



The Essence of the Industry Lies at Its Grassroots

by Marisa Peters

Discover how one chapter has become involved in educating state and local building officials.

2005 was a year of renewed focus on the purpose and function of WTCA chapters, of which there are 32. Ranging from those that have existed since the industry's first years to new start-ups, chapters are the lifeblood of our organization. By monitoring local markets, keeping in touch with elected officials, reaching out to inspectors through educational efforts and taking off their competitive hats to unite over marketplace issues, manufacturers and their suppliers comprise the many regional chapters that, in tandem with the organization's underlying support system, make WTCA a world class association.

While some admit to harboring hesitation when it comes to participating in their local chapter, others would be at a loss without them. We've chosen to spotlight the Western Component Manufacturers Association (WCMA), a newly formed chapter that has defined the essence of their existence by establishing relationships with building official groups.

Officially the 32nd chapter in October 2004, WCMA has made quick work of reaching out to building inspectors within Oregon and southern Washington. After a previous attempt to form a chapter didn't work out, a group of manufacturers and suppliers re-upped their efforts. "There had been some interest in the truss fabricating community for the past five or ten years," said Lee Howe, WCMA president and branch manager of Lumbermen's. "Dave Hughes, Rudy Pierce, myself and Kris Alberti—somehow we all just started talking."

Besides talking with one another, they also spoke with various people they know in the marketplace. From these conversations, they decided there was enough interest and willingness to create a chapter, Howe said.

David Hughes, WCMA vice president and general manager of Oregon Truss, remembers what unified the chapter. "Lee Howe and I were frustrated by the issues that local building departments created in this area," he said. "We decided we needed to get everybody together to change it, instead of trying to do it individually."

Professional Ties

Although WCMA is a newer chapter, it has already made a difference by making education a priority. There is now a relationship between component manufacturers (CMs) and building inspectors on both local and statewide levels that did not exist prior to the chapter's formation. For example, Howe was contacted by Dennis Carney of the City of Hillsboro in November 2005, who needed assistance in understanding how to inspect trusses for proper bracing in the field. Howe said the City did have a copy of BCSI 1-03, but when they started to look at the permanent lateral bracing in trusses, they realized there were some things they didn't really understand. "My recollection is that they were a little confused as to who was responsible for the bracing to begin with, how it was to be done, and how were they supposed to know how it was attached to the structure," Howe said.

This conversation led to Carney inviting WCMA to participate in a meeting of inspectors regarding bracing. "He was trying to get some education because I think he discovered that they [building inspectors] were all applying different rules to things," Hughes said.

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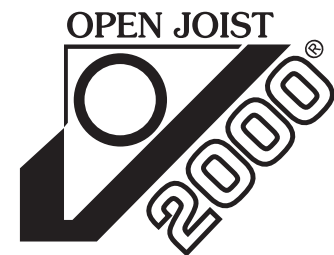
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at a glance

- ❑ The Western Component Manufacturers Association has taken an active role in educating local and state building officials in Oregon.
- ❑ Through its educational efforts, WCMA has begun to forge relationships with the building inspector community.
- ❑ In the last six months, WCMA has been invited to participate in several meetings with the inspectors, who have been very receptive to the manufacturers' information.

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As the date of the meeting approached, attendance numbers and technicalities became greater than originally anticipated. It seemed as though there was much more interest in bracing than expected. Hughes said the number of participants grew from about five people to more than 20, and that was when they decided to call in help. Assistance came in the form of WTCA staff member Rachel Smith, who joined WCMA in giving a presentation about bracing.

Armed with a Truss Technology Workshop (TTW) on Jobsite Truss Inspections, BCSI 1-03 booklets and WTCA Jobsite packages, Smith flew in for the meeting-turned-event. Hughes said that in the end, about 50 people attended.

"Rachel was well-prepared," said Howe. "Additionally, the truss fabricators were prepared to field questions." The fact that so many people were there from different segments of the industry also helped the whole thing to go smoothly and professionally.

In the end, WCMA and WTCA were successful in working together to show the group of building officials that they are serious about bracing education. There were some preconceived notions about permanent bracing and design responsibilities, but Howe said he believes these were eliminated during the meeting.

Carney said the presentation helped bring the inspectors up to speed on bracing issues and also sparked some debate.

Continuing Education

While the meeting helped to clear up some questions, the complexity of the issues made it very difficult to address everything in one presentation. This was made clear as people were leaving the meeting, when it was suggested that WCMA should be at the Oregon Building Officials Association (OBOA) seminar in March 2006.

"So [WCMA's participation], in fact, has happened," said Howe. "I think that there were a lot of unanswered questions at the Hillsboro meeting. A lot of people left thinking they understood the industry and the business more than before, but the attendees still had a lot of questions."

WCMA, having been pleased with Smith's presentation at the meeting, decided to reach out again and have her to return to teach a class at the OBOA seminar.

Hughes said he sees the invitation to participate in OBOA's seminar as recognition that education is important. "I think that the folks at the meeting wanted more info, and asking us to present at the state-level seminar is pretty good evidence that there is definitely a recognized need for education," he said.

While the relationship between WCMA and Oregon building inspectors is going in a positive direction, CMs and building inspectors are still getting to know each other and figuring out how to work together productively. The fact that they're communicating is clearly a good sign, though.

"What we can hopefully accomplish is a relationship where when they [inspectors]

have a question, they'll come to the association for an answer—not only locally but nationally—instead of trying to interpret it themselves," Hughes said. "My hope is that we'll get a mutual understanding of each other's needs, and educate each other."

Howe said he feels positive about the developing relationship between WCMA and building inspectors. The exchange of information that occurred when city officials asked for information, and WCMA responded by providing it in a helpful way, was a good step.

"I want to have open dialogue between the building inspector groups that look at our work every day and our fabricators," said Howe. This is his hope because if there's open dialogue, then when issues come up they can be handled maturely and effectively, and consequently won't blow up into huge problems.

Carney seems to agree, expressing gratitude for the growing relationship with WCMA. "I really appreciate what the chapter is doing to help educate us," he said, adding that he hopes more manufacturers participate in the future.

Aiding Through Associations

It is apparent that many chapters and their members would benefit from having a positive working relationship with building inspectors from local jurisdictions. One thing that can help turn an unhealthy relationship into something beneficial is to be professional and willing to offer education if an issue arises, Howe said.

"Respond professionally," he said. "If you sense that it's something relatively complex, and perhaps a bigger issue, get as many people involved—including WTCA staff—as you can."

Another important thing is to be sure that members are working together as an entity rather than as competitors. There should be only one agenda, and it should be a win-win outcome for everyone involved.

"I think the association—both locally and nationally—has got to work together to present ourselves with one united voice," said Hughes. "That way, we don't add confusion to an already confused issue, whatever it is. We can't press individual agendas. We've got to press industry agendas."

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and helping to forge a relationship between local CMs and inspectors is quite a bit of work. However, Howe and Hughes both seem to know why they do it.

Having spent most of his career in the industry, Howe said the time has come to give back. "I've made my living over the past 25 years in the truss industry, and I can see the need for returning a little bit to keep the industry whole," he said.

Hughes is motivated by his desire to help CMs in his area. "That's basically it...just trying to make a positive change as far as what's being required of all component manufacturers in this area," he said. **SBC**

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