills stadium.

Joshua Bessex/Buffalo News



Alex Preisch, who is working on the new Bills stadium, joined the construction industry with help from CA Hill Tech's Construction Academy.
Joshua Bessex/Buffalo News

Having workers such as Preisch enter the construction field has also helped Hill with her work in construction at the stadium – a job her team has been on since the groundbreaking in June. Her company is working in hydro excavation, demolition and construction services.

It has been a job that has helped accelerate her site construction services company's growth, Hill said.



Carley Hill, founder of CA Hill Tech, photographed near the site of the new Bills stadium.
Joshua Bessex/Buffalo News

She is also proud to represent a woman-owned business working on the site, and applauded the Bills and general contractor Gilbane/Turner for their efforts to reach goals of using for project packages not only women-owned businesses, but also Black- and military veteran-owned companies.

“They’ve been very inclusive and open about providing new opportunities for me as a business owner, which then trickles down to the workers on the job,” she said.



Carley Hill, founder of CAHill Tech, celebrates her win during the 43North business competition finals at Shea's in 2022.

Joseph Cooke/Buffalo News

Preisch said he's become so comfortable in his work that he already feels like he's been in the construction field for 10 years.

“The amount of knowledge I've gained and the things they've been teaching me out there at the stadium are amazing,” he said. “I go home and I tell my family, ‘I'm building Bills stadium.’ As a matter of fact, everywhere I go I tell people that.”