

# Time Warp:

## What It Takes to Make a New Association

by Emmy Thorson-Hanson

The beginning of WTCA was a time of excitement and determination for everyone involved.

If you've ever had the pleasure of knowing a pack rat, you probably wonder why he or she feels compelled to save everything. When the minutes from the first WTCA meeting were discovered at WTCA headquarters several months ago, they were carefully dusted off while we praised the thoughtful pack rat who had the foresight to file them away. Let's take a stroll down memory lane and explore how the process began for WTCA back at that first meeting in 1983.

The Component Manufacturers Council (CMC) was the first council for component manufacturers, which then became the Component Manufacturers Division (CMD) of the Truss Plate Institute (TPI) in 1975. But given that CMC/CMD and TPI represented different factions of the industry, there were naturally differences in priorities. Many manufacturers felt that they didn't have as much input as they deserved. Chuck Montgomery of Montgomery Truss & Panel—one of the 16 manufacturers who attended the first ever WTCA Board meeting—recalls what partially started the revolution of WTCA. "[TPI] was an organization we had where the [component manufacturer] members and people who ran the business were under the control of the suppliers, which wasn't very good for the industry." So, in May 1983 it was decided that a new council was to be formed, one that was self-sufficient, independent and served the interest of component manufacturers. History was made when the CMD decided to take control of its own destiny by forming the Wood Truss Council of America. (To see the minutes from this landmark meeting, visit [Support Docs](#) at [www.sbcmag.info](http://www.sbcmag.info).)

### at a glance

- ❑ WTCA's first meeting minutes have been uncovered and offer a glimpse back in time to the beginnings of the association.
- ❑ Sid Ketchum of PDJ Components recalls the separation of WTCA and TPI being a big and risky move, but that people were excited for the change.
- ❑ WTCA's membership has stood out since the beginning as people who are doing it for the greater good.
- ❑ Potential members joined WTCA because they observed how it was for the benefit of the whole industry, not just individuals.
- ❑ Today, WTCA and TPI represent a united front, working together for the good of the entire industry.

"We were very excited but also afraid because we didn't know if any others would come with us. We had a lot of fear about whether anyone would leave TPI," remembers Chuck of the landmark decision.

Sid Ketchum of PDJ Components, also at that first meeting, has a similar recollection of what it was like in the beginning. "It was a big move and very risky. We were excited that we made the move but also unsure of what was going to happen in the long run," he recalls.

Despite the uncertainty, the attendees harnessed their excitement for the new organization's potential and the possibilities it presented for component manufacturers to help WTCA start on the right foot. Staton Douthit, WTCA's first president, shared his memory of what it felt like at that first meeting: "I remember almost everyone at the meeting being very determined, excited and willing to help make the association successful."

The founders got right down to business by listing priorities. Chuck remembers who got the initial ball rolling at the meeting. "Tom Pinkham got up and started writing out our goals on the chalkboard. He compiled a list of what we all wanted to do with our new organization." The purpose of the newborn association

### Attendees at the First WTCA Board Meeting:

Staton Douthit  
Ed Clark  
Tom Pinkham  
William Alcorn  
Tom Moore  
Leonard Sylk  
Charles Montgomery  
Dave Chambers  
George "Sid" Ketchum  
Charles Hayden  
Michael Mullins  
Thomas Carbeck  
Paul Heckman  
John Mannix  
Jack Littfin  
Ricks Wilson

was established in four basic objectives:

- Attract members who by their participation in the association will broaden the influence of the component manufacturing industry.
- Provide education, information and services to component manufacturers.
- Support the research, development, testing and promotion of structural wood components to obtain product acceptance.
- Promote the sale and use and increase the market share of structural wood components.

Narrowing down these objectives took some compromising. "Everyone had different areas they wanted to focus on and we realized we couldn't do it all, so we prioritized and came to agreements on what was most important for the industry as a whole," recalls Sid. "It is clear that from the beginning, WTCA had a unique membership of people willing to put the greater good before personal interests."

### Recruiting Members

The only way a new organization can grow is through strength in numbers. With a core of devoted members, it was clear that WTCA was an organization with a just cause and honorable people leading it. Sid attributes the membership growth in part to this. "The early WTCA members were out for the industry, and potential members saw that these guys were looking out for the industry and not themselves," he said.

But new members don't just grow on trees; it took patience

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and a solid strategy. "We all pitched in and called companies we knew and encouraged them to join. We also made personal visits," remembers Staton. He notes that recruiting wasn't always easy: "People would question why it was worthwhile to join, and what WTCA had to offer them for the membership fee. I appointed Bill Alcorn as membership chairman; he served in that role for three years and did a very impressive job."

According to Chuck, at the time most component manufacturers had concerns and an interest in growing the industry, so it wasn't that hard to convince manufacturers to jump on the bandwagon for the greater good. "We asked potential members to help us get this organization going because it

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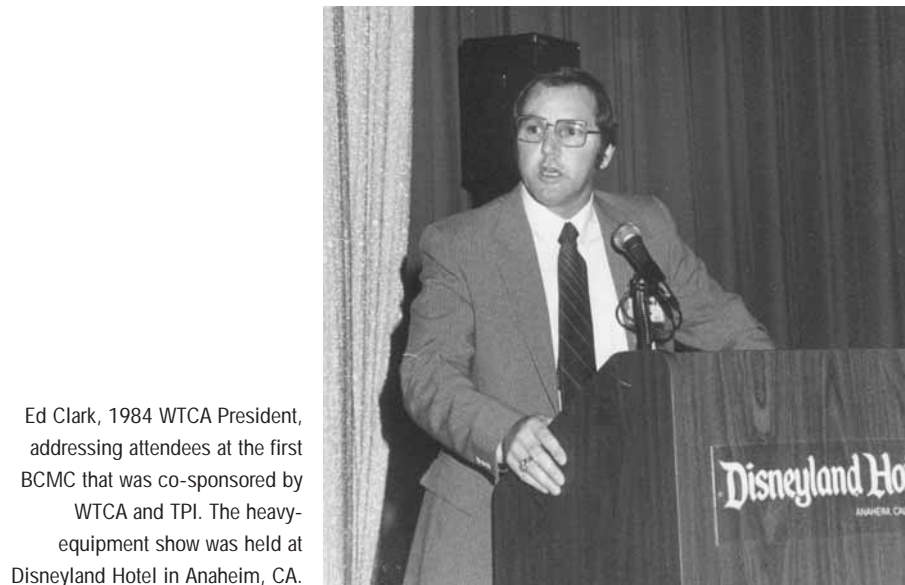
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Ed Clark, 1984 WTCA President, addressing attendees at the first BCMC that was co-sponsored by WTCA and TPI. The heavy-equipment show was held at Disneyland Hotel in Anaheim, CA.

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would benefit of all of us, and improve our position in the industry," he said.

Another means of recruitment (which is still a tool used to this day) that debuted at the meeting is the Top Chord Club. The original idea behind it was for each individual to convince a certain number of new members to join. Chuck believes that everyone reached their goal that first year, which greatly contributed to the growth of the association during that critical time of development.

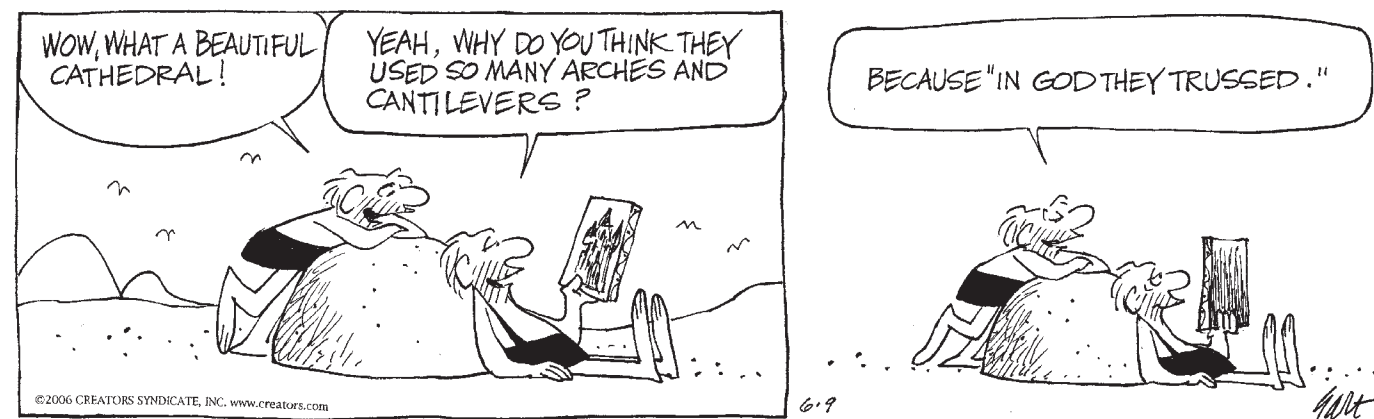
**New Traditions**

The following year, the BCMC show was jointly sponsored by WTCA and TPI—a landmark event for the new association. It was such an important event to be involved in that the member pricing to attend the show became a huge incentive for manufacturers to join WTCA. "BCMC was the annual show that everyone came to, with a big price difference for members versus non-members," recalls Chuck. "That difference made people join just so that they could get the better pricing for the show. And once they became a member they realized how much there was to gain from membership. They realized that we all have the same problems, and could learn a lot from each other. And we did."

WTCA can thank the tireless dedication of its members and their commitment to the industry for propelling its progress to the association it is today. In 1983, when the decision was made to become autonomous, no one fathomed the impact that decision would have on the structural building components industry. "It went way beyond our expectations, and we really didn't know what to expect," says Chuck.

Not to say it was easy. There were many skeptics convinced that the association would fail miserably. Not to be deterred, WTCA plowed ahead, and has since gained acceptance and recognition in the building industry. "We have proven without a doubt that this is a successful association and that we will be the ones to determine our own destiny," comments Sid. Although the split was not amicable in the beginning, WTCA and TPI now enjoy a very effective working relationship. "At first we didn't get along with TPI," says Chuck, "but now we have a great relationship."

What could be better? By taking all the positive and negative issues/emotions of the past and turning this energy into a united front, TPI and WTCA's mission and actions are now dedicated to serving the best interests of the structural building component industry, which is truly the future of framing. **SBC**



**What's In a Name?**

A rose by any other name would smell as sweet...but it's a different story for associations. A name conveys what the association is about and has to be distinctive and clear in meaning to be effective. The original list of names for the fledgling association consisted of nine variations (see below), with all but two including the word "wood" in the title. This is interesting considering the organization's recent name change from "Wood Truss Council of America" to "WTCA - Representing the Structural Building Components Industry." Staton explains why the name didn't include other structural building components: "There were not too many wall panels built at that time and steel trusses were not a big factor, so most people believed 'Wood Truss Council of America' was the proper name for our association."

1. Truss Manufacturers Association
2. **Wood Truss Manufacturers of America\***
3. **Wood Truss Council of America\***
4. Structural Wood Truss and Component Producers of America
5. **Structural Wood Components Association**
6. Structural Wood Component Manufacturers Association
7. **National Association of Wood Truss Manufacturers**
8. American Association of Wood Truss Manufacturers
9. Truss and Component Manufacturers of America

\*The four names with the most votes are in bold. The final vote was between Wood Truss Manufacturers of America (with four votes) and Wood Truss Council of America, which won with six votes.



Left to right: John Herring (1990 WTCA President), Rip Rogers (1989 WTCA President) and Leonard Syk (1987 WTCA President) planning the work of WTCA in the early years.

Most people who read the comic section in the newspaper are familiar with the B.C. comics by Johnny Hart, which have been running since 1958. These cartoons feature dry, tongue-in-cheek humor. This cartoon was recently discovered by Rip Rogers, retired vice president of Trussway, who saw it in the Houston Chronicle. "When I came across this cartoon, I circulated it to everyone at Trussway and titled it 'We've finally made it!'" The fact that the structural building components industry has become well-known enough to be featured in a comic proves that most people have knowledge about building components.



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