

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE (FORMERLY WOODWORDS)

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"The Joys & Challenges of Starting a Chapter" by George "Sid" Ketchum, PDJ Components, Inc.

A WTCA Chapter can begin simply but can help its members accomplish some big goals. We wanted to form the New York Chapter because the truss manufacturers in our area knew that we had important local issues, but we weren't close enough to the Northeast Chapter to make our voices heard.

The New York Chapter of WTCA started with a phone call to six other area truss plant manufacturers to find if there was any interest. Everyone who was contacted about forming a Chapter was enthusiastic, so we moved ahead. We sent a letter endorsed by four New York area truss plants to other plants and associate plate salespeople. The letter received such a good response that we contacted Kirk Grundahl, WTCA Executive Director, to attend the first meeting to explain the benefits of participating in a WTCA Chapter.

We had a very straightforward approach to building our Chapter. We selected officers and had three of these officers develop the Chapter's by-laws. WTCA National approved our by-laws, and WTCA New York was ready to do business!

Our first scheduled meeting was held on April 17, 2000. At this meeting we set dues, selected officers, decided on the number of meetings to have each year (we meet four times a year) and set up committees for membership, programs and education. As with all of our meetings, there was discussion about our industry and WTCA. We also planned a meeting calendar that would work around the schedules of our associate members. Representatives from the truss plate industry, for example, are important members and industry partners to us. We wanted to ensure their participation.

Deciding on the subject of our Chapter meetings, we've found, is the key to their success. Before each meeting a guest speaker and subject are chosen that coincide with our agenda. From the beginning, one of the main issues on our agenda was the New York State Building Code. With this in mind, we have selected guest speakers who can keep us informed on Building Code issues. This has proved to be very beneficial for our chapter members. We have found that our members get answers to their questions, voice their concerns and build relationships with the people who regulate our industry.

"Our Chapter helped us form a partnership with the New York code inspectors—they are our watchdogs and perform a service for our industry. Having a better relationship with them will be an asset to our industry and the end users of our products."

—Terry Tontarski
Fabco

"Being part of a Chapter helps you find strength as a group—it's like finding kindred souls and support."

—Bruce Hutchins
Northeast Panel & Truss

The meeting we had in November 2000 showed us how successful our Chapter could be using this focused approach. Our meeting's topic was the change to the Building Code for New York State. Our guest speakers included New York State Building Code Officials George Clark (Head of Code), Sam Ricotta (Director of Training) and Dottie Harris (Assistant Director). Kirk Grundahl also joined us for this meeting.

In the past, our members have not had a good experience with building code officials. However, that was not the case here—in fact, it may have been one of our best meetings. The officials we invited were open to all of our ideas and suggestions. Kirk took the opportunity to facilitate a proposal between the WTCA-NY Chapter and the Building Code Officials. WTCA proposed that New York Building Inspectors be able to use truss plant tours to count toward continuing education credits (like any civil servant, a building inspector must earn a certain number of continuing education credits every year). WTCA-National submitted an outline of what the typical truss plant tour would cover. In addition, it was agreed that résumés for the tour guides would be submitted for approval prior to the tour.

The acceptance of this proposal has directly benefited the New York State Building Inspectors by giving them a way to meet their continuing education goals. WTCA-NY has also benefited by being able to build strong relationships with the inspectors and educate them about the truss industry and its commitment to safety and quality. This program has been such a success that other areas are beginning to adopt it and WTCA now offers it as its fourteenth Truss Technology Workshop.

WTCA-NY continues to grow and set an agenda full of goals that will further our industry. At our meeting in January of this year we had 48 people attend to hear Hamid Naderi, Senior Staff Engineer at the International Conference of Building Officials (ICBO), speak about the differences between the IBC International Building Code and the old New York State Code. For an upcoming meeting, we have invited members of the New York State Department of Transportation and the State Police to give a talk on transportation issues in our industry. We may also participate in a project with New York State in the building of a house that can withstand extreme weather conditions.

There are many people to thank for our Chapter's success, including staff at WTCA-National, all of our associate members and dedicated individuals like Jerry Vulgaris and Stan Sias from the Northeast Chapter. However, our chapter members deserve the most credit for our progress. We are competitors, but by working together and focusing on the future success of the component industry we have created a situation from which we all benefit.

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