

Economic Recovery Continues Despite Causes for Concern

By Anirban Basu, Sage Policy Group, Inc.



During last year's third quarter, profits at U.S.

companies posted their largest annual decline since the recession. Corporate earnings have been trending lower for a variety of reasons, including a stronger dollar, a weak global economy, sagging exports, more competition from cheaper imports, as well as pressure from rising wages and healthcare costs.

Weaker earnings typically translate into diminished private investment, which in turn implies uninspired rates of economic growth. As reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, a comprehensive measure of U.S. corporate profits produced by the U.S. Department of Commerce fell to \$2.1 trillion during the third quarter, down more than a percentage point from the second quarter. Compared with a year earlier, profits fell 4.7 percent, the largest annual decline since the second quarter of 2009. The third quarter marked only the second time profits have declined on a year-over-year basis since the recession ended in mid-2009.

The third quarter reading helped highlight the divergence in performance between globally oriented companies and domestically oriented ones. During the quarter, domestic profits actually expanded by \$7.3 billion or by 0.4 percent, entirely the result of expanding profits at nonfinancial firms. Over the same period, foreign profits were down by \$30 billion, translating into a 7.4 percent decline from the second quarter and a 12.2 percent falloff from one year earlier.

The issue would not be nearly as worrisome if the factors driving the decline in profitability were merely temporary. However, rising wage pressures are part of today's reality given a national unemployment rate of 5 percent and reported human capital shortfalls in key industries like construction and trucking. Healthcare costs are also likely to expand, with certain insurers indicating recently that they may pull back from the marketplace due to unsatisfactory financial performance. The global economy will remain weak. If anything, the situation in China is becoming more—not less—serious. Weak performance in Russia, Brazil, much of Europe, and Japan is also likely.

When one includes the specter of higher interest rates on top of all of these factors, there is a strong implication that this could be an appropriate time to reduce portfolio risk. Even non-economic factors suggest something similar. Iran, North Korea, Ukraine, and other hotspots seem only to be getting hotter.

This is not intended to imply that recession is coming to America anytime soon. Given ongoing job and wage growth coupled with low fuel prices, consumer spending should be enough to keep the nation out of recession in 2016. However, the broader economic outlook for 2017 and 2018 is decidedly murkier. There are indications of issues in key parts of the economy, including data indicating bubbles in commercial and multifamily real estate markets, declining energy sector investment, junk bond defaults, and excess supply capacity.

That said, the nation's labor market ended 2015 with a bang. The best two months of the year in terms of monthly job growth last year were October and

December, as the labor market gained momentum as the year came to a close. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' preliminary estimate, the nation added 292,000 net new jobs in December, bringing the 2015 monthly average to 221,000 net new jobs. During last year's final quarter, the nation added an average of more than 280,000 jobs per month. The early months of 2016 are also likely to be associated with meaningful job growth. It is also encouraging that the nation's labor force has been expanding in recent months as more Americans have decided to begin their respective job searches.

Given a national unemployment rate of around 5 percent and ongoing job growth, one might think that consumer confidence would be higher. In fact, it has been flat in recent months due to a number of factors, including growing geopolitical unease. Among other things, a weakening global economy and sagging U.S. exports suggests that the Federal Reserve is unlikely to tighten monetary policy substantially in 2016 even as labor conditions continue to improve. The nation's unemployment rate seems destined to dip below 5 percent in the near-term. Normally, that would be associated with frequent and regular

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rate increases, but a disturbed news cycle may keep the Federal Reserve on the fence more often than not. Many investors expect the nation's central bank to raise short-term rates only twice this year. In short, interest rates generally and mortgage rates in particular are unlikely to rise significantly in 2016.

There are five leading engines of economic growth in America today: consumer spending, auto purchases/production, residential construction, nonresidential construction, and technology. At least four of these segments are disproportionately interest rate sensitive (the possible exception being technology). The Federal Reserve understands that if rates rise too quickly, the U.S. economy could stall.

The upshot is that housing momentum could continue through 2016. U.S. housing starts in November expanded by over 54 million units on an annualized basis. Through November, housing starts have been above a one million unit pace for eight consecutive months. Single family starts now sit at 768,000, their highest level since January 2008.

Looking Ahead

The nation is approaching its 80th month of economic recovery. The prior three recoveries lasted an average of 95 months. If one views this as a meaningful indicator, recession could be upon us sometime next year. Equity markets often perform poorly during the period leading into recession (e.g. 2000, late 2007). The recent performance of corporate profits and equity markets may be signaling that we are collectively entering the late-stage of the current economic expansion.

Anirban Basu is Chairman & Chief Executive Officer at Sage Policy Group, Inc., an economic and policy consulting firm in Baltimore, MD. Mr. Basu consults on behalf of numerous clients, including prominent developers, bankers, brokerage houses, energy suppliers and law firms. You can hear him speak at the RCA 26th Annual Conference on March 12.



RCA's mission is to promote professionalism and integrity in retail construction through industry leadership in education, information exchange, and jobsite safety.

Retail Contractor.....

Register for RCA's Annual Conference, March 11-13



RCA's 26th Annual Conference will be held March 11-13, 2016 at the Hilton Anatole, Dallas, TX, prior to SPECS 2018.

Friday, March 11, 6:00-8:00pm: Welcome Reception

Saturday, March 12, 8:00am-3:30pm: Conference, including industry roundtable discussions and keynote presentations by:

James Benham, Chief Executive Officer, JBKnowledge Anirban Basu, Chairman & CEO, Sage Policy Group, Inc. David Madison, Senior Consultant, Risk Management, FMI

Saturday, March 12, 6:30-9:00pm: Networking Reception and Showdeo at Southfork Ranch (shuttle provided)

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Commercial Contractors, Inc.

. .

Bogart Construction, Inc.
Timberwolff Construction, Inc.
Management Resource Systems, Inc.
Gray Construction

Silver

EMJ Construction Elder-Jones Retail Construction Services

Sunday, March 13, 9:00-10:30am: Owner's Breakfast (invitation only)

RCA members: your first registration is free, additional registrations are \$199. **Retailers:** Registration is free. **Architects:** One free registration for each organization; additional registrations are \$199. **Nonmembers:** Registration is \$299.

Visit retailcontractors.org for a full agenda and registration form.





President's Message



This is my final president's column. It has been a privilege to serve this organization and its members for the past two years.

Andrew Carnegie said, "Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision." I could not have asked for or imagined a better team than the Board of Directors with whom I've worked during my tenure. Together, we worked to create value for RCA members and the retail construction industry. This was done in part by building upon

the foundation of our first 25 years, and in part by developing programs and benefits that respond to the ever-changing needs of our businesses.

In 2014, we launched a Military Service Initiative, spearheaded by Steve Bachman. The program matches transitioning veterans with RCA member companies. Initially focused on superintendent recruitment, it has recently been expanded to include project managers, estimators, and administrative staff. In the coming months, we'll be sharing the individual success stories of this program, each of which make us proud to be part of this effort.

The past two years have seen record attendance at our Annual Meeting. Rick Winkel has done a great job putting programs that offer our members substantive information to help them manage their businesses. Eric Handley has joined the planning team and we are excited about our 26th Annual Conference coming up in March. Building on the well-received offsite event last year, we'll be hosting our Saturday, March 12 reception at Southfork Ranch ("Dallas" attire encouraged!).

Our membership continues to steadily grow, with **Hunter Weekes** leading the committee. We're developing a targeted prospect list, and have been reviewing the membership application and renewal process to make it more efficient while maintaining our rigorous standards.

Guided by Jack Grothe, the communications and marketing committee oversaw an overhaul of our website last year. And we continue to utilize partnerships with Chain Store Age and Commercial Construction & Renovation to place ads for retailer engagement and membership recruitment.

Sponsor support is a vital part of our operations. Brad Bogart has cultivated one of our most important sponsor relationships, Home Depot. The collective Home Depot rebate received by RCA members last year was \$275,000. As treasurer, Brad has been vigilant in monitoring the financial health of the association.

Job site safety has always been a hallmark of RCA. Kent Moon coordinated a review of our full kit of materials in 2014. New committee chair **Doug Marion** is pursuing new partnerships to increase our members' access to safety material and information. With the most recent membership year, all members were enrolled in Safety Meeting Outlines, providing them relevant and topical content for weekly safety meetings.

Before moving to Safety, Doug launched our technology committee, committed to providing information about the apps, software, and systems that can help our members be more resourceful. Ray Catlin has taken over this group and will soon be overseeing the launch of a technology wiki.

We're always searching for new member benefits. Justin Elder was instrumental in negotiating our most recent member discount with La Quinta, for short-term stays, This is a great counterpart to our Extended Stay discount, which launched in 2014.

Last year we revamped our scholarship program to a nationwide to call for applications. Currently in our second cycle of the new system, we received three times as many applications in 2016 as in 2015. Mike McBride leads this committee, ensuring RCA focuses on grooming the next generation of construction management leaders.

In the office of president, I am preceded by Art Rectenwald and will be superseded by **Bob Moore**. Both of these men have a passion for our industry and devotion to the success of this organization. It's humbling to be part of this leadership pipeline, and encouraging to know that our association has had, and will have, first-rate leadership as we maintain our commitment to our members while responding to the challenges and demands we face as business owners.

Our staff is led by Carol Montoya, at the association management company Potomac Management Resources. With us for 11 years, Carol is a repository of historical knowledge and a great resource when we embark on new initiatives. She and her staff work hard to keep us organized and on track.

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RCA has an Advisory Board comprised of retailers, landlord representatives, and architects. These industry leaders attend our Board meetings and participate in committees. Their contributions and counsel are invaluable and highly impactful on our successful. Many thanks to **Chuck** Barnes, G.C. Barnes & Associates, Jason Miller, JCPenney, Steve Olson, CESO Inc., Mike Clancy, FMI, Mike Glaser, Signet Jewelers Ltd., Raj Singh, H&M, Jeff Mahler, L2M, Inc., Dave Gearing, GEAR Management Group, LLC, Larry Tureff, Ulta, Inc., and Ken Christopher, LBrands.

I'll close this column with another quote, this one from Henry Ford: "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." From the start of my term, through all of our accomplishments, the collective efforts of our leadership has led us to success. I wholeheartedly thank them for this experience and for their dedication to our members and our industry.



— mike@timberwolff.com



Retail Contractor.....

RCA members must meet and maintain a series of qualifications and are approved by the Board of RCA Membership Directors for membership. They have been in the retail construction business as general contractors for at least five years; agree to comply with the Association's Code of Ethics and Bylaws; are properly insured and bonded; are licensed in the states in which they do business; and have submitted letters of recommendation.

COMPANY	CONTACT	PHONE	STATE	EMAIL	MEMBER SINCE
Acme Enterprises, Inc.	Robert Russell	586-771-4800	MI	rrussell@acme-enterprises.com	2009
All-Rite Construction Co., Inc.	Warren Zysman	973-340-3100	NJ	warren@all-riteconstruction.com	1993
Bogart Construction, Inc.	Brad Bogart	949-453-1400	CA	brad@bogartconstruction.com	2008
Buildrite Construction Corp.	lan Bannister	770-971-0787	GA	ian@buildriteconstruction.com	2013
Chance Construction Co.	D. Jay Chance	409-787-2615	TX	tellinaw@chanceconstruction.com	2000
Commercial Contractors, Inc.	Kenneth Sharkey	616-842-4540	MI	ken.t.sharkey@teamcci.net	1990
Commonwealth Building, Inc.	Frank Trainor	617-770-0050	MA	frankt@combuild.com	1992
Construction One, Inc.	Bill Moberger	614-235-0057	OH	wmoberger@constructionone.com	2015
Crane Construction Company	David Crane	816-324-5951	MO	dcrane@crane-construction.com	2013
David A. Nice Builders	Brian Bacon	757-566-3032	VA	bbacon@davidnicebuilders.com	2011
De Jager Construction, Inc.	Dan De Jager	616-530-0060	MI	dandj@dejagerconstruction.com	1990
Desco Professional Builders, Inc.	Bob Anderson	860-870-7070	CT	banderson@descopro.com	1995
DGC Capital Contracting Corp.	Gerry Ryan	914-664-7244	NY	gryan@dgccapital.com	2013
Diamond Contractors	Lori Perry	816-650-9200	MO	loriperry@diamondcontractors.org	2015
DLP Construction	Dennis Pigg, Jr.	770-887-3573	GA	dpigg@dlpconstruction.com	2008
E.C. Provini, Co., Inc.	Joseph Lembo	732-739-8884	NJ	jlembo@eprovini.com	1992
Eckinger Construction Company	Philip Eckinger	330-453-2566	OH	phil@eckinger.com	1994
EDC	Christopher Johnson	804-897-0900	VA	cjohnson@edcweb.com	1998
ELAN General Contracting Inc.	Adrian Johnson	619-284-4174	CA	ajohnson@elangc.com	2010
Elder-Jones, Inc.	Justin Elder	952-345-6069	MN	justin@elderjones.com	1990
EMJ Corporation	Ray Caitlin	972-580-1210	TX	RCaitlin@emicorp.com	2014
Fortney & Weygandt, Inc.	Greg Freeh	440-716-4000	OH	gfreeh@fortneyweygandt.com	2013
Fred Olivieri Construction Company	Dean Olivieri	330-494-1007	OH	dean@fredolivieri.com	1992
Fulcrum Construction, LLC	Mike Arasin	770-612-8005	GA	marasin@fulcrumconstruction.com	2014
•		714-491-1317			
Gray	Robert Moore		CA CO	ramoore@gray.com r.hays@haysco.biz	2005 2002
Hays Construction Company, Inc.	Roy Hays	303-794-5469		, ,	
Healy Construction Services, Inc. Herman/Stewart Construction	James Healy	708-396-0440	IL MD	jhealy@healyconstructionservices.com	1996
	Terry Varner	301-731-5555	MD	tvarner@herman-stewart.com	1995
International Contractors, Inc.	Bruce Bronge	630-834-8043	IL OA	bbronge@iciinc.com	1995
J. G. Construction	Jack Grothe	909-993-9332	CA	JackG@jgconstruction.com	1998
James Agresta Carpentry Inc.	James Agresta	201-498-1477	NJ	jim.agresta@jacarpentryinc.com	2013
KBE Building Corporation	Michael Kolakowski	860-284-7110	CT	mkolakowski@kbebuilding.com	1998
Kerricook Construction, Inc.	Ann Smith	440-647-4200	OH	ann@kerricook.com	2012
Lakeview Construction, Inc.	Kent Moon	262-857-3336	WI	kent@lvconstruction.com	1998
M. Cary, Inc.	Robert Epstein	631-501-0024	NY	repstein@mcaryinc.com	2014
Management Resources Systems, Inc.	Doug Marion	336-861-1960	NC	dmarion@mrs1977.com	1992
Marco Contractors, Inc.	Martin Smith	724-741-0300	PA	marty@marcocontractors.com	1994
Metropolitan Contracting Co., Ltd.	Jane Feigenbaum	210-829-5542	TX	jfeigenbaum@metcontracting.com	1995
Montgomery Development Carolina Corp.	John Fugo	919-969-7301	NC	jfugo@montgomerydevelopment.com	1999
Murray Costello Construction, Inc.	Murray Costello	239-482-2770	FL	Susan@MCIUSA.com	2014
National Building Contractors	William Corcoran	651-288-1900	MN	bill@nbcconstruction.us	2013
Pinnacle Commercial Development, Inc.	Dennis Rome	732-528-0080	NJ	dennis@pinnaclecommercial.us	2012
Prime Retail Services, Inc.	Donald Bloom	866-504-3511	GA	dbloom@primeretailservices.com	2014
PWI Construction, Inc.	Jeff Price	480-461-0777	AZ	price@pwiconstruction.com	2003
RCC Associates, Inc.	Beverly Raphael	954-429-3700	FL	braphael@rccassociates.com	1990
R.E. Crawford Construction LLC	Jeffrey T. Smith	941-907-0010	FL	jeffs@recrawford.com	2011
Rectenwald Brothers Construction, Inc.	Art Rectenwald	724-772-8282	PA	art@rectenwald.com	1996
Retail Construction Services, Inc.	Stephen Bachman	651-704-9000	MN	sbachman@retailconstruction.com	1998
Retail Contractors of Puerto Rico	Sean Pfent	586-725-4400	MI	spfent@gregconstruction.com	1996
Roche Construction, Inc.	Thomas Roche	970-356-3611	CO	troche@rocheconstructors.com	2008
Rockford Construction Co.	Thomas McGovern	616-285-6933	MI	azimmer@rockfordconstruction.com	2014
Royal Seal Construction, Inc.	Gene Colley	817-491-6400	TX	gene@royalseal.com	1994
Russco, Inc.	Matthew Pichette	508-674-5280	MA	mattp@russcoinc.com	1995
Sachse Construction and Development Corp.	Jeff Katkowsky	248-647-4200	MI	jkatkowsky@sachseconstruction.com	2009
Scheiner Commercial Group, Inc.	Joe Scheiner	719-487-1600	CO	joe@scheinercg.com	2012
Schimenti Construction Company, Inc.	Matthew Schimenti	914-244-9100	NY	mschimenti@schimenti.com	1994
Shames Construction Co., Ltd.	Carolyn Shames	925-606-3000	CA	cshames@shames.com	1994
Shrader & Martinez Construction, Inc.	Ronald Martinez	928-282-7554	AZ	info@shradermartinez.com	1990
Singleton Construction, LLC	Denise Doczy-Delong	740-756-7331	OH	denisedelong@singletoncontruction.net	
Solex Contracting	Gerald Allen	951-308-1706	CA	jerry@solexcontracting.com	2015
Sullivan Construction Company	Amanda Sullivan	954-484-3200	FL	amanda@buildwithsullivan.com	2012
Taylor Brothers Construction Company, Inc.		812-379-9547	IN	jchandler@tbcci.com	2014
TDS Construction, Inc.	Robert Baker	941-795-6100	FL	inbox@tdsconstruction.com	1994

Thomas-Grace Construction, Inc. Timberwolff Construction. Inc. Tom Rectenwald Construction, Inc. Trainor Commercial Construction, Inc. Tri-North Builders. Inc. Triad Retail Construction Travisano Construction, LLC Warwick Construction. Inc. Weekes Construction, Inc. Westwood Contractors, Inc. William A. Randolph, Inc. Winkel Construction, Inc. Wolverine Building Group Woods Construction, Inc.

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Jay Dorsey	281-485-4700	TX	j.dorsey@triadrc.com	2013
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Tony Annan	832-448-7000	TX	tony@warwickconstruction.com	2008
Hunter Weekes	864-233-0061	SC	hweekes@weekesconstruction.com	1990
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Rick Winkel	352-860-0500	FL	rickw@winkel-construction.com	1990
Michael Houseman	616-949-3360	MI	mhouseman@wolvgroup.com	2012
John Bodary	586-939-9991	MI	jbodary@woodsconstruction.com	1996

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Please notify the RCA Office (800-847-5085 or info@retailcontractors.org) of any changes to your contact information.



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Retail Contractor....

Giving Back – How RCA Members are Improving Their Communities Retail Construction Services, Inc.

By Jennifer Danquist Kilgore, Managing Director of Client Relations, Singleton Construction, LLC

Members of the Retail Contractors Association are high caliber retail contractors united to provide a solid foundation of ethics, quality, and professionalism within the retail construction industry. But our members are not just building stores around the country; they are also giving back through a variety of public service efforts. In this feature series, we share how our members are making a difference in their local communities.

Retail Construction Services, Inc. (RCS)

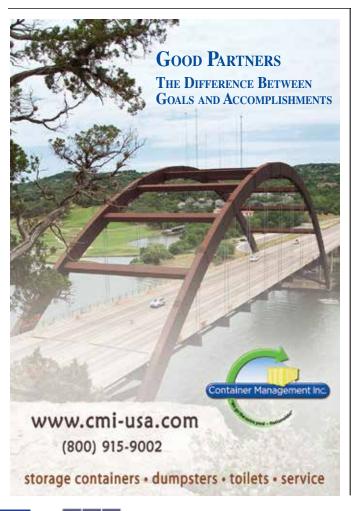
is headquartered in Lake Elmo, MN (outside the Twin Cities), with RCA Board member **Steve Bachman** at the helm. The 31-year-old company has a home-grown family feel to it—with many employees having been with the company since its inception—and a collective desire to help those around it. RCS has been involved in and supportive of dozens of charity organizations and nonprofits, a culture that is a cornerstone of how they treat everyone: friends, neighbors, vendors, and clients.

From what we get, we can make a living; what we give, however, makes a life.

- Arthur Ashe

President and founder Bachman talked about what the company has been doing in its community. "There is much hunger in the world and in all our neighborhoods, so a thought began to grow that we at RCS could make a difference at our corporate office here in Lake Elmo, MN. This passionate gardener knew our employees would be willing to help the community's neediest residents if only they had the means. In this case, that meant a garden – The RCS Giving Garden."

(Continued on page 7)





(Continued from page 6)



RCS staff plants the Giving Garden.

The property where RCS's corporate office sits has more than enough green space and possibilities, including the ability to reduce their own carbon imprint. The Giving Garden is being used as a full circle teaching tool; involving the children from across the St. Croix Valley, who learn about gardening, the impact of the food cycle on fossil fuels and the collapse of the honey bee, water conservation, food storage, harvesting seeds, composting, and many other lessons. Above all, they experience firsthand the spirit of giving and volunteering.



Children's learning hands-on in the garden.

Valley Outreach, the food shelf to which the Giving Garden supplies food, utilizes some of the produce for cooking and nutrition lessons in their teaching kitchen, which was constructed by RCS for them in the summer of 2012. Local high school students that previously volunteered in the RCS Giving Garden have now begun a garden of their own, incorporating the same full circle learning into their school curriculum.

This is an example of what our RCA members are doing to improve their local communities. Thank you to the RCS family for improving the lives of those in Saint Croix Valley as well as the environment as a whole, and educating our youth to be sustainable for the future.

You can read more about this project at http://rcsgivinggarden.blogspot.com.



Steve Bachman helps with the honey bee harvest.

RCA members, if you are interested in having your firm featured in new series, please contact Jennifer at jkilgore@singletonconstruction.net.



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