

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE (FORMERLY WOODWORDS)

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"Education -- Building a Foundation for the Future at the Chapter Level" by Melinda Caldwell

In the April 2000 issue of WOODWORDS, Curt Cress of Schuck Component Systems gave readers some insight into how WTCA-Arizona (WTCA-AZ) was building its chapter around a mission focused on education. This chapter has made a place for itself in Arizona by, "Promoting the common interests of wood truss manufacturers and increasing the use and acceptance of our products through a process of education for Building Designers, Engineers and Building Officials in the correct application of wood trusses."

The Iowa Truss Manufacturers Association (ITMA) has made a similar commitment to education and has been particularly effective through the use of slide and PowerPoint® presentations over the past several years. In addition, ITMA has made valuable contributions to WTCA-National's development of the Truss Technology Workshop (TTW) CD-ROM. ITMA's Educational Committee continues to keep itself busy informing people in their area about issues dealing with structural components.

A POSITIVE TREND

The good news is that WTCA-AZ and ITMA are not alone in their educational efforts. More and more, chapters across the country are finding that education not only reaches their marketplace, but also brings together chapter members to work toward a common goal. Chapters are using creative ideas to reach the people in their communities—especially engineers, architects and building officials—who need this type of education.

As WTCA-Kentucky (WTCA-KY) turned their educational efforts up a notch, Chapter President Keith Kinser of Kintec found particular interest among groups such as the Home Builders Association of Louisville and the Structural Engineers of Kentucky. "Basically what I did was to start calling various associations that I was familiar with to see if they would be interested in having a TTW," explained Kinser. "My experience has been that these organizations are starved for continuing education programs. Obviously, not every program will be a huge success, but I think that over time the effect that we can have will be great. All a chapter has to do is make a few calls and the opportunities will present themselves."

The Southwest Florida Truss Manufacturers Association (SWFTMA) recently decided to expand the chapter's educational efforts in their marketplace as well. Chapter President Michael Nilles of Raymond Building Supply explained the chapter's goal: "What we hope to achieve with our efforts is an introduction to our association as a helpful agent to our whole industry, to show that we utilize a strong technical foundation in our work and that we will share our skills where they may help all in our industry. We also hope to develop and maintain a mutual respect and cooperative spirit with those that we deal with in our business."

SWFTMA took full advantage of the programs and materials WTCA has to offer in preparing for their seminar presentation in early March. About 150 vo-tech students and staff, building officials, plans providers, engineers, builders and framers attended a free, half-day program sponsored by SWFTMA. "Although we've been involved in this type of program work in the past," remarked Nilles, "I have to comment on how much help has come from WTCA in the prep work for this program, in materials, information and guidance....Since our association became a Chapter of WTCA, it is a genuine pleasure to approach a project like this seminar knowing what a great resource we have behind us."

A FRESH APPROACH

The beauty of educating the marketplace through local WTCA chapters is that each chapter can focus on the group with the greatest need for education and implement its own individual approach for reaching that group.

For example, the Wood Truss Council of Michigan (WTCM) began 2001 with a renewed focus on education. Over the last five or six years, WTCM has developed courses especially for building inspectors who are required to take a certain number of continuing education units (CEUs) each year. The chapter went through the process of taking the WTCA TTW programs and modifying them for their specific needs as well as getting these programs certified as CEU courses and providing certified instructors to teach them. In the past, WTCM has conducted these programs on a small scale, presenting programs once or twice a year to about ten to 30 building inspectors per class. As of February, WTCM had already given four programs this year to audiences that have grown to almost 200 building inspectors!

What's the secret to WTCM's success? They added a new twist to their program this year. The chapter made the commitment to invest in the distribution of the Code Official's Guide to the Structural Component Industry, a customized binder from WTCA-National that contains a wealth of information about the structural component industry, including a copy of the Metal Plate Connected Wood Truss Handbook and a variety of other informational publications developed by WTCA.

Response to the addition of the binder to the course has been encouraging for the chapter. "I realize that these building inspectors are required to take a certain number of courses each year, but they wouldn't come back to our programs if they didn't think they were valuable," stated WTCM Chapter President Phil Luneack of Bear Truss. "As the classes and demand for the binders have grown, the cost has become somewhat difficult to deal with. The exciting thing is that the building inspectors felt the information in the binders is valuable enough that they donated \$2,500 toward the cost of binder materials for our course on February 27. There isn't much clearer feedback than that."

In addition to improving upon their current programs for educating the marketplace, WTCM has also renewed its commitment to educating its chapter members. Plans include covering more controversial topics like environmental issues by inviting representatives from the Sierra Club and the Michigan Land Conservancy. "The chapter is simply trying to expand its horizons and be

creative in the presentations we schedule for our meetings,” commented Luneack. “There are many difficult issues out there to be explored and understood. We can't just stick our heads in the sand.”

THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS

There are not enough pages available to talk about all of the valuable educational work being done by WTCA Chapters throughout the country. In addition to Truss Technology Workshops and other seminar-style programs taking place in practically every state, chapters are also finding success with some less classroom-oriented educational vehicles. Truss plant tours are a particularly effective means for educating people in a hands-on way. Joint education projects with other organizations such as local fire departments and home builders associations are also well worth a chapter's time and effort as they often result in programs that are tailored for a specific group of people. Working with local technical schools, community colleges and universities not only helps to educate the next generation of architects, engineers and building officials, it can also be a great way to get students interested in a career in the component manufacturing industry.

The bottom line is that the efforts of local chapters are the best way to reach those in need of education about our industry. Furthermore, the exchange of ideas between chapters is also beneficial for all of our chapters to establish successful educational programs and to keep things fresh and innovative. Look for more in depth reports on education at the chapter level in the regular “Human Faces” column in future issues of *WOODWORDS*. Keep us informed of the educational initiatives in your chapter and we will continue to share your stories.

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