

Human Faces

"Putting a Human Face on the Component Industry: Finding a Niche in Arizona" by Melinda Caldwell with Curt W. Cress



When component manufacturers from the state of Arizona first got together to form a Chapter of WTCA, the initial challenges were a little different than what most chapters face. Often, the mission of a chapter focuses more on promoting components as an economical alternative to traditional forms of construction. In Arizona, this kind of focus was laughed off the table because Arizona is virtually an all-truss market—people already know about building with components. The need for a chapter didn't make itself immediately evident.

So, this emerging chapter set about the task of developing a mission statement that suited their unique market situation.

The following story played a major role in how the Arizona Chapter of WTCA determined its niche and proved that its presence was very much needed—even in an all-truss market.

On May 25, 1999, the Building Safety Manager for the City of Peoria issued a letter that included two mandates that significantly affected the truss industry:

- "In order to minimize the time involved in truss inspections, we will ask for the truss calcs for the specific model and elevation being inspected. Therefore, please provide separate truss calculations for each unique elevation rather than a truss calculations package that applies to all elevations."
- "Repairs of damaged trusses shall be inspected and approved by either: (a) The truss manufacturer and the approval shall bear the truss manufacturer structural engineer's seal; (b) The structural engineer of record; (c) Approved special inspector."

Compliance to these new rules was made effective June 14, 1999. Component manufacturers in the area didn't find out about them until July. This made one problem evident to the Arizona Chapter: effective communication between truss manufacturers, their builder customers and local building officials was almost non-existent.

In addition to these changes, a new requirement regarding the submittal of plans to an engineer of

record for review also surfaced during this time, again without any direct communication to the truss industry. As members of the Arizona Chapter of WTCA began to make contact with the Building Safety Manager for the City of Peoria to work on solutions to these unacceptable mandates, they became aware of another, potentially more serious problem. In the Arizona market, building and other government officials did not know a local chapter of WTCA existed to be utilized as a resource for code changes and other decisions.



With that, the mission and purpose of the Arizona Chapter of WTCA became clear. The Chapter needed to be an educator about the truss industry as well as on the forefront of decisions being made. It needed to be known as a resource for problems, questions and issues involving the component industry. The mission statement that developed encompasses this realization:

To promote the common interests of wood truss manufacturers and increase the use and acceptance of our products through a process of education of Building Designers, Engineers and Building Officials in the correct application of wood trusses.

Fortunately, the situation in the City of Peoria had a positive ending. The Building Safety Manager was more than happy to meet with Chapter members and was thrilled to learn of the Chapter's goal to be a resource for information regarding building code decisions that involved wood trusses. Through a series of meetings, the Chapter was able to work out compromises with the City of Peoria that were acceptable for all involved and took inappropriate burdens off the shoulders of truss manufacturers. More importantly, a relationship was forged that will change the way that decisions affecting the truss industry are made in that community. The Chapter took the first step in fulfilling its new mission statement.

What's next for WTCA—Arizona? As a way to carry out its mission statement more fully, the chapter has introduced itself, by way of a letter, to all of the building officials in all of the cities and municipalities in Arizona. The letter explained the Chapter's goals of being a resource for information and a conduit for education on issues concerning the use of trusses, and included an invitation to a general chapter meeting. The Chapter will continue to make itself known in the Arizona market through a successful, hands-on approach to putting a human face on the component industry.

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