

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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CaIESCA-North Left 'Em Hungry for More by Molly E. Butz

Building bridges is all the rage in northern California. Read about how the CaIESCA-North Chapter is doing it with their local building inspectors.



A CD-ROM, a handful of support documents and a room full of eager building inspectors was all it took for Allen Erickson of the California Engineered Structural Components Association-Northern Region (CaIESCA-North) to get the ball rolling. Erickson was originally contacted by Rick Swenson, Inspection Services Manager for the City of Rocklin, CA, shortly before BCMC 2003. "At the time, Rick asked if I might be able to put together a presentation on inspecting trusses [at the jobsite] for the Sacramento Building Inspectors Association," Erickson told SBC staff. "Of course, I said we would be happy to do that, but I knew with BCMC just around the corner that we'd need to plan for sometime in the spring of 2004."

In the meantime, Erickson began to outline the program. In passing, he mentioned it to Anna Stamm of WTCA Staff. Unfortunately, Rick Swenson lost track of Erickson's contact information and, as spring quickly approached, he decided he would call the WTCA-National office in the hopes to get in contact with someone who could put together a presentation. Remembering her conversation with Erickson, Stamm directed Swenson to the CaIESCA-North Chapter, and got Swenson and Erickson back in touch.

The first of two presentations took place this past March in Sacramento, CA. Roughly 50 building inspectors attended, with another 50 present at the second presentation given in Rocklin, CA in April. "I think the inspectors really enjoyed the presentation. They got a lot of new information and they were able to get their hands on some printed materials, which were really helpful," Swenson said.

The presentations included a multi-media Truss Technology Workshop (TTW) focused on reading Truss Design Drawings, a PowerPoint® slideshow on inspecting wood trusses in the field, and an introduction to the BCSI 1-03 booklet. Erickson wrapped up with a discussion on design responsibilities, which included handing out the ANSI/TPI/WTCA 4-2002 and the Commentary on ANSI/TPI/WTCA 4-2002 documents. In addition, the building inspectors received several other documents including How to Read a Truss Design Drawing, How to Read a Truss Placement

Diagram, and a sample truss design drawing.

Charlie Truax, a licensed P.E. and owner of Tru-Truss Engineering, Inc., was present at both workshops to answer questions. "After each section of the presentation we had a question and answer session. It was great to have Charlie available to dive into the technical areas," Erickson commented.

"At the April presentation in Rocklin, the building inspectors were asking some really great questions. Along with Charlie, we fielded as many as we could, but honestly, they asked a couple of detailed questions about continuous lateral bracing and we were having a little trouble coming up with the answers," Erickson confided. During a break, Erickson called the WTCA-National office and spoke with Ryan Dexter. Dexter answered the questions for Erickson, who explained, "When the presentation resumed, I told them I was able to contact an engineer that had actually sat on the panel that developed the materials the building inspectors were asking about. I was able to give the inspectors the answers they were looking for and they were really impressed that I could reach that far into my bag of tricks, and that quickly too!"

Overall, Erickson was very pleased with the programs, and indicated that he was looking forward to presenting more TTWs with other focuses. Not surprisingly, he wasn't the only one. Duane Hillabush, also from the CalESCA-North Chapter, attended the March presentation. "It was very well attended and there was a lot of interest and excitement from the people that were there," Hillabush confirmed. "They were thrilled to get the information and as we were wrapping up it was obvious they were hungry for more. In retrospect, we probably could have brought more information with us, I know they would have been glad to have it."

Hillabush analyzed the crowd by saying, "You know, whenever you give a presentation there are varying types of people who attend. The 'hostages' and the 'vacationers' and even the 'socialites' that are more interested in chatting than anything. But the most important kind of participants are the 'learners' and those building inspectors, they were ALL learners; we had an entire room full of learners."

"It was great to have Charlie on hand. As a Professional Engineer, he was able to answer a lot of questions and he added greater credence to the presentation as a whole," Hillabush concluded. Swenson agreed, "[Truax] was able to fill in the specifics with details. It was great that Allen had arranged to have an engineer available at the presentations; it really helped out." The workshops made an overwhelming impression on the building inspectors of Sacramento Valley, and at the same time illustrated an unmistakable need to continue presenting educational seminars like this in the future.

Truax also agreed that the subject was very well received and much needed. "At the conclusion of one seminar I participated in, about ten building inspectors came up to me with specific questions. One gloomy-faced inspector approached and, although not teary-eyed yet, he was close. He said 'My job is to protect public life safety and welfare. Today I realized, based on what you have shown me, that I have inspected thousands of trusses that have been installed wrong and I personally approved and signed off on them as correct.'" It's certainly a sad story, but it completely embodies the purpose of the presentation, a solid presentation that provides the happy ending.

“First of all, we’ve promoted communication with the building inspectors and have opened doors that didn’t even exist before,” Erickson said. “We had many requests for more information and additional materials. We’re finally done with all of the follow-ups!” But all of the excited frenzy aside, Erickson is happy about the relationships being forged. “We’ve established a set of common goals, and it’s no longer an us and them situation. It is our entity and their entity, but we’re both committed to providing a quality product with a safe and lasting installation that the homeowner can enjoy for a lifetime.”

Go ahead; ask Allen Erickson if he’ll be doing this again. Ask him if spear-heading the educational efforts for CalESCA-North has been worth his time and energy; and while you’re at it ask Duane Hillabush, Rick Swenson and Charlie Truax, too. You’ll get a resounding “Yes!”

“We ran out of time, and the organizer had to actually ask Allen and the inspectors to wrap things up,” Hillabush said. Truax added, “I feel like the whole seminar needs to be packaged and taken to all building departments.” Even Swenson made it clear that the presentation was a success, “I’d like to do this every year or so, especially as we get new inspectors. A little guidance goes a long way when you’re inspecting trusses on the jobsite.”

And Erickson? He’s thrilled with the results. “It was great,” he said, “and on their way out, I reminded them that they can always call the plant that manufactured the trusses. They’ve got to keep in mind that the guy that did the work on the project is happy to talk to them and answer any questions.”

“Overall, it was just very well received,” he added, then he chuckled and continued, “hey, I even got a standing ovation at the presentation in April. Oh, but don’t print that. Really, no really, don’t put that in the article.”

(So don’t tell Allen we told you, but we wanted you to know!)

For more information about CalESCA-North’s building inspector training program, you can contact Allen Erickson at allen@cal-asia.com. For more information about the California Engineered Structural Components Association (North Central and South Regions), contact Anna L. Stamm at WTCA-National at 608/310-6719.

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