

Get to Know the Hidden Benefits of Member Meetings

by Marisa Hirsch

Participating in Committee or Board meetings means free advice, camaraderie and business opportunities.

Being involved with the WTCA Board and Committees takes time. It takes time, it takes money and it takes effort. No one is likely to deny this—but it would be difficult to find someone involved who says participation isn't worth it.

The structural building components industry is made up of some intensely competitive people, and the rivalry can run deep in regions. Yet, these strong personalities find a way to work together within WTCA's Board. In fact, it goes beyond just working together. Friendships are formed, advice is shared and business opportunities even crop up.

Don Groom, vice president of operations at Stark Truss Company, Inc. in Canton, OH, has always believed that being part of the Board and attending Open Quarterly Meetings benefits the industry as a whole. But, there are other benefits that come with active participation that people might not be aware of.

"For us, it's been a tremendous avenue for connecting with other manufacturers across the country—being able to talk and having business interests that can be beneficial for both companies," said Groom, who is also a WTCA past president. "Numerous opportunities have come up just through being involved [in the Board]."

Becoming active on the WTCA Board and attending meetings means joining a community of like-minded people who are willing to share thoughts and advice about the industry. Instead of withholding information about their operations, they often share it to help one another.

Scott Arquilla, vice president of Best Homes, Inc. in Hazel Crest, IL, turns to people he knows from the board any time he's thinking about buying new equipment. He said that in the eight years he was on the Board (Arquilla is also a WTCA past president), he developed relationships with the best of the best—and those are the people he wants to get advice from.

"At the same time you contact a supplier, you talk to people about why they bought what they bought and not something else," Arquilla said. "You always get the inside scoop on this stuff from being on the Board."

Urging Involvement

Groom acknowledged that it can be intimidating when a person is first beginning to actively participate in meetings. There's a lot going on with so many different projects, as well as numerous ideas and concerns being discussed. Groom said that at the first meeting he attended, he only understood about half of what was being talked about. But understanding comes with time and involvement, and people are willing to make clarifications if asked.

"Some guys come and then they don't come back because they didn't think there was any value," said Groom. "Well, value comes from getting involved in committees and boards, meeting people and networking. There are tremendous business opportunities for companies that do that."

Although he may not have understood everything that happened in the first meet-

ing he attended, Groom still realized there was great value in getting involved.

"If I didn't know anything about it, and it was being talked about and voted and passed, then I needed to know about it," he said. "So I made a point to make sure I knew what was going on."

Rick Parrino, vice president and general manager of Plum Building Systems, Inc. in West Des Moines, IA, also found himself eager to be involved once he learned how much was going on at Board meetings.

"Once you get in there and you hear about the projects, it's hard not to get involved and want to participate," he said.

In Parrino's case, active participation began with his local chapter, the Iowa Truss Manufacturers Association. He was encouraged by other members there to become more involved at the national level, which is how he became a WTCA Board member. Now, after several years of serving on the board, he knows he would miss it if he gave up his seat. Being involved is how he keeps up with what's new in the industry.

"You learn at every meeting you go to, whether it's about design or changes in codes," said Parrino. "You can't help but learn when you're there. It's really difficult to run an operation day-in and day-out...and keep up with all that stuff. If I wasn't participating in the WTCA [Board], I could never keep up."

Steven Spradlin, president of Capital Structures in Fort Smith, AR, also got involved in the Board due to urging from a fellow component manufacturer who was involved. Spradlin decided to attend an Open Quarterly Meeting and, similar to others, quickly recognized the value.

"I saw what it was all about and felt like it helped me to learn more about the industry," he said. "And to understand what's going on in more than just my immediate area of the industry—because I do operate beyond my little circle."

Prosperous Perks

There are many ways that these connections initially made through the Board extend far beyond meeting days and the issues at hand. One way that may be surprising is that, at times, some companies have worked together to fill customer orders. For example, Groom said he has called on Board members in the past to help Stark fill orders. "The first call I'll make is to a fellow Board member I know in that region who may be able to help us with the job," he said.

Groom also said Stark has collaborated with other member companies in the past for jobs requiring both wood and steel components. Because Stark does manufacture steel roofs and walls, and some companies don't, there have been times when Stark has provided steel components while another company provides the wood components.

"[The Board] provides such value for business connections," Groom said. "We may be able to do this; [other companies] can do something different.... We talk and say 'We can meet this customer's needs together.' We make a plan that works for everybody. The customer is taken care of and both companies benefit from that relationship."

Stark is not alone in finding business opportunities like this; several companies have collaborated with one another in the past to meet orders in an efficient way that is beneficial to their customers. Capital Structures is one of those companies, with the costs of shipping and freight factoring into their decision to do so at times.

Spradlin said that when Capital has done jobs like this, it's been with companies he's familiar with through the Board. This is because he has established relationships with people at those companies, trusts them and has some firsthand knowledge of their operations. "That's how you get to know people—through the Board, BCMC and the association," Spradlin said.

Prior relationships can help business collaborations run more smoothly and, in Groom's case, possibly eliminate some worry. "Without those relationships and those connections, I would have had to find somebody I didn't know [to work with on jobs]," said Groom. "Once you get to know people, you learn to trust them. You believe in their work because you've spent time with them. It makes it a lot easier to have a good relationship."

Arquilla said he has never gotten a bad recommendation when asking for advice from current or past Board members. He feels comfortable asking for advice about almost anything—and confident that he'll receive an open and honest response.

"I got involved with the Board because that's where all the smart people were," Arquilla said. "I have an awful lot of lasting friendships. Anybody that I've met would be happy to give any one of us an answer [to business questions]."

Open Discussions

There is, of course, always a limit to what can be shared. For example, following U.S. antitrust law, members don't discuss prices and other matters that may restrain trade. However, this doesn't prevent them from discussing what sort of methods they use for cost accounting and operations management—another example of how Board participation benefits members (and their companies) on many levels.

Parrino said he learned a lot about how to implement benchmarking and cost accounting systems from other WTCA Board members, thanks to the open manner of communication fostered by participation. Because members often aren't direct competitors (unlike at local chapter meetings), they can be more candid about how they operate.

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at a glance

- Being involved with the WTCA Board benefits individual companies just as much as the collective industry.
- Board members say participation helps them keep up with the latest trends and news in the industry.
- Several companies have collaborated with one another to meet orders in an efficient way that makes customers happy.
- In times of need, Board members say the first people they call for help are friends they've met at meetings.

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"We talk about how do you do it (benchmarking), what do you use and measure," Parrino said. "You just don't get that in a lot of places...where you can talk like that."

Board and committee members also discuss the systems they use and, at times, invite each other into their plants to see how they're doing things. Parrino remembers being invited into a fellow Board member's plant right after it had opened to see and discuss the systems being used within. He also talked about how he's learned a lot from fellow CMs who have been sued and are willing to talk about it—so that it hopefully doesn't happen to any of the rest of them.

"It's just the camaraderie," Parrino said. "You get to be good friends with people. You're not going to get that stuff...without going out and getting to know people, becoming friends, sharing business techniques, stuff that works and doesn't work."

Listen, Learn, Advise

Groom spoke of how he doesn't spend money on seminars or classes; he prefers to sit down with people he knows through the Board who have years of experience and just listen to them talk.

"At every Board meeting, there are hundreds of years of experience in the truss industry together from the people attend-

ing," he said. "When you leave there, you're going to learn a lot more than from some motivational speaker who doesn't know anything about the business. I just can't say enough about what I feel like [participating on the WTCA Board] has done for Stark, for me and my personal growth, career knowledge and business connections."

Groom got involved in the Board because, as he sat in the back row of his first meeting and listened, he realized Stark really needed to have a voice in the decisions being made. So, he decided to pick a couple WTCA projects he was passionate and knowledgeable about and focus on those. He didn't try to go to every committee meeting.

"I tell people not to try to do that," said Groom. "Pick a couple you have passion for, that you have input on, and feel like you can put something on the table."

Groom said it's important to get involved in the Board because WTCA is representing the entire structural building components industry. The Board is discussing topics that could have a major and daily impact on individual CMs.

"I wanted to make sure Stark had a voice in what the discussions were, where it was headed, what kinds of things we worked on and what were the top things that needed to be discussed that would directly affect Stark," he said. "It's a

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The WTCA Board in Brief

The WTCA Board of Directors is made up of the association Officers and elected representatives. The Board meets four times a year—

these are WTCA's Open Quarterly Meetings. The WTCA Committees meet in conjunction with the winter and summer Board meetings. **Every WTCA member, board member or not, is encouraged to attend.** Below is a brief explanation of who makes up the Board.

Officers

When agreeing to serve as an Officer, each individual commits to a four-year term. The first year, that individual's nomination is ratified by the membership to begin the path to WTCA President. The job begins with Secretary, continues with President-Elect/Treasurer the following year, culminates as President the third year, and concludes with Past President the fourth year.

- The **President** is the principal executive officer and is in charge of all business and affairs. He or she presides at all meetings and works closely with staff on WTCA policy, goals and objectives.
- The **President-Elect/Treasurer** assists the President in his duties and performs them if the President is absent. He or she is also the principal accounting and financial officer.
- The **Secretary** is responsible for seeing that the minutes of the meetings are recorded and that all notices are properly given.
- The immediate **Past President** uses his experience to offer counsel to the Board. He is also chair of the Nominating Committee, which oversees the election of all Board members.

Executive Committee

The Executive Committee was created to aid the Officers in making decisions regarding the daily operations of the association. Up to four component manufacturer member representatives are elected to serve with the Officers; together the two groups compose the Executive Committee (of up to eight members). The committee

meets monthly via teleconference and may be convened whenever necessary to discuss pressing matters.

Representatives

All types of representatives are charged with bringing ideas, opportunities and issues to meetings. They also assist in formulating or changing existing WTCA policy. Representatives are expected to work with and support WTCA staff in implementing Board-approved policy, as well as in achieving goals and objectives. Representatives must be the eyes and ears of WTCA in their local markets, and work together to develop a united voice in the market that strengthens the structural building components industry.

Chapter Representatives

Each WTCA Chapter is entitled to one seat on the Board. The chapters nominate the individuals, who are then ratified by the general membership. These representatives are charged with representing the chapter and the local market at meetings, and taking information back to their chapters to share with those who could not attend. Chapter Representatives keep the lines of communication open with the grassroots membership.

At-Large Representatives

In addition to serving as Chapter Representatives, component manufacturer members are eligible for election as At-Large Representatives. These individuals are nominated (or volunteer) for Board service to take an active role in directing the association and have knowledge and experience that will benefit the association. Often these individuals also represent areas where a local chapter has not been formed.

Associate Representatives

Finally, the Board includes up to five seats for industry suppliers. The Associate Representatives are nominated to speak on behalf of key industry supplier areas. Care is taken to ensure that these seats rotate between supplier companies so that no single company holds a seat longer than three years. **SBC**

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mistake to not be at as many meetings as you can be at. It's a tremendous thing for a company to be involved."

Parrino also acknowledged the need to be present at meetings in order to be informed. "If I wasn't participating, I wouldn't know there are some big changes we need to learn about," he said.

Arquilla said being involved means access to friends and solutions. "To people who have never been on the Board or a committee: you'll make a whole new series of friends," he said. "Even though they may be competitors, you'll have new people who you can bounce ideas off of. You'll always find

somebody on the Board who's had the same problem that you've had, and hopefully came up with a solution."

WTCA meetings are a place to network, hash out issues or problems, brainstorm and stay up on the latest news and technology.

"Coming to the quarterly Board meetings...you get to know all the people," said Groom. "You develop interests, you develop trust, and you're able to work out many business opportunities on both sides. The first people you call for help are those you've met at Board meetings." **SBC**

For more information about WTCA's Board and Committees, view the Board of Directors' Handbook at www.sbcindustry.com/bdhandbook.

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6300 Enterprise Lane • Suite 200 • Madison, WI 53719
608/310-6706 phone • 608/271-7006 fax
www.sbcmag.info • admgr@sbcmag.info