

## President's Message



ROGER J. GIBBS

### "Technology in the Truss Plant" by Roger J. Gibbs

Technology in the truss industry has changed dramatically in the past 15 years. The majority of truss plants have already undergone or are in the process of undergoing a transformation. What was once an industry focused on a somewhat old school style of manufacturing, powered by strong bodies and deft physical precision, has become an industry for a new millennium, powered by knowledge and technical innovation. More and more of today's truss plant employees have technical skills and are involved in identifying and implementing industry-changing

improvements within a growing number of companies.

Nowhere is this transformation more evident than at WTCA's industry tradeshow—the Building Component Manufacturers Conference. For the past eight to ten years, companies have been upgrading their manufacturing equipment to be more productive with less labor to manufacture their product. This productivity has come from an array of new technologies such as computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment, just-in-time production, supply chain automation, and electric data interchange. These and other changes are dramatically increasing the speed of our manufacturing process—from sourcing and production to inventory control and distribution—and linking suppliers and customers in entirely new ways.

### ONLY THE BEGINNING

Just look at what computers have done for us in the last ten years. We are designing trusses we never would have never dreamed of and now we can't get enough of the hard stuff. Bill Gates recently stated that, in his opinion, the computer has not had even ten percent of the impact that he expects in the years ahead, and that in the next ten years, we'll see even more change than we've witnessed in the last 25. This is something that I am really looking forward to.

Consider the technology our industry has developed over the last few years, such as computer-aided quoting systems with large databases for tracking quotes, customers and margins. Electronically transferring information to the technical department to optimize the design and create information for the customer while tracking the actual cost of the product and comparing it to the quote in real time as it is being designed. This information is downloaded to the computer-aided manufacturing equipment, which tracks inventory, time and the production schedule for each job. All of this information is valuable and necessary to identify the proper procedures that help to create time, labor and money saving efficiencies.

This advance in technology will necessitate a workforce that has been trained to handle it. One of the more challenging areas of our industry is the technical departments of our companies. We are currently facing a serious shortfall of the kind of highly skilled employees who are in greater demand than ever due to today's "new" manufacturing environment. WTCA has been a pioneer on this front for many years. In 1993, the Association recognized the need for training in the technical field and started the Truss Technician Training courses. This program has been very successful and the demand for training continues to grow.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

How is technology paying off? The president of the National Association of Manufacturers used a recent Industry Week survey to illustrate the impact technology is having on manufacturing in general. The survey showed that companies that invest four percent or more of their plant budgets in information technology report a 99 percent increase in productivity over a 5-year period, or a 20 percent annual payoff. What's more, the companies that implement technological innovation in their plants and train their employees to use them experience an improvement in productivity that most companies only dream about.

This new era in manufacturing is without doubt information and technology oriented, but it's also exciting and cutting-edge. It requires a workforce that can handle a fast-paced environment and continuing education, but that's a workforce that will be prepared for and challenged by what they do. Find a healthy balance between technology and employees who are ready to handle it and you'll be riding the information superhighway to increased efficiency and success.

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