

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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Memoirs of Washington, D.C. — 2003 WTCA Legislative Conference Recap
by Kelli Gabel & Suzi Grundahl.

"I found the visit entirely satisfying. Before the trip, I had reservations. Would I be effective? Would the legislators care about my concerns, and would they listen to my voice? Staff did a great job of prepping us with a policy handbook that we could discuss with the staff members, and leave in their possession. It clearly spelled out some of the hot issues for the component industry, and what the legislators could do to help our industry. I discussed the softwood lumber trade issue with Senator Cantwell. She was well informed on the issue, but was not aware of the size of the value-added industry. She was gracious and I plan to follow up with the findings from the ITC 332 investigation. I now believe that our industry can make a difference with our government officials, and we must continue to talk to our representatives about issues important to our industry." —David Motter, Tri-County Truss

For the third year in a row, WTCA held its annual Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. April 30 through May 2. For many members this was their first experience, while others were able to offer leadership and skills based on their past visits to the Hill. With a full agenda and meetings for all members, each experience was different, but positive for all.

APRIL 30: KICK-OFF DINNER

In preparation for Capitol Hill visits, WTCA kicked off with a dinner and brief overview of the Legislative Positions & Policies Handbook and other handouts. Issues varied from tort reform to housing affordability, including talking points and how our elected officials can help the structural building components industry. Most noted was the current U.S./Canada trade issue pertaining to softwood lumber.

"The legislative conference exceeded my expectations. It was obvious to me that the voice of the WTCA had been 'heard' in their previous trips to Washington. I look forward to becoming a more active participant in future legislative conferences." —Tony Harris, Smyth Lumber

Staff provided an overview of this lingering trade issue, pointing out the size of the value-added sector in comparison to the North American softwood industry, and reiterating the fact that the current 27.2 percent tariff enacted in May of 2002 has adversely affected our industry. We had many figures to back up the impact of this tariff, including number of jobs, which equate votes.

Members informed legislators that the U.S. value-added wood products industry, which includes the wood structural components industry, has 381 percent more dollars in shipment (\$47.93 billion vs. \$12.57 billion), 602 percent more employees (390,563 total employees vs. 64,910 total employees) and 546 percent more payroll (\$10.111 billion in payroll vs. \$1.850 billion in payroll) than the entire sawmilling industry. Further-more, the Coalition for Fair Lumber Imports only represents the interests of 40 percent of the softwood lumber industry in the U.S., so the total number of employees adversely affected by the tariff is 390,563 versus 25,964 helped. The question that everyone in attendance asked their elected officials is why the U.S. Government would put at risk the U.S. value-added wood products industry when 364,599 more jobs and \$8.261 billion in payroll are directly affected through the unintended consequences of the current tariff? The U.S. value-added wood products industry, which includes the wood structural components industry, will continue to be negatively affected if a resolution does not take into account the issues and concerns of such industry segments.

Also included in the handouts was a document called "Establishing the Thompson-Nicola Region as a Centre for International Wood Products Manufacturing in the BC Southern Interior." This piece of information outlines British Columbia's proposal for increasing the value-added sector, which ultimately can bypass the current tariff. Again, this directly affects our industry and puts a number of U.S. jobs at risk.

"I would say that my opinion of the WTCA legislative session was entirely different than what I had anticipated. I thought that trying to meet with members of Congress would be a waste of time, as our industry paled in size compared to the big industrial concerns. What I found was that the prior groundwork laid by the past two years' meetings has given WTCA some voice and recognition in matters that do affect steel and wood issues. My eyes have been opened and I do expect to continue to attend these meetings in the future." — Andy Schwitter, Truswal Systems Corp.

Last, there was discussion about what our main objective as an industry is to remedy the situation. The only practical solution to this issue is a negotiated settlement between Canada and the U.S. that would result in actions being taken that will result in systemic changes to the manner in which the Canadian market functions so that timber and lumber are priced in an open and competitive way (i.e., open up the Canadian timber supply to public bid, without governmentally imposed lumber production requirements). These changes would allow all U.S. companies, including the U.S. value-added producers, to be able to compete in their marketplace on a completely fair and equitable basis.

These facts are why we as an industry so passionately believe that the tariff has significant common sense flaws and negatively affects the overall U.S. economy. The message we conveyed is that a permanent solution is the best approach for all U.S. workers and their families.

MAY 1: VISITS TO CAPITOL HILL

Early in the morning WTCA members gathered and prepared for their individual Hill visits. They took last minute notes and reviewed their policy booklets in order to possess an effective

grassroots “lobbying” approach. For some members, this was their first time in D.C. and just finding your way to and through the Senate and House buildings can be a job in itself!

Each meeting was distinct, but overall, each member left with an optimistic feeling that their message was heard at least by the legislators' staff and in some instances, directly with their Senators and member of Congress.

MAY 1: CAPITOL TOUR

Many members took advantage of a private Capitol tour, thanks to the staff at Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin's (WI) office. After getting the large group through rigid security below the Longworth House Building, many facets of the Capitol were seen, including artwork that lines the tunnel from the House building to the Capitol. Artists from all 50 states were represented in this display.

“After meeting with my legislators, I feel as if I’ve grown tremendously. This was a whole new experience for me and I have to admit I was somewhat intimidated at first. It was great. We have taken a part in influencing our government. Even if our influence was small, it’s better than doing nothing. A big THANK YOU to WTCA for not only making this happen but also for making our meetings/presentations so professional. Great job.” —Dave Denoncourt, Steenbeke & Sons, Inc.

Since the 108th Congress was in session, we all had the opportunity to listen in on activities on the floor of the Senate and House. From the balcony above the Senate floor, we witnessed Senate Minority Speaker Senator Daschle vocalizing his appreciation for the Capitol police. This is where you are able to grasp the real history and experience how our governmental system works. What a truly amazing process!

VISIT WITH OSHA

A small group from WTCA met with Michael Buchet and Stu Burkhammer of OSHA’s Office of Construction Standards and Guidance in their Washington, D.C. office. We believe it is important for WTCA to take a proactive role in keeping OSHA informed of our industry association's commitment to safety and they were appreciative of that. We had an excellent discussion about the jobsite safety documents (specifically WTCA's Jobsite Package as well as the new Building Component Safety Information [BCSI] Series). Mr. Buchet and Mr. Burkhammer made positive comments about the effectiveness and readability of the materials. They had some suggested additions to the Warning Poster that we will employ. They encouraged WTCA to consider an alliance program with OSHA, which provides training and education and outreach with deliverables. They are especially interested in the topic of fall protection and any recommendations the industry can make with regard to safely installing trusses while being tied off. They also indicated their high priority for providing safety information in Spanish. They publish a quarterly newsletter in Spanish and suggested that WTCA submit articles to this publication. They also have language translation services for safety documents.

GARY O'MALLEY • WEYERHAEUSER

After an eventful day on the Hill and many miles logged, members enjoyed a relaxing dinner and the pleasure of listening to Gary O'Malley, Director of Government Affairs at Weyerhaeuser, speak on the current softwood lumber issue and where he sees the U.S. value-added sector in the future. Mr. O'Malley focused on the timeline of the U.S./Canada trade issue pertaining to softwood lumber and covered the degrees of difficulty that exist in resolving this dispute between Canada and the U.S.

CONCLUSION

Each year, WTCA makes an even greater presence in our Nation's Capitol. This year was no different. Many Legislators and their staff were well informed about our industry and many of the issues that surround it on a day-to-day basis. This was only made possible with the relationships that have been formed and the open lines of communication that exist for many members.

This line of communication should continue throughout the year. Your senators and representatives have multiple offices in your state! Take advantage by visiting their local offices to discuss issues that affect our industry and specifically your business—schedule a plant tour, keep legislators informed of our industry and remind them of the significant value it has to our economy.

Take this tremendous opportunity and join in to strengthen our industry's voice. Each member of Congress has the opportunity to decide the fate of any and all legislation that enters committee or goes to the floor for vote. Use your voice and help them decide!

May 2: WTCA Open Quarterly Meeting

A WTCA Open Quarterly Meeting followed the conclusion of the Legislative Conference. President Scott Arquilla opened the Board meeting by noting that the legislative conference was an excellent success. Then each chapter representative in attendance provided an update on local chapter activities. There was a discussion about the Weekly Board Report. Comments were that the summary is excellent and very informational. Many members noted that could also be used as a membership recruitment tool. The Board directed that staff send the report out weekly to all members, not just the Board. Members will have the opportunity to unsubscribe. Chapter presidents can add additional information if they choose.

The following topics were also discussed at this meeting:

- The completion of the In-Plant WTCA QC program. The database program is up to date and a presentation on the web demonstrates how the software works. There was also a discussion about third party inspectors that are In-Plant WTCA QC certified. Implementation of ANSI/TPI-

1 was a big part of the discussion when WTCA's Executive Committee met with TPI on May 6-7. ([See letter.](#))

- Requirements for sealed placement plans. In Florida, we plan to implement an online presentation before the Building Officials Association of Florida's summer conference, at which we were invited to speak. In Riverside, CA, building officials have said we're on the same page with electronic seals and signatures and getting a shop drawing approval. We continue to address this issue in North Carolina as well.
- February's U.S. Value-Added Wood Products briefing. Senator Grassley (IA), Senate Finance Committee Chair, and his chief of Staff Everett Eisenstat have been very proactive on our industry's behalf. The ITC 332 study on structural building components was sent to the Senate Finance Committee on April 30. When WTCA receives it, we will create a summary of the information.
- The corrosive effect of ACQ on steel connectors. We sent a letter to SFPA about the use of ACQ in the floor trusses of the Holigan House—a marketing project they undertook. Mark Crawford of Simpson Strong-Tie will forward his findings on this issue to WTCA and TPI for review. Preliminary findings, as we suspected, are that the only options for ACQ treated lumber are a triple zinc coated product or a post production hot dipped galvanized product, or two stainless steel alternatives. There's also a major concern about corrosiveness of nails in lumber treated with ACQ.
- Industry insurance program. Kendall Hoyd reported that WTCA plans to develop a handful of insurance brokers who are capable of being experts in our industry. We plan to develop six to eight WTCA-endorsed brokers. To achieve that status, they will need to devote the time in understanding our business. He said that if members think they are represented by a broker who would be interested, send the names to staff. Our focus will be on property and casualty versus workers comp at this time.

Treasurer Dan Holland reported that WTCA's financials are favorable to budget for the first quarter. The TTT Revenue is higher than budget and higher than last year. The deadline for the BCMC early bird exhibitor registration was May 1 so much of the exhibitor income is collected. The staff hours budget is in good shape.

In addition to a lengthy report by each in attendance on the effectiveness of their visits to the hill, there was an update on BCMC, SBC Magazine, Truss Knowledge Online statistics and effectiveness, the online Member Satisfaction Survey, and Carbeck, as well as reports by our suppliers from TPI, the engineered wood products industry and the lumber industry.

On a personal note, Scott Arquilla stated that six weeks ago his plant burned to the ground. He thanked the numerous people who sent notes and made calls. He said that he didn't realize how many friends he had until this happened. It has been tough to get through but he knows they're going to make it. He urged everyone to come to downtown Seattle for the next Open Quarterly Meeting in August.

Special thanks to Allen Erickson and Frank Klinger for taking so many wonderful photos of this year's event.

SBC HOME PAGE

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