A significant change is taking place as the once-largest generation, the Baby Boomers, have begun to retire from the workforce. This is true for all professions, but the exit is causing alarm among the facilities management (FM) field. The four core areas of FM, as defined by APPA, have remained generally constant (General Administration and Management; Operations and Maintenance; Energy, Utilities, and Environmental Stewardship; and Planning, Design, and Construction). However, the expanded expertise and level of responsibility for facilities managers has increased considerably, and FM continues to gain importance as people see their role in asset management. Financial and asset responsibilities for the campus are immense, and the ability to welcome change and improvement through new methodologies and technologies is important to the success of any institution.

THE CURRENT STATE OF FM

Research indicates that approximately 86 percent of the current facilities managers will be retiring in the next 10 to 15 years, and that there are not enough individuals choosing to enter the field. Employers do not seem to be preparing for this change, with only 36 percent of industry representatives surveyed stating their department currently has a succession plan ready to replace these individuals.

In addition, 67 percent of those surveyed do not have confidence in the availability and skill level of the young facilities managers that will fill the voids created through retirement (Sullivan, Georgoulis, Lines 2010). Considering a high percentage of people that currently work in FM simply “fell” into the field, we need to focus on creating a clear path to FM that people will take purposefully. As I have heard stated many times by APPA Past President Polly Pinney, we need to make facilities management a “profession of choice.”

ENGAGING AND PROMOTING

APPA is doing a great job engaging professionals at all levels, but we need to be intentional about our connection to our newest generation—our future leaders. The educational facilities field needs to be promoted to let students know about the opportunities available and about our great network of experts. Discussions related to the aging facilities workforce and the serious upcoming “knowledge gap” have been in the forefront for the last several years. Through meetings, conferences, listserv discussions, websites, etc., people have been talking about the risk that the FM field is in. APPA has recognized the need to address this, and many new initiatives and actions have been taken over the last several years:

- A certification program was created and is being refreshed and updated regularly to meet the needs of the profession and the members;
- Free student membership is promoted through the new integrated membership; students within the FM academic programs are sought out to attend conferences through scholarships;
- An Emerging Professionals (EPs) Team was established by APPA Past President Mary Vosevich, working on initiatives related to recruitment and engagement, professional development, and emerging technologies, to name just a few.

Through my discussions with the EPs, a need for involving students became apparent. At the same time, I was working on my master’s degree with a focus in project management and training and development. As I was attending classes, I had the opportunity to meet many students who are looking for career options. Most of them did not realize the number of opportunities that are available in educational FM. I also found that many of the students were frustrated that they were not able to qualify for positions because of their lack of experience. It
seems both the student and the facilities profession have a real need that we can help address.

**APPA INTERNSHIP INITIATIVE**

In support of making educational FM a profession of choice, the APPA Regional Representatives proposed an APPA-sanctioned internship program. Individual institutions are great at offering internships to students through the FM department, but the types of internships vary and are not necessarily tied to APPA. By developing a more formalized program, we can ensure that in addition to the specific operational projects and tasks the students perform during their internships, there is some consistency in the practical experience they receive, and that they gain an awareness of the opportunities offered in educational facilities and an early connection to APPA. This program will provide many opportunities and benefits, such as:

**Benefits to Institution:**
- Gains access to the latest business strategies and techniques, innovative ideas, and advanced technology by way of the newest generation entering the workforce
- Enables focus on transferring knowledge and documentation

**Benefits to APPA Organization:**
- Provides opportunity for all of the APPA regions to promote educational facilities as a profession of choice
- Expands partnerships with individuals, FM departments, other organizations, and academic degree programs

**Benefits to Student:**
- Gains practical experience and develops skills while connecting to the facilities professional network
- Applies knowledge learned in classroom and prepares for future career path

The APPA Board of Directors supports the development of a task force to further research the needs and to propose a new program. We are currently building the Internship Program Task Force and are looking for passionate people who want to be a part of this project. We will be researching existing programs and best practices, developing criteria, creating a network of supporters, identifying strategies to connect to students, developing the application process, building communication methods, identifying policies and procedures, creating a marketing plan, and so much more!

The development of a formal student internship program supports all five leading strategies within APPA’s Strategic Plan 2020. In creating this internship program, APPA will develop a pipeline to the students getting ready to enter the workforce and begin training them to better understand our profession and educational culture. This will ensure that students are engaged early on and are learning consistently from experts in the field.

Thank you to APPA and its community—you are truly focused on growing our profession and ensuring that the next generation has a good foundation in FM.

Kristie Kowall is assistant director of facilities management at Illinois State University in Normal, IL and past president of APPA’s Midwest region. She can be reached at klander@ilstu.edu.

**REFERENCES**