Plenty of solid development is rumbling across the country in 2014. Here’s a snapshot look at some of America’s biggest ongoing construction projects:

- Georgia Power, owned by Atlanta-based Southern Co., continues work on the $10 billion, third and fourth units of the nuclear-powered Vogtle Electric Generating Plant near Waynesboro, Ga. Georgia Power is the plant’s majority owner; Oglethorpe Power Corp., Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia and Dalton Utilities also are joint owners. Unit three is scheduled for completion at the end of 2017, and unit four a year later. “It is the largest job-producing project in the state, employing approximately 5,000 people during peak construction and creating 800 permanent jobs when the plant begins operating,” company spokesman Brian Green says.

- The $2.1 billion Crenshaw/LAX Transit project in Los Angeles County proceeds with utility relocation and heavy construction. The 8.5-mile line will have eight stations. It’s funded through a $40 billion, half-cent sales tax measure that county voters approved in 2008.

- Construction of ExxonMobil’s Houston campus—a $2 billion project, according to a union official—“is continuing at an active pace, with infrastructure nearing completion, office buildings and interiors progressing and specialty buildings continuing to rise,” company spokesman David Eglinton says. The 385-acre campus will consolidate more than 25 buildings and house 10,000 employees. The project has about 5,000 workers. Completion is slated for sometime in 2015.

- Work proceeds on the $1.2 billion National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility in Manhattan, Kan. Construction of the facility’s central utility plant, which provides...
Labor leaders and top contractor organizations are looking to the future by working together to embrace changes in technology for skilled labor and trades.

Some say it’s organized labor’s ace in the hole to ensure ongoing relevance, demand and quality pay.

Edward Smith, president and CEO of Ullico Inc., is among that group. Ullico, a specialty insurance and investment company based in Washington, D.C., describes itself as “a proud partner of the American worker.”

One potential downside of those changes is that technology can lead to fewer jobs because it enables fewer workers to get the jobs done. “That’s always an issue, but technology also brings new jobs,” says Ron Miller, executive secretary of the Los Angeles/Orange Counties B.C.T.C. Welding, for example, used to be done exclusively by hand. “But now we have orbital welders,” Miller says. “The machine does all the work. But there has to be a welder who sets up the machine. That machine doesn’t have a bad day, for the most part. It is affected by humidity and such, but the welder adjusts for that.”

**Attracting Young Talent**

Technology also helps pique the interest of younger people in entering the trades, Smith said. “That’s because young people sit there playing games all the time on their computers, so they would be drawn in by the technology.”

Miller came from the plumbers union. He used to design piping systems by drawing blueprints by hand on paper. “Then we started doing them on computers,” he says. “So, naturally the kids coming out of school are used to computers, so they’re very good at it. But they didn’t have the experience in piping. They could draw it on the computer, and the plumber learns to do it and makes the pipes fit. The knowledge that you gain working with your hands and putting the pipe in—you’ll always have an edge on somebody who’s never done it. I think the companies that (require hands-on experience for younger workers) are more successful.”

**Smarter, Safer Workers**

Technology clearly is the driving force of success in the building trades, says Mike Stotz, president and managing director of AFL-CIO Investment Trust Corp., which invests in real estate valued at $4 billion. That force affects
every other aspect of any construction project, on through to returns on investments.

Technology also is a key factor in keeping works safe on jobs.

“The union movement as a whole historically has always emphasized safety,” Stotz says.

Social media also helps improve workers’ safety by targeting “bad employers,” says Cara Noel, spokeswoman for the New York City Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO. If a worker falls from scaffolding on a job site, for example, photos texted or emailed by other workers or bystanders can be used to alert news media, she says. “News stories help to inform the public about situations where workers have been put in danger, which then makes it easier to target bad employers,” Noel says.

She sees organized labor as increasingly open to using technology to spread its messages. “Technology makes it much easier to disseminate information,” she says. “Workers can be kept abreast of new rules and regulations, as well as technological advances that will make it easier for them to perform their jobs.”

Labor organizations are prone to resist technological changes initially like many other organizations are, simply because change can be difficult to accept, Miller says. He saw initial resistance to the advent of plastic pipe and waterless urinals, for example. But technological advances also bring improvements in quality and efficiency, he says. “If we don’t change with the technology, we get left behind.”

ATM FEES RISING AGAIN
Bank of Labor customers have access to 79,000 ‘fee-free’ machines

The average American worker pays hundreds of dollars a year for the privilege of accessing his or her own money. According to Bankrate, Inc., which tracks ATM fees, the average fee per transaction at an ATM that is not in the user’s bank network is now $4.35. That’s a five percent increase over last year, and continues a trend of annual increases in ATM surcharges each of the last 10 years. Bankrate Inc. reports that ATM charges have increased 23 percent in the last five years, alone. And that trend is expected to continue.

Americans use ATMs an average of 4-8 times a month, and using out-of-network ATMs is often a necessity. “Those ever-higher fees at out-of-network ATMs can really add up, especially for travelers and others whose commutes involve ever-changing work locations,” said Bank of Labor Senior Vice President, William Arnold.

Bank of Labor provides its savings, checking and debit card customers with access to more than 79,000 “fee-free” ATMs through its affiliation with MoneyPass® and Allpoint® ATM networks.

“We want to help our customers save their hard-earned money however we can,” said Arnold. “Our original mission to be a bank that working men and women could trust with their hard-earned money has not changed. We still live and breathe that mission every day.”

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Labor applauds effort to boost quality of American construction

In a move that strengthens enforcement of workers’ rights, President Barack Obama issued an executive order July 31 that requires further reporting of labor law violations by prospective contractors with the federal government on contracts of more than $500,000.

“Labor laws haven’t kept up with the changing workforce. Why are we going to give government contracts to people who are breaking the law?”

Obama stated in the order, titled the “Fair Pay and Safe Workplaces Executive Order,” that he had issued it “in order to promote economy and efficiency in procurement by contracting with responsible sources who comply with labor laws.” The administration expects to implement the order in stages during 2016.

Federal agencies will use information provided by companies seeking this category of federal contracts in the process of determining whether to award contracts.

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that about 24,000 businesses hold federal contracts and that these companies combined employ roughly 28 million workers.

“It’s long overdue,” said Edward Smith, president and CEO of Ullico Inc. “Labor laws haven’t kept up with the changing workforce. Why are we going to give government contracts to people who are breaking the law? The government’s saying ‘We’re going to do a background check on them.’

“The damn shame of it is, between the business lobby and the Supreme Court rulings, so much of it is in favor in business,” he said. “All the power resides in the companies today, and none of it resides with the workers.”

Mike Stotz, president and managing director of AFL-CIO Investment Trust Corp., said that what strengthens workers ultimately boosts the quality of construction projects and keeps returns on investments strong.

“We’re AFL-CIO branded, so our mission is absolutely with a fondness for workers,” Stotz said.

The order has eight key provisions and effects, according to a White House fact sheet:

- Prohibits future mandatory pre-dispute arbitration agreements involving sexual assault or harassment.
- Requires companies to report labor-law violations from the prior three years to qualify for federal contracts.
- Holds repeat violators accountable.
- Promotes efficient federal contracting.
- Protects responsible contractors.
- Emphasizes helping prospective contractors comply with labor laws.
- Informs employees about their paychecks.
- Streamlines implementation and contractor reporting.

Thinking Big continued from page 1

backup power, is more than halfway completed, spokeswoman Sue Peterson says. The project’s last installment of funds—$300 million—will pay for construction of NBAF’s laboratory. The 574,000-square-foot facility will replace the Plum Island Animal Disease Center in Suffolk County, N.Y. NBAF will be a state-of-the-art biocontainment facility for the study of foreign animal, emerging and zoonotic (transmitted from animals to humans) diseases, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

- The $450 million renovation of Kyle Field at Texas A&M University is on track for completion in September. The project will expand the stadium’s seating capacity from 82,600 to 102,512. Kyle Field was built in 1927 for $345,000 and expanded in 1999 for $32.9 million.

- AFL-CIO Building Investment Trust’s 2014 projects include Wolf Point West Tower, a $160 million, 48-story, 509-unit multifamily rental project in Chicago. Wolf Point West is the first of three buildings slated for the Wolf Point site, which combined will create more than 2,000 construction jobs.

Youngstown Flats in Seattle, a $48 million project that will have 193 rental units, is expected to create hundreds of union construction jobs.