"Tips for Soldering a Lap Seam," by Kyle Diamond (video, Feb/14)

My unfortunate experience with soldered copper gutters is that the joints are stressed by expansion and contraction and are likely to fail, unless they are either locked or riveted in addition to being soldered. (Also, they should be relatively short, and have expansion/contraction joints and other movement details as needed.) The Copper Development Association publishes details for many copper applications, including joints in copper gutters. [In "Gutters and Downspouts: Built-in Gutter Linings," paragraph F, "Transverse Seams in Gutter Lining" it says] "Where seams occur in the copper gutter lining, a locked and soldered seam is required to maintain a watertight gutter condition. The seam should be locked and soldered or riveted and soldered so as to allow the water to flow away from the joint. Rivets are installed in a staggered pattern at 3" O.C." —*ThingOfBeauty*

"Cool Tools for 2014," by Bruce Greenlaw (Mar/14)

I always like looking through the Toolbox section that Bruce Greenlaw compiles. His reviews keep me up to date on what's new. But there's one product in "Cool Tools for 2014" that needs some clarification—the Deck Harness from GRK. I examined the Deck Harness at the Deck Expo last fall and spoke for a while with GRK reps in the booth. Despite what the company says, the IRC lateral load connection detail using tension ties is not a hassle to install when the house joists and deck joists don't align. I've installed dozens of these lateral load connections on decks since 2009 and haven't run into an offset joist configuration that can't be easily handled.

When the house joists are perpendicular to the deck joists, double blocking is needed for the Deck Harness, as well as for Simpson StrongTie's DTT and USP's DTB hardware, so there's no difference there. When the joists are perpendicular, it takes me about one hour to install the blocking and hardware; when the joists are parallel but offset, it takes me about 30 minutes to install one tension tie assembly. Though I haven't installed a Deck Harness yet, it doesn't look any quicker than what I'm doing now, and it certainly won't cut the installation time in half.

Potential users of the Deck Harness should also consider a note at the end of the installation instructions that says, "Minimum ... ¾ inch Plywood Floor sheathing." So if the subfloor is sheathed with OSB, solid wood planks, or plywood less than ¾ inch thick, you can't use the Deck Harness.

GRK's Deck Harness costs $150 for one assembly; it costs me less than $20 for a pair of DTBs or DTTs and a bolt or threaded rod. Now if the Deck Harness installed itself, I might consider it—otherwise, it's way overpriced.

The horizon is changing regarding the deck lateral load connection. In June, the 2015 IRC will be published and it includes a new lateral load detail—a simple angle bracket that can be installed from the outside of the house. This alternative may render the Deck Harness and tension tie lateral load connections obsolete. —*Mike Guertin*

"Save the Trades," by Clayton DeKorne (Web-only, Apr/14)

In his Web post, JLC executive editor DeKorne describes how students in Ottawa, Ill., protested the closing of their high-school building trades program, sparking a wider debate about vocational training.

Good for them! All over the States as well, programs like this are being cut or reduced, often in favor of more math and science. While these are important, of course (in the trades as well), a well-rounded and economically stable society requires workers of all types and skills. And especially now, when the codes and other technical requirements are getting ever more stringent and complex, a solid educational foundation is critical. As an architect, I'm overjoyed when I see that the builder or his crews are properly educated, since they bring the skills to the table to make our designs come to fruition. —*Anonymous*

I am a product of a Vocational Industrial building trades program from high school and represented my state at the national level my senior year. I went on to college and have a bachelor's degree in construction management. A few years later, that high school program was cancelled. Industrial arts classes are being scrapped across the country. Our leaders wonder, "Why don't we have a skilled workforce?" and "Why are so many people paid a low wage?" Here's a news flash: [Untrained workers] ... are only worth a lower wage until [their employer trains] them to produce at a level where they are worth more. Building trades programs do that. Give these kids a chance to learn while they're still "under their parents' roof" and not out trying to learn a trade and make a living at a lower wage. You want to help the economy? Keep these programs going so that the "non-college track" kids actually have a skill that's worth a higher wage. —*Jonny B*