

Adventures in Advocacy

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Growing More than Just Corn in Iowa

by Sean D. Shields

While this department is regularly devoted to federal issues and the workings of Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, it's important to point out that state lawmaking bodies can have an equal or greater effect on the economic and regulatory environment in which you operate your business. So while you can sometimes get a bigger bang for your buck by establishing relationships with your members of Congress, it's important to not overlook efforts to grow those same lines of communication with your state lawmakers.

The good news is building those relationships can be relatively easy. For one, a lawmaker on the state level represents a significantly fewer number of people. This can translate into less constituents vying for time and attention. Two, the economic development and employment base your company represents in their district takes on a more significant role in establishing your credibility and adds strength to your message. Third, it can be a lot easier to set up a face-to-face meeting with your state lawmaker because he or she doesn't spend a majority of their time working out of state (in Washington, DC).

However, if setting up a personal meeting with your lawmaker still seems daunting or possibly not something you want to do on your own, having your local WTCA chapter invite state lawmakers to one of its meetings is a great alternative.

The Iowa Truss Manufacturers Association (ITMA) has invited state lawmakers to visit its quarterly meeting in March for three years running. In each of those years, members have had at least one representative from both the Iowa Senate and House attend to discuss pending legislation. Not only has ITMA been able to positively advocate change to bills affecting the structural building components industry in Iowa, it has established close relationships with the lawmakers who have attended.

They've also been successful in attracting lawmakers to return multiple years, and have had representation from both Republicans and Democrats. This strengthens their chances for success because they can get support not only in both lawmaking chambers, but from both sides of the aisle. One example of success from ITMA's efforts is a bill introduced last year to create a statewide fire code advisory board to review the code and give recommendations to the legislature.

During ITMA's meeting with lawmakers last year, members asked them to amend that bill to include representation from the structural building components industry. A state Senator in attendance (who happened to be a retired fire service official) agreed to sponsor the amendment and was successful during debate on the bill the following week to

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—Ray Noonan, Cascade Mfg Co

add the amendment to the bill, which eventually passed and was signed into law.

Finally, in February of this year, the fire code advisory committee had their first meeting, and ITMA members Ray Noonan (Cascade Mfg Co) and Rick Parrino (Plum Building Systems), were invited to attend. Commenting on the experience, Ray said, "Representing the structural building components industry, and having an opportunity to review the baseline codes they are considering for adoption, will allow us to provide immediate input in the decision-making process, particularly if they consider adopting any amendments to the code."

During the ITMA meeting this year, members spoke with lawmakers at length about a number of meaty issues. One, which ITMA was in strong support of, was a pending bill requiring claimants intending to sue builders for damages to give notice and provide a period of time for repairs to be made.

Another piece of legislation ITMA was against was a tort reform bill revising construction contract indemnification laws in such a way that if the component manufacturer had conducted repairs on a roof truss and the roof subsequently collapsed at some time in the future, the CM could be brought in as a party to the lawsuit.

They also discussed legislation pertaining to statewide building codes, safety standards and construction wage standards, as well as a bill on eminent domain. At the conclusion of the meeting, the lawmakers in attendance pledged to report back to the chapter on all the legislation discussed—providing an additional line of communication between the lawmakers and ITMA.

Many WTCA chapters are actively looking for speakers and topics for their quarterly meetings. Many chapters are also looking for ways to boost membership and meeting attendance. Devoting a meeting each year to inviting state lawmakers can be a very effective means to accomplishing both objectives. If this sounds like something you would like to see happen through your state chapter, contact your chapter officers or WTCA staff, and we'll be happy to help set it up. **SBC**



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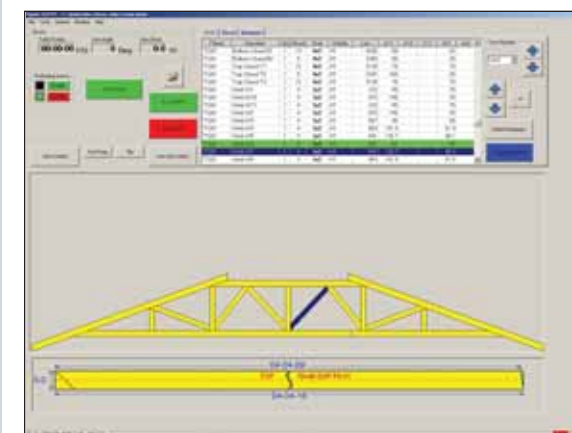
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