

All Politics Is Local Politics



The stories of two groups joining forces to address common legislative issues.

Joint Legislative Conference

by Sean D. Shields

What do Shriners, NASCAR race coordinators and Florida component manufacturers have in common? I'm sure there's a punch line there somewhere, but the real answer is: not much. Yet, they all found themselves walking the halls of the Florida State Capitol Building simultaneously one day in March. They all shared a common focus: building closer relationships with their state lawmakers and exercising their voice in the political process.

The Shriners had their distinctive red fez hats. The NASCAR folks had their jumpsuits and torque wrenches, and the component manufacturers...well, they didn't have a distinctive prop to announce themselves to others (nobody wore a hat made of mini roof trusses, just in case you were wondering). They did, however, have their size 13 footprint on their state's economy to get attention, and they weren't alone.

For the first time, component manufacturer members of WTCA joined with members of the Florida Building Materials Association (FBMA) to participate in a Joint Legislative Conference on March 28-29. Together, these two groups met with state lawmakers and talked about how some pressing issues were affecting their combined industries and impacting Florida's residential housing market.

"I said before the conference that I was excited to see what WTCA and FBMA could do when they brought their complementary strengths together in coordinating this conference," said Barry Dixon (True House, Inc.). "They didn't disappoint, this was truly a great experience and a testament to the excellence of these two associations."

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"...this was truly a great experience and a testament to the excellence of these two associations."

—Barry Dixon, 2007 WTCA President

at a glance

- WTCA component manufacturers joined with Florida Building Materials Association (FBMA) to participate in a Joint Legislative Conference.
- The two groups met with state lawmakers to discuss issues affecting their combined industries and impacting Florida's residential housing market.
- WTCA and FBMA staff created talking points for the members to use when meeting with their lawmakers.

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Jay Leahy of ENAP with John Herring.

“Attending legislative sessions like this one is an easy decision when you look at the cost versus benefit. These events help our industry in many ways, a fact that is reiterated constantly through the positive feedback I received from the legislators and fellow manufacturers in attendance.”

—John Herring, WTCA Past President

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The event kicked-off with dinner at the historic Goodwood Plantation. As the name suggests, it was the perfect place to meet with state lawmakers, eat local fried oysters and talk about the important role the variety of building materials and structural components play in the Florida economy. One of the high-profile attendees was House Committee on Energy Chairman, Bob Allen, who is sponsoring a \$50 million ener-

cussed property values and summarized a property tax bill he has introduced in the Florida House of Representatives. Then, Wade Hopping, a former Florida Supreme Court Justice, warned the group about the disadvantages of the public petition process. In particular, he expressed his concern over a petition regarding the “Hometown Democracy” constitutional amendment.

Next, Secretary Holly Benson, head of the Florida Department of Business & Professional Regulation, shared her insights

gy bill this session. Component manufacturers and WTCA staff had the opportunity to discuss the Green Building initiative portion of his bill and provided the Chairman with new insight into how these standards would impact the housing industry.

“Attending legislative sessions like this one is an easy decision when you look at the cost versus benefit. These events help our industry in many ways, a fact that is reiterated constantly through the positive feedback I received from the legislators and fellow manufacturers in attendance,” said John Herring, WTCA Past President. “It gave me a chance to discuss today’s market issues, property tax and insurance reform, and hear where several important leaders believe Florida is headed in the future.”

The following morning, members of FBMA and WTCA heard from a wide range of Florida’s political leaders on a variety of subjects impacting Florida’s communities and future growth. First, Representative Ron Regan dis-

on the challenges facing government agencies. By way of example, she shared how the legislature was considering a bill creating a wind mitigation inspector position. Assuming the law passes, her department then has to go through a six-month public rulemaking process to establish exactly how the new law will be carried out and enforced. That means the inspectors wouldn’t be out in the field until long after this year’s hurricane season is through. She called on those in the room to help educate homebuilders on the wind load requirements under the new building code.

Finally, Steve Seibert, Executive Director of Florida’s Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida, gave a very candid presentation on the recommendations his group has put together as they consider the future growth needs of Florida over the next 25 to 50 years. He asserted that the most basic objective of the commission was to take a non-political, science-based look at Florida’s economy, demographics and infrastructure as well as find a way to balance development versus environment. To learn more about the commission’s recommendations, go to www.centurycommission.org.

“We set out to try this joint conference between our two associations as a test,” said Bill Tucker, FBMA’s Executive Director. “However, by the end of the event it was so obvious we’ll do this again, that we’ve started planning for next year and exploring ways we can grow it.”

After the morning session, component manufacturers and building material dealers met with their lawmakers, and they were well-equipped for the task at hand with a little help from their associations. WTCA and FBMA staff created a series of talking points for attendees to use during their visits. Some of the pertinent issues impacting the industry in 2007 include: affordable property and casualty insurance, property taxes, impact fees, affordable workforce housing, and workmen’s compensation insurance reforms.

Component manufacturers also went armed with a Florida map that indicated where every manufacturing location in Florida is, as well as 2006-2007 data on total industry employment, wages and sales. These maps gave lawmakers

a valuable snapshot of the industry and that size 13 economic footprint mentioned earlier. It also served as a good starting point for each discussion between the manufacturer and the lawmaker as they began the relationship building process.

“We started out talking about the issues, which was important, but we quickly moved on to talking about the changes we’ve both witnessed in our hometown of St. Petersburg,” said Rick Cashman (Florida Forest Products) on his visit with

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Left: Representative Ron Regan discussed property values and summarized a property tax bill he has introduced in the Florida House of Representatives.



Right: Wade Hopping, Executive Director for the Coalition of Coalitions, warned the group about the disadvantages of the public petition process.



Left: Secretary Holly Benson, head of the Florida Department of Business & Professional Regulation, shared her insights on the challenges facing government agencies.



Right: Steve Seibert, Executive Director of Florida’s Century Commission for a Sustainable Florida, gave his group’s recommendations for the future growth needs of Florida over the next 25-50 years.



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"We set out to try this joint conference between our two associations as a test. However, by the end of the event it was so obvious we'll do this again, that we've started planning for next year and exploring ways we can grow it."

**—Bill Tucker,
FBMA Executive Director**

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Rep. Heller. "We found we knew some of the same people and shared some similar hobbies. We ended up talking for forty minutes, so it was a great start to that relationship."

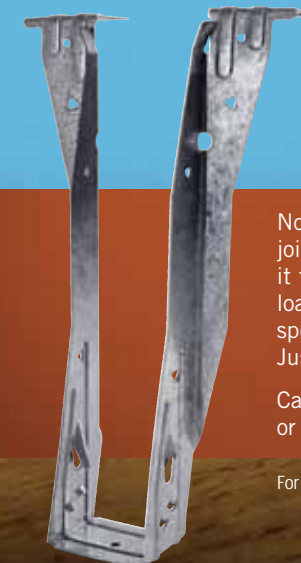
The WTCA/FBMA Joint Legislative Conference in Florida was the first of its kind, and was a huge success. It served as a good test for future state-level legislative conferences and for building additional working partnerships with other state building material dealer associations. If you have interest in doing this in your own state, contact WTCA staff at 608/310-6728. **SBC**

Above Left: (l to r) Sean Shields of WTCA Staff, Rick Cashman of Florida Forest Products and Bob Hoffman of Bouchard Insurance.

Above Right: (l to r) Mark Rose of Manning Building Supplies, Inc., John Smith of PLM Insurance, and Don Magruder of RoMac Lumber.



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Participants in the 2007 SBC Legislative Conference in Washington, DC witnessed the power of plant tours at work:

"During all my previous trips to DC for past legislative conferences, I never met with my Congressman, Rep. Jon Porter (D-NV). However, after we got him out on a plant tour late last year, he made certain he had time to sit down and talk with me face-to-face this year."

—Glenn McClendon, Sun State Components

"This was the second time I met with the same senior legislative aid in Senator Isakson's (R-GA) office. Not only did he remember me, he promised to make an effort to come and visit my plant with the Senator soon."

—Jim Finkenhoefer, Truss Systems

"I gave my lawmakers a presentation on why they need to come and take a tour of our new manufacturing facility; it was well received. I'm looking forward to walking them through our facility and building even stronger relationships with these guys."

—Brian Johnson, Structural Technologies

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