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By [Ruth Simon](#) - Follow The Wall Street Journal
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Nearly 60% of small companies report that worker shortages are affecting their ability to operate at full capacity, according to a September survey of more than 725 small-business owners by Vistage Worldwide Inc., a business coaching and peer advisory firm.

Southeast Constructors Inc. in Des Moines, Iowa, is addressing the labor shortage by creating its own training school. The new academy, set to open early next year, will offer three months of instruction in construction basics such as how to hang drywall, paint and drive a Bobcat. The heavy-construction firm hopes to hire some graduates of the program, which is expected to start with 50 students.

“During Covid, it was really hard as far as hiring. After Covid, it was even harder,” said Perlla Deluca, president of the 22-year-old company, which specializes in bridges, roads, parking lots and other government projects.



Perlla Deluca, president of a company that specializes in bridges, roads and other government projects, says hiring has gotten harder since earlier in the pandemic.

PHOTO: PERLLA DELUCA

Ms. Deluca borrowed nearly \$750,000 to buy and renovate a former middle school to house the program; she plans to charge \$4,200 for the three-month class.

Overall, small-business confidence inched up slightly in September, as expectations for the national economy improved and the portion of entrepreneurs who expect profits to increase or remain at current levels edged upward, the Vistage survey found.

Nearly 80% of small-business owners said they have increased wages and compensation in response to hiring challenges, according to the survey, and another 11% plan to do so. In addition, 60% of small businesses have refined their recruiting strategies, while 46% have boosted employee benefits.



2023 People to Watch

Perlla Deluca paves way to open up the construction industry for women, people of color

Like an artist ready to unveil a new project, Deluca, an entrepreneur and owner of the Des Moines-based general contractor firm [Southeast Constructors](#), said her vision for this space is simple: She wants to create an inclusive school to equip the next generation of young adults — young women, especially — with the right set of trade skills to work in construction.

Deluca was chosen as one of the Des Moines Register's 15 People to Watch in 2023 because, come next year, she and her team plan to reopen the former elementary school at 1801 McKinley Ave. under a new name — the [Iowa School of Construction](#) — and welcome their first batch of students. The students, 20 of whom have already signed up, will take a 12-week course that includes lessons on the basics of carpentry, welding, masonry, power tools and other machinery. Registration is ongoing, with classes set to start in February.



Perlla Deluca



Joseph Cichowski

ARTICLES

Small Businesses Are Braving a Stormy Outlook; Policymakers Should Follow Their Lead



Such was the shortage of skilled labor in Iowa, that Perlla DeLuca, owner and CEO of Southeast Constructors in Des Moines, took workforce shortages into her own hands: by opening a construction school to train new employees.

In time, DeLuca plans to educate more than 1,000 students a year in the 20,000-square-foot building she's refurbishing. Like many small business owners, DeLuca will be operating this new venture alongside her existing construction business.

