

## New Format, Fresh Topics, Successful Annual Workshop

March 21-23 • Sunset Station • Las Vegas, NV

With a new format and design,  
this year's Annual Workshop &  
Conference was better than ever!

by Emmy Thorson-Hanson & Melanie Birkeland

**A**fter going through many different iterations, the WTCA Annual Workshop & Conference has finally found a successful balance between location and format. On March 21-23, 2007, the new and improved event was held at the Sunset Station Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, NV. Once known as "Chapter Summits" and the "Regional Workshop and Conference," it now takes place over three days once a year.

There were four session topics to choose from this year, each with a separate time-slot, along with time set aside for questions and answers and roundtable discussions. Jim Schumacher (Woodinville Lumber, Inc.) liked the format, which was different from past conferences: "The open discussion with group interaction was helpful." Michael Schmidt (MJ Insurance Inc.) agreed: "The conference provided an arena to share ideas and innovative solutions among component manufacturers."

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The first session kicked off on Wednesday afternoon with a respected industry veteran. Don Hershey, WTCA Past President and Director of Alliance TruTrus, LLC, shared his vast knowledge and experience during a session called "Business and Operations Management." Don discussed key business concepts, honing in on benchmarking as one of the cornerstones of managing a truss company. He talked about benchmarking from a holistic approach—from creation to implementation.

Chris Lambert (Southeastern Materials) gained a lot of from this session. "Benchmarking is so important because it lets you know where your company stands on performance-related issues," he said. As the session was winding down, the group worked through some individual and specific benchmarking concerns and discussed how it varies widely from operation to operation. Frank Klinger (Mid-Valley Truss & Door Co.) commented that the session gave him some good ideas to take home and implement at his plant.

"Human Resources and Marketing Management" was the topic for Thursday morning's session, and attendees got the opportunity to learn about incentive compensation from a favorite BCMC speaker, Joe Hikel, Chief Operating Officer of Shelter Systems Limited. One of the focal points of Joe's presentation was how to grow a business in a down market—something that many attendees could relate to. Hikel brought to light issues surrounding cost structure and strategies. He also touched on ways to retain and motivate employees. For the second part of his

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### at a glance

- ❑ The new WTCA Annual Workshop & Conference was held March 21-23, in Las Vegas.
- ❑ The new format included four sessions, covering fresh, new topics, with roundtable discussions and time for questions and answers.
- ❑ One session was entirely devoted to steel truss manufacturing, which was a first for this event.
- ❑ Attendees agreed that the workshop is valuable regardless of where you think you're at with your business.



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"If you think you are doing well in the industry, come to the workshop and you will either reassure yourself or your eyes will be opened. Our industry is in good hands."



"Excellent forum! The steel framing industry needs more like it!"

#### New Format, Fresh Topics...

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presentation, Joe turned to incentive compensation programs. Joe Odgers (Bama Truss & Components, Inc.) couldn't get enough: "Second time to see this presentation and I would sit through it a third." John W. Hickey (Trusco, Inc.) was another fan of the session. "Joe has helped everyone think outside our standard industry models and think about what our customers want," he commented.

Thursday afternoon was all about steel. For the first time at this event, an entire session was devoted to the topic of steel structural building components. And there is no one better to speak on the topic of steel than the enthusiastic Joe Odgers. Along with Joe, the session included an impressive group of panelists within the steel components industry. The panelists included Eddie Blair (Nucon Steel Commercial Corp), Tom Valvo (Aegis Metal Framing), Tim Warran (Stark Steel, a Division of Stark Truss Co.), Dave Dunbar, PE (ITW Building Components Group) and Roy Zeh (Dynatruss). The combination of the formal presentation that Joe put together and the expertise of the panel made this session one of the most interactive at this year's workshop. Joe McGuire (Universal Truss, Inc.) felt that the panel was very informative. Tom Valvo (Aegis Metal Framing, LLC) applauded Joe's comedic side: "Odgers was his normal entertaining self." Bruce Allen (Standard Builders) felt that "the best feature was the strength of the panel."

The dialogue created at this session between attendees, panelists and the speaker opened everyone up to the marketing potential of steel components. Don Allen (Steel Framing Alliance) was excited about the session. "Excellent forum! The steel framing industry needs more like it!" he remarked.

The last session, "Managing the Future of Technology and Marketing," took place on Friday morning. Kirk Grundahl (WTCA Executive Director) was the speaker, and the session followed an open forum format. The group discussion took many different directions as the attendees asked poignant and important technical questions. The group discussed a wide range of issues including: the 2006 codes, building design, branding/marketing, whole house software, the best business economics structure, bracing, testing and the new SBC Research Institute facility. Stuart A. Coles (Sun State Components NV) commented on the value of the session: "Always worthwhile and well presented. Kirk is a good speaker."

In the final part of the session, Kirk addressed the importance of proper bracing and best practices for installing trusses. He showed some jobsite pictures illustrating what can happen if proper bracing practices and techniques are not followed, which spawned much discussion. The attendees in this session—like all the other sessions, were just as important as the speaker. The group interaction was key in making this session a success!

The new format of the event was a huge hit. Jack Dermer (American Truss Systems, Inc.) felt "the topics covered were new and fresh. A lot of new ideas and great info, even if you've been to a lot of these meetings you walked away with new info and a lot of great ideas that you can use." Bruce

Allen issued a challenge to manufacturers who missed the conference: "If you think you are doing well in the industry, come to the workshop and you will either reassure yourself or your eyes will be opened. Our industry is in good hands." **SBC**

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