

Human Faces

"Putting a Human Face on the Component Industry: Truss Plant Tours Improve Partnerships Through Education" by Melinda Caldwell

There's an old adage that says you can't really understand someone until you've walked a mile in his or her shoes. To some degree, this idea can be applied to the relationship between truss plants and the specifiers with whom they do business on a daily basis—communication is the key to a successful partnership. In an effort to further these relationships, Trussway's Southwest Division in Houston, Texas, has begun inviting individuals from the engineering firms they work with most frequently to take the time to visit their plant and spend a day in their shoes, so to speak.

According to Kim Krizak, Engineering/Design Manager for Trussway, the tour is approximately a four-hour commitment. It includes a full plant tour, including all of the machinery and a demonstration of what goes into the actual, physical production of a truss. From there, visitors are introduced to Trussway's design team as well as the design software and workflow that the plant's design department utilizes on a daily basis. This part of the tour also covers key legal issues, such as why approvals by the engineer of record are so important. The tour concludes with lunch and a trip to the plant's truss testing rack, where a truss test demonstration shows visitors firsthand just how effective the engineering behind trusses is. Trussway also provides the firm with a copy of WTCA's Metal Plate Connected Wood Truss Handbook to use as a reference tool in their day-to-day work.

"In the end, even though a tour like this involves a big time investment by participants from both companies, the educational opportunity this type of event provides has been well received and only works to open up the lines of communication," explained Krizak. "We have a wide range of people in each tour group—from engineers to quality control checkers to designers—and all seem to walk away having learned something new. Trusses aren't a topic that's covered very extensively, if at all, in university and college programs. Most of the people who visit our plant have no idea just how much work goes into each submittal. They leave with a much better sense of what goes on after they send us their plans and are usually very grateful for both the educational opportunity of the tour and the wealth of information provided in the Handbook."

While this truss plant tour program is just getting started at Trussway, the success of the initial tours ensures that the company will be planning more visits in the near future. According to Krizak, they will focus on setting up tours with many engineering firms and see where things go from there.

"The more we do, the more communication we'll have with our customers," he stated, "and the better off we'll be in the long run."

• This is an excellent industry educational concept and can be expanded upon to include building officials, builders, framers, legislators or their staffs, etc. For more information on how to give a successful truss plant tour, contact WTCA

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