



An Association's Coming of Age

by Libby Maurer & Emily Patterson

The commemoration of BCMC's 25th year wouldn't be complete without the perspectives of those who led WTCA through many of those years. The WTCA Presidency began with the establishment of the Wood Truss Council of America in 1983. Once a committee operating under the direction of the Truss Plate Institute (TPI), the Component Manufacturers Division (CMD) declared its independence and became autonomous in May of that year. (Prior to 1983, CMD had a board of directors and officers, but remained under TPI's direction.) Early WTCA presidents faced adversity, battled a grim financial outlook, struggled to increase membership and fought to secure credibility. Here, they tell the true story of an association's coming of age.

Change of the Guard

WTCA's first president in 1983 was Staton Douthit, who inherited the post as CMD broke away from TPI. WTCA's first years were marked by a bitter struggle with TPI; the early leaders took the fate of the future into their own hands and remained positive that the tension would subside. "The customer and supplier had become adversary and competitor. It was an unusual situation," explained 1987 President Lenny Sylk (Shelter Systems Corporation). "We are what we are today because of our determination to take control of our destiny more than 20 years ago," he said. 1988 President Koss Kinser (Kintec LLC) echoed Sylk's assessment of the contentious relationship. "There was a tremendous amount of friction between TPI and WTCA. By working with [then TPI President] Mike Conforti, we were able to resolve many issues. I feel this started WTCA down the path to get where we are today," he said. "Bringing WTCA and TPI closer together was a major accomplishment in my year as president," noted Rip Rogers, 1989 WTCA President (Trussway Ltd.). "And the fact that [WTCA] didn't go bankrupt," Rogers quipped.

The threat of bankruptcy was no laughing matter at the time. Early on, the fledgling association had few members and virtually no revenue stream save for BCMC every other year until 1993. A dedicated and determined group of component manufacturer leaders it did have, but running their respective operations while working to keep the association afloat proved taxing. "WTCA's financial picture was strained every non-BCMC year," recalled 1991 President Bob Ward (Southern Components). The maverick association's financial woes were further

complicated by the country's economic scenario. "To top it off, it was also the year of the Desert Storm War and uncharacteristically low housing starts," he added.

The '90s Transition

Bleak financial picture aside, winds of change continued to blow in WTCA's direction. John Herring (A-1 Building Components), who assumed his presidency in 1990, described a shift in personalities within the WTCA leadership. "The '80s were a transition period. We were going from being a hands-on industry run by people who came up through the ranks—real blood and guts guys—to looking at machinery and other advances," he explained. "Between

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at a glance

- ❑ The Component Manufacturers Division voted to split from the Truss Plate Institute in 1983 to establish itself as the association we know today as the Wood Truss Council of America.
- ❑ Throughout their history, WTCA Presidents have faced adversity, worked to improve the association's financial outlook, struggled to increase membership, and fought to secure credibility.
- ❑ WTCA is now a well-respected and influential organization, thanks to the direction and leadership of Past Presidents.

1983



Staton Douthit

1984



Ed Clark

1985



David Chambers

1986



Tom Carbeck

1987



Leonard Sylk

1988



Koss Kinser

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Koss and myself, we were sort of the first outsiders and I was the first new kid. Back then, we had to scrape and scrounge for board members. It was like, 'who can we con into this thing?' I think a lot of people thought it was an elite group...but it really wasn't that way when you got involved. During the next few years, that perception changed," Herring recalled.

During his term, Herring started the Past Presidents Council, a group that still exists today. "I felt it was important to keep an historical balance while going through change," he said. "I was a relative newcomer with just 10-15 years of experience. I thought, 'We need to keep these guys involved. Let's not make any of the same mistakes twice. They can help us keep one foot on the ground.'" The Past Presidents Council was not the only thing that has stuck with Herring from his 1990 term. On August 22, 1990, the WTCA Board of Directors announced the decision to bring Kirk Grundahl on as the association's first technical director. Herring was quoted in a press release, "We believe the selection of Kirk as our technical director will help the wood truss industry flourish in the '90s." And flourish it did. "Bringing Kirk on as a technical consultant and creating the Past Presidents Council are two things I'm proud of. Those are two big issues we started the ball in motion to change. It was a time of growth," Herring remembered.

New Management & the Early '90s Challenges

The struggle to maintain autonomy, finding solutions to improve financial health, recruiting a fresh crop of leaders: what else would challenge the young association? A big time management change, that's what. In early 1991, the WTCA Board of Directors felt a change in management was necessary to correct the organization's financial strain. "We began talks with Kirk Grundahl and Qualtim Technologies to take over the management from Smith, Bucklin & Associates (Chicago)," Ward recalled. Qualtim, Inc. has managed the association ever since, and Grundahl assumed the role of executive director.



Rip Rogers



John Herring



Robert Ward

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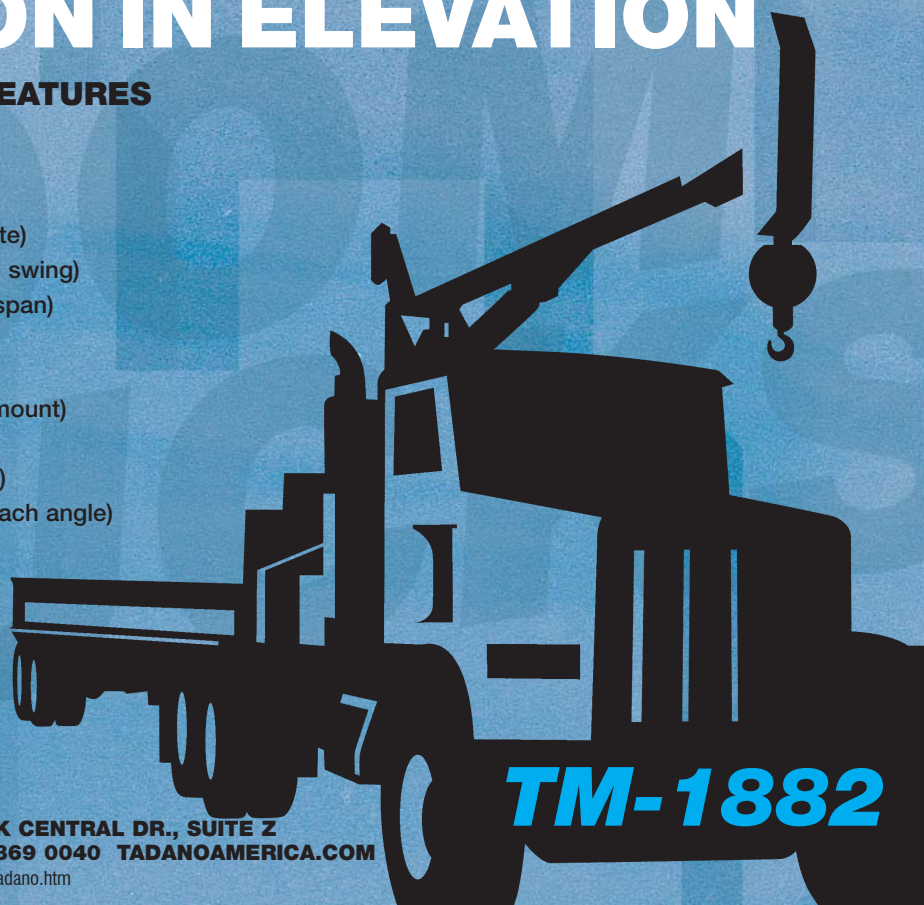
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Don Hershey



Lee Vulgaris



Pat McGuire, P.E.

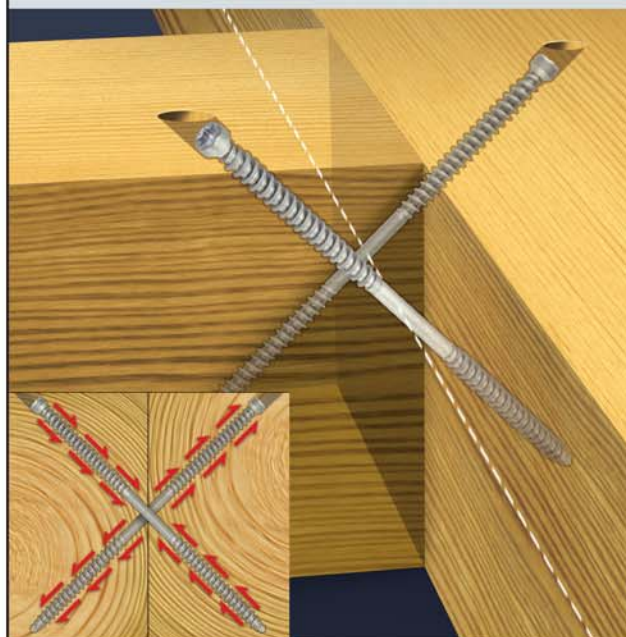


Merle Nett

As the association awoke to a new decade, the internal struggle to manage and lead WTCA gave way to external issues of all types. In the early '90s, the age-old battle with members of the fire industry heated up as "various publications were printing articles about the danger of trusses, naming them the cause of firefighter deaths through non-factual information," Ward said. Mandatory labeling of buildings using trusses was being discussed in a number of states due to this type of information being published. The association took a proactive stance on the fire issue based on facts and "continues to educate the public as to the valuable and safety of our products when used properly," he added.

In addition to addressing wood truss fire performance, Ward and the Board of Directors were in the midst of completing two monumental firsts for WTCA: the development of the first version of the **Metal Plate Connected Wood Truss Handbook** and the notion of creating an in-plant quality control program for component manufacturers. "What I was

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most proud of during my presidency was the movement toward the completion of the handbook, getting the QC program [WTCA QC] underway, and changing WTCA management," said Ward.

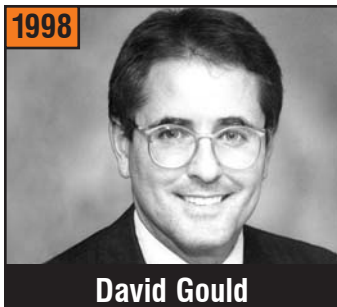
Don Hershey (Alliance TruTrus, LLC) experienced more of the same—financial strain and pressure to establish credibility—through his extended term of February 1992 to November 1993. "Because of lack of funds, we had to be creative in ways to raise money to support our efforts. There were more good ideas for WTCA to be involved in than we have resources available to fund. The Board of Directors had to wrestle and decide what efforts we needed to be a priority. There was intense pressure to prove the credibility of WTCA to both our membership and TPI," he said.

1995 President Pat McGuire (Borkholder Buildings & Supply, LLP) echoed Hershey's recollection of trying to climb out of the red. "The thing I remember most is the very rough financial status of the association, especially in the years immediately before my term. I learned a lot from Don Hershey and even more from Lee Vulgaris. Without the leadership of those two guys (and others like Bob Ward and Rip Rogers), who made some very difficult decisions about WTCA management,

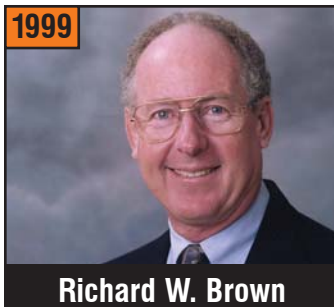
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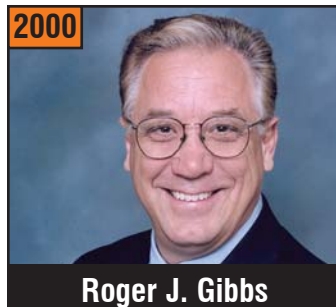
Gary Sweatt, P.E.



David Gould



Richard W. Brown



Roger J. Gibbs

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the association would not exist today, or at best it would be a subsidiary of TPI," he noted.

Local Chapters Hit the Scene in the Mid-'90s

Although WTCA Chapters had been tackling local grassroots efforts since the 1970s, 1996 President Merle Nett (Richco Structures) remembered a renewed association-wide campaign to ignite chapter participation. "During my presidency, we strongly pushed and promoted local chapters. It was the beginning of putting the emphasis on having chapters start to develop. At the time, there were probably only a handful of chapters, but everything starts with one. Wisconsin was one of the first, and it had a purpose to be a chapter even before it was part of WTCA. It had that purpose and driving force."

Nett also pushed to complete WTCA's in-plant quality control program during his term, a task Ward had begun four years earlier. "Providing the impetus to keep WTCA QC moving was a big step for me. I felt then and still feel now that QC should be one of the association's major points of focus," he commented.

Relationship Building

Just before the dawn of a new century, WTCA and TPI continued to take baby steps toward an improved and productive working relationship. 1999 President Richard Brown (Truss Systems) experienced a milestone as the first [WTCA] president allowed to sit with the TPI board. "We had made some overtures, and I was the first invited to sit down and participate and talk about some of our mutual concerns," he explained. That invitation sparked a change of epic proportions that ultimately came to fruition two or three presidencies later. "So I take my participation as a positive step toward a healthy relationship," Brown noted.

Growing by Leaps & Bounds

It was fitting that the highlight of Roger Gibbs' (SpaceJoist TE) turn-of-the-century 2000 term was the move to unite the many segments of the structural building components industry under a common name. "I'll always remember my presidency for creating that umbrella over WTCA called the Structural Building Components Council (SBCC). The idea was eventually WTCA would include wood truss manufacturers, EWP distributors, steel fabricators and others," he explained. With his influence on the all-encompassing umbrella council, Gibbs had addressed the growing diversification of the industry: "Some manufacturers are involved in wood, steel and EWP. Others simply do one of those activities," he said.

Big changes for the association rolled right into 2001, as WTCA tackled material volatility issues, addressed the softwood lumber dispute and debuted an annual conference. "WTCA has helped us as an industry to advance by leaps and bounds," said 2001 President Mary Pat Keller (Gateway Building Components). Keller is proud to have been involved in another "first" for the association: the debut of the Annual WTCA Legislative Conference in Washington, DC. "I'm proud to have been a member of the first group to visit lawmakers on Capitol Hill visits," she said, recalling that the softwood lumber dispute was a hot issue among component manufacturers at the first conference. "I remember discussing the dispute with other members. We came to the conclusion that we had to start talking about this issue, especially with lawmakers," she noted. The idea to meet with elected officials stuck; in May 2005, component manufacturers gathered at the nation's capital for the fifth straight year.



Mary Pat Keller



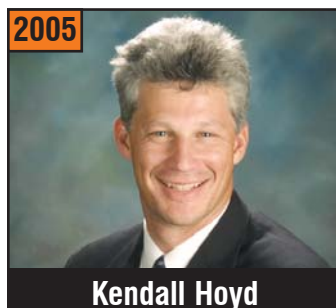
Michael Ruede



Scott Arquilla



Daniel Holland



Kendall Hoyd

Uncharted & United Territory

Under 2002 President Mike Ruede's (California Truss Company) watch, **WOODWORDS**, the wood truss industry's trade publication, adopted a name that more accurately represented the scope and diversity of its audience: **Structural Building Components Magazine**. In his November 2001 **President's Message**, Ruede wrote: "The change is the culmination of over three years of work to bring the component industry together under the Structural Building Components Council. Both our markets' and customers' demands have changed and our intent in changing the magazine is to stay abreast of the times and ensure that member companies understand, and are able to take advantage of, the opportunities that these changes offer us."

As the **WOODWORDS/SBC** change was revealed to the membership, Ruede, Gibbs, Keller, Scott Arquilla, Tom Manenti, Dionel Cotanda and Bill Turnbull were hammering out the details of a groundbreaking agreement that would forever change the WTCA/TPI working relationship. "I was determined to unify our associations," Ruede stated, noting that the duplication of tasks was becoming a major source of frustration. To get the ball rolling, Ruede and TPI President Charlie Hoover talked weekly, hashed out the issues that needed to be addressed, and set up the framework for the famed Litmus Test to narrow the focus of the two associations' unique roles in the market. The respective WTCA and TPI executive committees met in Dallas on April 23, 2002. "We were either going to agree or disagree. At the end of the day, both sides had defined their scope of work and the Litmus Test was born," he said. "The beauty of it is you can take any task and easily determine which group should take the lead. It has and will continue to serve the industry well."

The year of Scott Arquilla's (Best Homes Inc.) term—2003—made headlines thanks to a revolutionary new prescriptive approach to handling, installing and bracing. With cooperation and input from TPI's Technical Advisory Committee and WTCA's Engineering & Technology Committee, the **Building Component Safety Information** (BCSI) documents were born. Arquilla remembered the whirlwind development process: "I'd say the highlight of my presidency was the introduction of BCSI 1-03. We completed it in almost record time during a two-day meeting in Chicago during which we ham-

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mered out the content, and later introduced the booklet [and related B-Series Summary Sheets] in October 2003." Keller commented that years of work to establish a positive relationship between the once competing organizations had officially paid off after the completion of a document like BCSI 1-03. "I'm proud to have taken part in building the relationship between WTCA and TPI. It was a big step to grow up as an association and take ownership of our issues; that ultimately resulted in the Litmus Test and BCSI." The Arquilla administration successfully developed BCSI to replace TPI's HIB-91 and WTCA's bracing documents. "It's been a very financially rewarding document and a vast, vast improvement over the old [WTCA and TPI] documents," he declared.

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When Dan Holland (Clearspan Components) took over the reigns from Arquilla in 2004, the BCSI experience was still young. Holland took full advantage of yet another opportunity to partner with TPI. "The Joint Publications Agreement was drafted and signed during my term," he said. "That and the closer relationship with TPI was major news in 2004." The Joint Publications Agreement was significant for both groups in that it split BCSI net profit down the middle.

The Future & Beyond

As he writes in his farewell message (see page 7), current President Kendall Hoyd's (Idaho Truss & Components) hallmark will likely be starting a WTCA research and truss testing center. "It will pay huge dividends in our industry for years to come," he predicts. But as you can see, there really is no predicting where WTCA's future might lead, given the strong leadership and commitment of its component manufacturer members. Without question, the many changes made since 1983 have cemented WTCA's future as a credible, influential and persistent force in the building components industry. Cheers to the leaders who have helped light the way. **SBC**

Adventures in Advocacy

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If a state appeals court issues case opinions, these become case precedent applicable to that particular state. Federal appeals courts are likewise at times called upon to interpret state laws and regulations. When they do, the case opinions they issue will also become case precedent for that particular state. Generally, however, federal appeals courts interpret only federal law and their case decisions are binding as federal case precedent. To the extent one federal appeals court issues a case opinion interpreting federal law one way, and another federal appeals court issues a case opinion interpreting federal law differently, it is up to the United States Supreme Court to resolve this difference. When the U.S. Supreme Court issues a case opinion, it becomes a federal law case precedent that applies to all states.

Going back to the example, as we recall the trial court has ruled that the existing statute of limitations bars the lawsuit. In this case, on the appeal of the plaintiff homeowner, the appeals court reverses the judgment in favor of plaintiff. In reversing the judgment the appeals court issues a case opinion

describing the reasons to support the reversal. The case opinion describes that although the lawsuit was filed ten years after the trusses were sold, the plaintiff homeowner did not discover problems with his trusses until less than four years prior to filing his lawsuit.

Even though the statute itself does not in any way mention that discovery of problems is any kind of test, the appeals court is persuaded that homeowners may very well not be able to know of problems within the four-year timeframe set forth in the statute. In doing so, the appeals court establishes a law that otherwise did not exist. The law they establish is what becomes later referred to as the "discovery rule." In other words, on a sale of trusses and subsequent complaints of design or manufacturing defects, the statute of limitations does not run from the date of sale as the statute may state, but from the date of discovery or the date the homeowner should have reasonably discovered the problems.

As you can see, an active judicial system can work and impose law that directly affects component manufacturer. The net result of all of this for the roof truss manufacturer is no certainty as to when they can be sued for product defects and corresponding property damages. The statute of limitations runs from a date of discovery as imposed by the courts and not a transaction date as set forth in a statute adopted by a legislature. **SBC**

Kent J. Pagel is the President and Senior Shareholder of Pagel, Davis & Hill, a professional corporation. Mr. Pagel serves as the outside counsel for WTCA.

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