

Working for Your Workers

Connecting the Dots: Truss Manufacturer to Family Home

by Sean D. Shields

Making the connection between manufacturing trusses and identifying what holds the roof above our heads may be the best solution to the industry's work force shortage.

n a recent survey of youth conducted by the respected Gallup organization, "teachers," "law enforcement" and "computer technology" were the three most popular responses when asked what field they wanted to work in when they grew up. Shockingly, "truss manufacturer" did not make the top ten. In fact, none of the children surveyed gave this as an answer.

It is easy to look on the surface and explain this by pointing out that almost all youth are surrounded by teachers who act as instructors and mentors, so this is a logical top choice for kids. Youth also see law enforcement in their local community, see them portrayed on television and in movies as protectors, and this also follows as something they would aspire to be. Finally, given the amount of technology that surround the youth of today, it isn't at all surprising that this profession is foremost on their minds.

However, following this logic, "truss fabricator" should also be near the top of their list because almost all of them live in a house or an apartment that relies on the components made by these manufacturers to provide protection and warmth from the elements. The biggest problem is that relatively few of them know about it.

The best long-term solution to begin addressing the work force shortage facing the industry is to draw the connection between the components you manufacture and the homes they live in. The best place to start is by raising awareness of your company and products within your local community. This approach also has intrinsic benefits, such as creating additional opportunities for you to increase local market share, and obtaining assistance for employee training—a key to retaining your work force—which may be available through your local work force and economic development boards.

"We believe firmly that if you give to your community and invest in education, it comes back to you," says Barry Dixon, True House. "We find that by being involved in the community, they become aware of who we are and they come to us both for our products and for employment."

True House has participated in builder trade shows and career expos for four years and with local community organizations for even longer. Through these shows they've raised their exposure not only to a wider group of builders, but also to students who are prospective employees that might otherwise never have heard of them. For their booth, they've built a small model home out of roof truss and wall panels, and they run a short three-minute video in the booth highlighting the products they manufacture.

Currently, True House is creating a dream home to raise money for a local charity, and they're shooting a commercial to highlight the employment opportunities available at their plant.

Builder trade shows and career expos are an extremely effective way to highlight the connection between, as well as the benefits of, structural building components in residential and commercial construction. Rick Parrino, Plum Building Systems, has been exhibiting at shows for six years. He's also been closely involved in the

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at a glance

☐ Most youth are unaware of careers in the

☐ Raising awareness about your company locally can bolster market share and

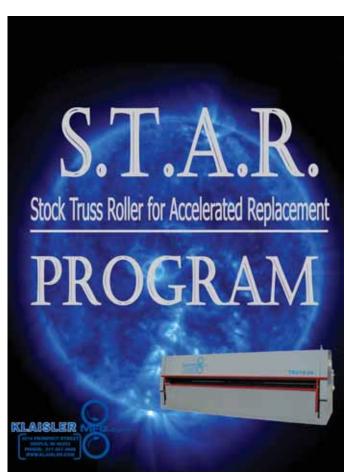
promote employment opportunities.

Consider becoming involved in builder

trade shows and career expos to show-

case products and employment oppor-

truss manufacturing industry.



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educational outreach efforts of his chapter, the Iowa Truss Manufacturers Association (ITMA) in presentations to building and fire service officials.

"This outreach makes a difference. Our company is gaining name recognition, and as our company grows, our employees benefit from both more opportunities for advancement within the plant and additional training opportunities available through local grants," says Parrino.

Within the community, Plum is also active in raising money for local charities and has an ongoing agreement with Habitat for Humanity of Iowa to donate components. That work has earned them recognition locally and helped them get grant money for employee training. Not only does the money go toward production, design and safety education, but it also helps to fund personal growth seminars for Plum's employees.

Another company that has benefited from its relationship with the local community is Shelter Systems Limited. Through the help of their economic development board, they were able to get a Maryland state training grant to provide additional training for their employees. In addition to participating in trade shows to promote their company, they also open their doors and invite members of the community to use their facility for their meetings.

"The Chamber of Commerce holds its meetings in our board room, and other groups do too. We also give a number of plant tours each week, for customers, competitors and students, and let the facility speak for itself. It's a great marketing tool," says Dwight Hikel, Shelter Systems Limited.

By opening their doors to the public and seizing on opportunities to draw them in, Shelter Systems Limited exponentially increases the number of individuals aware of the quality of their products and workplace environment. This, in turn, is leading to additional business opportunities and more individuals seeking out employment with their company.

Shelter has also gone the extra mile in reaching out to its local community college by donating money to set up a scholarship with the company's name on it. It's a significant investment in creating recognition of the industry amongst individuals who will soon be looking for jobs. It also solidifies that connection between "truss manufacturer" and the house they grew up in. The scholarship was established within the last year, so only time will tell how many recipients come to work in the industry. SBC

In the June/July issue, this column will explore how other component manufacturers have successfully built relationships with their local educational institutions and discovered a wealth of potential employees.

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