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Press release

Preparations for the Stone+tec 2024 trade fair for natural stone are in progress – Good mood in the stonemasonry craft

The order situation in the construction industry is still good and the "Stone makes you proud" campaign for young people is running successfully, but at the same time the shortage of skilled workers is becoming an even greater challenge. While preparations for Stone+tec 2024 are already in progress, there is a current mood picture from the stonemasonry craft.

Nuremberg – The next Stone+tec will be held at the Nuremberg Exhibition Center from June 19th to 22nd, 2024. Numerous exhibitors from Germany and abroad have already registered for the trade fair and all three product areas – "Building with Natural Stone", "Equipment for Professionals" and "Place of Remembrance" – are well booked. Stone+tec is on the right track to continue its growth. The topic of "Sustainable Building with Natural Stone" plays an important role at the trade fair and at the Congress, which will be held parallel to it, and the focus will be on the advantages of natural stone. The range of special topics, such as kitchen countertops, gardening and landscaping, but also tools and transport, will be highlighted even more at Stone+tec. The trade fair is aimed at all stone processors from the construction, cemetery, monument and design sectors, as well as property developers, planners and architects. The accompanying congress offers the possibility for technical further training. The presentation of the "German Natural Stone Award" will take place at Stone+tec again.

Current mood in the stonemasonry craft

The stonemasons in Germany, Austria and Switzerland currently still have a lot work to do, according to the results of a survey conducted in June 2023 among the federal guild masters and managing directors of the umbrella organizations in German-

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speaking countries. Although the construction industry in general is affected by major cutbacks, the stonemasonry trade in particular is proving resistant to the crisis with a good order situation.

Federal guild master Markus Steininger of the BIV, Federal association of German stonemasons, judges the tendency in the German stonemasonry handicraft as predominantly positive at the moment. Accordingly, the order situation is still very good for the companies mainly active in the construction sector, but in the gravestone sector, the situation varies greatly from region to region. Orders in the restoration sector will tend to decline at the beginning of 2024, because the public-sector clients are putting on the brakes.

For 2024, the Federal Guild Master expects an overall decline in order density. As reasons for this, he cites the fact that, on the one hand, there are currently hardly any building permits for larger buildings, many plots of land are being returned by builders due to a lack of sufficient financing, and the public sector is generally putting on the brakes. As a solution Markus Steininger sees as high flexibility as possible of the companies and the willingness to open up new sectors, for example gardening and landscaping: "For a long time I have been appealing to all companies to look beyond their own nose and step out of their comfort zone," says Markus Steininger. He says it is particularly important to strengthen in-house production. In-house production is more demanding, but in conjunction with forward-looking stock-keeping it offers the security of being able to react flexibly to bottlenecks and short-term customer requests. The Federal Guild Master particularly emphasizes the importance of collegial exchange: "Together, everyone is stronger. That is exactly the purpose of a trade fair. Only at a trade fair with many suppliers I do get an overview and, through direct comparison, can I recognize trends more quickly than at the in-house exhibition of a single supplier."

The managing director of the BIV and the bbw vocational training center, Sybille Trawinski, is particularly pleased with the good development of the "Stone makes you proud" campaign for young people: "Many guilds and companies have already ordered advertising materials and our trade show counter as well as rollups. Our Instagram channel is running very dynamically. We are continuously developing new offers, currently a film that promotes training in the stonemasonry craft and can be used at trade fairs, in schools, in the company, etc."

A major issue for the BIV and its member companies is the recruitment of young talents: "We discuss a lot about how we can

motivate and support our young talents so that this does not have to be done by the training companies alone. The vocational training center has a central function here. We are in close contact with the inter-company training centers and the vocational schools," explains Sybille Trawinski.

The ever-increasing bureaucratic demands of the EU, the federal government and the states are causing major problems for many companies. In terms of personnel, business management or occupational health and safety – the requirements are becoming ever stricter. At the same time, more and more laws and regulations are being passed which make life difficult for companies, for example the Supply Chain Act or the planned ban on lead.

For the second half of 2023, Sybille Trawinski sees the stonemasons facing many challenges, not least because of the rather negative economic mood. A reliable forecast is therefore difficult, but "viewed positively, the stonemasonry trade has already overcome many crises and will hopefully also stand firm like its material in the future," the BIV managing director is confident.

Reiner Krug, Managing Director of DNV, the German Natural Stone Association, attests that the mood among member companies is still good at present. The order situation is still good, too. However, due to the general economic situation in the construction industry, a decline in orders is expected. The DNV managing director sees the biggest challenges in energy prices, the slowdown in the construction industry, labor shortages and disrupted supply chains. According to Reiner Krug, the situation between small and large companies does not differ significantly. In his view, however, smaller companies can react more flexibly to current market changes.

Wolfgang Ecker, chairman of the stonemasonry trade group in Austria, sees Austrian companies facing the same challenges as those in many other branches: He says it is difficult to find new employees, plus permanently high energy costs and a price trend that has not been seen for decades. Many companies feel that the general economic situation is becoming more challenging for numerous customers and business partners. At the same time, Wolfgang Ecker gives the industry a good report card: "I know from many personal conversations that the companies are tackling this situation with a lot of courage, innovative power and creativity. That is always impressive to me."

According to Wolfgang Ecker, the order situation varies from company to company and the individual product area. The decline in the construction of single-family homes is also affecting many other trades. Other areas, such as cemetery stonemasons or monument preservation, are less affected, according to Wolfgang Ecker. Wolfgang Ecker also sees the search for new employees as the biggest challenge for stonemasons: "There is no one big solution for this, we have to turn many cogs. One of them is the teaching. It not only offers young people many opportunities and prospects, from skilled worker to master craftsman to self-employment. Dual training also has advantages for companies. It ensures that they can attract employees who are a good fit for the company at an early stage."

Jörg Depierraz, Managing Director of the NVS, the Swiss Natural Stone Association, describes the mood in the Swiss stonemasonry and sculpture trade as good: "The order situation of companies in the natural stone trade and industry is good in Switzerland. Demand for condominiums and single-family homes, for example, continues to significantly exceed supply; even rising interest rates are not changing that." Jörg Depierraz cites bottlenecks in the supply chains and, above all, the dramatic shortage of skilled workers as the biggest limiting factors: "So, in the medium term, we will probably have to promote greater understanding among customers that the production of services will take more time than before." It goes without saying that Swiss companies are also confronted with rising energy prices. The Swiss did approve the "Federal Law on Climate Protection Targets, Innovation and Strengthening Energy Security" in mid-June – but according to Jörg Depierraz, there is no plan for greenhouse gas emissions to be zero by 2050 in line with the so-called "net zero" target.

The trade show Stone+tec – International Competence Forum Natural Stone and Stone Technology will take place from Wednesday, 19 June to Saturday, 22 June 2024 at the Nuremberg Exhibition Center. For more Information: www.stone-tec.com

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