

TRUSS PLANT TOURS

a new perspective

by Molly E. Butz

“If someone like me, someone who works in the component manufacturing industry and has access to hundreds of component manufacturers (CMs) at any time, learns something every time she sets foot in a plant, just imagine the learning experience for someone outside of the industry!”

I have been working in the structural building components industry for more than two years now; you’ve probably even seen my byline in **SBC** articles now and then. As a member of the WTCA staff, I have been exposed to many wonderful educational experiences, from attending the BCMC show and Open Quarterly Meetings, to meeting with individual members of the industry in person and getting to know them over the phone. I’ve had the opportunity to be a part of our **SBC Magazine** team, every issue, and was a key team member in the development of WTCA’s Operation Safety program. Each person I talk with sheds a new light on the industry and I am opened up to yet another perspective on the day-to-day life in a component manufacturing plant.

Understanding what it’s like to own or manage a component manufacturing facility plays an important role in our responsibilities at WTCA and helps ensure that as we work on various projects for the industry, we can convey the information in ways that will best benefit those engaged in manufacturing and distributing structural building components.



One of the experiences I find most interesting, educational and enjoyable is visiting component manufacturing facilities. There’s nothing more defining for me than a look inside the daily operations, from the folks in the design department to the people in the fabrication areas. I find that wherever I go, there is always something to learn. Most recently, I visited Automated Building Components in Dayton, OH. As part of the WTCA Ohio Chapter Association

(WTCAOCA) meeting, we gathered alongside President Marshall McCarty and scoped out his new 150’ wide, 410’ long shop. Big, open, what a great saw area, and how interesting to see those babies in action! It was like something out of a sci-fi movie, each blade spinning, angulating and precisely cutting each 2x4 that passed through its grasp. Following the tour, the chapter met and discussed, among other things, how important it is to give plant tours.

I knew when I visited Automated Building Components that I would be putting this article together, and as I began mulling over the points I wanted to make about offering plant tours, a thought came to mind: If someone like me, someone who works in the component manufacturing industry and has access to hundreds of component manufacturers (CMs) at any time, learns something every time she sets foot in a plant, just imagine the learning experience for someone outside of the industry!

at a glance

- ❑ Truss plant tours give those outside our industry a chance to experience our component manufacturing industry and change their perceptions.
- ❑ A truss plant tour is easy to give a group presentation about. Just use your passion, your profession and your expertise!

In addition to my tour, I requested that the one of the questions on a recent **SBC** One Minute Poll (OMP) ask “Truss plant tours: How often do you invite elected officials, the public, or other trades in to see your operation?” In reviewing the results, I noticed that Mr. McCarty had responded: “All the time, as a matter of

fact, I'm having one with the Ohio Chapter this month."

I thanked Marshall for the tour and asked him what tidbits of wisdom about giving tours he could share. "ABC has been hosting truss plant tours for the last 30 years. We've had more in the last five, just because of the technology advancements, such as computers in the workplace. We have tours for anyone, any customer or vendor, and even the competition is welcome to come and look around," McCarty responded.

The competition? *Very cool.*

But the real question is, of course, what's the point? Why invite these people into your facility and let them see how your operation works? McCarty was direct, "We feel that the tour benefits us as well as the people going through. It gives both parties a chance to communicate."

"We have also had many school groups come through, from high schools and tech schools, even at the university level," McCarty explained. "These have been very beneficial and we were able to hire several people for our design/drafting department due to these tours!"

Getting regular plant tours underway at your facility can be fairly simple and it's an ideal way to provide a valuable service to educational institutions, builders, building officials, specifiers, the fire service, local legislators and even you. Yes, you! All of these groups have an impact on your business, and what better way to help them understand exactly what you do than to invite them in to see it for themselves. A hands-on experience can be an eye-opener and it also gives you the opportunity to answer the questions that arise.

"I never thought that people would be as interested as they seem to be," said Tom Nowak, President of Now Structures in Nevada, MO. "It feels good to be part of the education process." Nowak also responded to the OMP and gives tours of his facility on a monthly basis. "I invite anyone who is interested in seeing how a truss is manufactured, starting in the design department all the way to where the trusses are stacked for delivery."

Not only will you be able to dispel myths and clear up any confusion about the industry, this is also your opportunity to

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highlight your operation and show guests how the machinery works, how the pieces are put together and what new technologies are being used. Encourage your visitors to ask questions, and if safe and feasible, talk to your employees. For specific groups, such as legislators, you can describe how the products are used and the number of people you employ. This invites discussion about the industry, in general, and how it impacts your community as well as the state and even the country.

Ken Cloyd, President of California Truss Company in Perris, CA, sees a plant tour as an opportunity. "When I do a plant tour, the biggest thing that comes out of it at the end is a

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changed perception," Cloyd said. "The people that come through the plant have no idea how much knowledge, expertise, training and investment go in to making a truss. They have always viewed a truss as something made out of wood, something easy to do, something that can be cut or changed and they don't understand the process."

"There is a sense of awe at the end of the tour when they realize this is so much more than a couple of guys in someone's back yard with saws and hammers," Cloyd continued. "For every one of them that I've done—and I've done a lot—I can tell that they walk in thinking 'Eh, a truss plant' and they walk out very impressed. Frequently they'll hang around afterwards and ask all kinds of questions, sometimes for half an hour or more."

Cloyd has invited a wide variety of groups to come and tour his facility. From architects and engineers to people in the fire service, they are all fascinated with the fact that the plant is putting together dozens of trusses at any given time. "The engineers are amazed with what we can do and they are mostly impressed with the quality of the product and how well it does go together," Cloyd explained. "The firefighters come in, and some of them are carpenters on the side. When they see the process, the myths they've heard about trusses go out the window and they say things like, 'Wow, this is really professional, and the computers, and the controlled setting, this is very impressive.'"

"What it boils down to for everyone, whether you have a \$5 million or \$40 million facility, is this: this is your chance to get people excited about our industry, or maybe just about you as a business owner. But, either way, it completely elevates their thinking about component manufacturing and the quality products we produce quickly and affordably," Cloyd concluded.

A plant tour is your opportunity to showcase building components, educate a great variety of people in many specialties and help them gain an appreciation for the component manufacturing industry. Share your knowledge and expertise, even your pride in what you do every day.

Marshall McCarty said it best: "I believe I can come away with something learned from all tours."

Thanks again, Marshall, we agree. **SBC**

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