

# Fond Farewells

The SBC industry bids a fond farewell to two of its most enthusiastic and involved leaders.

**A**fter a career spanning three decades, Thomas J. Manenti will retire from our industry later this month.

Manenti began his career in the industry in 1977 as a sales representative at Gang-Nail Systems, an equipment and truss plate supplier based in Miami. After working his way through the positions of Midwest District Sales Manager, Sales Manager, and then VP of Marketing & Sales, he was promoted to president of the company in 1989. Gang-Nail was then acquired by MiTek Industries in 1991.

Jack Palacio, formerly of Gang-Nail, reflected on the time he and Manenti worked together. "It has been a real pleasure to work with you for so many years at Gang-Nail. I have very fond memories of our traveling together during the old days," he wrote.

After seeing Gang-Nail through the MiTek merger, Manenti became Division Vice President, then Senior Vice President of Marketing & Sales. He was named president of MiTek in April 2005.

One of the lasting impacts of Manenti's career was the customer relationships he forged during his various sales positions at Gang-Nail and MiTek. More than anything, he embodied the fact that success as a businessman could be achieved by acting with integrity. Integrity, it seems, is the quality Manenti is best known for. "It has been an absolute pleasure working with you over the years. You demonstrated integrity and honesty in all of our dealings. The component industry will miss your leadership and presence," said long-time customer David Motter of Tri-County Truss, Inc.

Manenti's quiet authority caught the attention of many, and influenced those he was close to. "Far beyond your vast knowledge, the manner that you've always carried yourself provided me with a goal to pattern myself. From helping to redefine the traditional and often adversarial vendor-customer relationship into a true partnership to observing your 'grace under fire,' you've been a great role model," noted David Horne of Universal Forest Products-Eastern Division, Inc.

Friends of Manenti's acknowledged the model of professionalism he set within MiTek, which ultimately transcended the entire industry. Dan Holland of Clearspan Components, Inc. said he could always count on Manenti to be "real" and noted that was one of the things he greatly appreciated in him. "Thank you for being such an example of professional behavior for all of us in the industry. I have benefitted greatly from observing your demeanor and poise when faced with adversity which would have brought a negative and emotional response from most other people," said Holland.

Manenti's involvement in the industry did not stop at servicing Gang-Nail and MiTek customers. For many years, he advocated for the interests of all component manufacturers through leadership in industry associations TPI and WTCA. He served several terms as TPI President, working to align its priorities for the good of the industry.

For WTCA, Manenti acted as chair of the BCMC Committee several times (1992 and 2004), served on WTCA's Board of Directors and participated in the WTCA Marketing and Legislative Committees. Some will never forget the priority he put on common good. "Many of our industry's and associations' accomplishments (WTCA and TPI) would not have been possible without leadership that was focused on what would benefit the industry. Fortunately for us, you always placed the industry first [in your association dealings]," wrote Robert Ward of Southern Components, Inc.

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## Manenti Leaves a Lifetime's Impact in 30-Year Career

by Libby Maurer



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Lee Vulgaris, WTCA past president and BCMC co-chair with Tom in 1991, echoed Ward's sentiment. "To anyone who bought from Tom, served with Tom, or was a friend of Tom's, it quickly became obvious that he had remarkable integrity and humility. From a WTCA perspective, Tom was highly instrumental in its success and advancement. He co-chaired the BCMC through its difficult years with an unwavering vision that a strong WTCA would be the linchpin of the truss and component industry. Well done, Tom," he wrote.

A nod to his participation and influence in these associations, Manenti twice received TPI's Outstanding Leadership award (1997 and 2001) and was inducted into the WTCA Hall of Fame in 2000. Kirk Grundahl, WTCA Executive Director, credits Manenti for the teamwork relationship that the associations benefit from today. "Tom was intimately involved with the evolution of WTCA's relationship with TPI—sometimes in the foreground and sometimes in the background—but always available to help when needed," he said. Grundahl also expressed gratitude for Manenti's direct involvement and solid counsel in the tough times for WTCA: changes in BCMC, *WOODWORDS* and the management of the organization.

In 2006, Manenti received the Dick Bowman Industry Enthusiast Award at BCMC in Houston. The award is given each year to a WTCA supplier member who has supported the show and the industry with enthusiasm and integrity. People who have worked with him throughout his 30-year career in the industry agree this describes Manenti's true character. "Over a period of years, [Tom] has consistently shown support of BCMC and the industry, and he has done it selflessly and with integrity," WTCA Past President Rip Rogers said of Manenti, whom he then introduced as the award recipient.

In a letter to MiTek customers in May 2007, it was with both contemplation and enthusiasm that Manenti announced he would be soon retiring from the industry. "I have been involved with The Fellowship of Christian Athletes for many years, serving in several capacities from coaching baseball to fund raising to event planning. FCA, along with the role I play in serving in my local church, has been the focal point of my life outside of my devotion to my family and my dedication to MiTek," he explained. "It became clear to me that my passion was in the area of teaching and encouraging others. The opportunity was presented to me to work in a greater capacity with FCA, one that would not allow me to 'serve two masters.'"

Manenti closed his letter with the reassurance that is characteristic of the man of unwavering leadership and foresight that touched so many in the industry: "These are challenging times, but the recovery will arrive in due time and everyone will be stronger as a result." Anticipating talk that his retirement and the slowed housing market are not merely coincidental, he clarified that the economy was not the reason for

his decision. "It's merely time for me to be where God wants me to be and for as long as He wants me to be there," he wrote. He noted that his last official day at MiTek would be January 31, and that going forward he'll be available on a consulting basis. Although his retirement comes during a difficult time for the industry, Manenti said, "I am thrilled that MiTek is in such terrific shape with so many wonderful people to fill the roles necessary to maintain our leadership position."

Many associates encouraged Manenti to follow his heart and fulfill a life-long passion. "I have greatly admired your ability to prove that there are still men of faith out there that live by example and not by words alone. I pray that you and your family will continue to be blessed in all that you put your hands to," said Scott Ward of Southern Components, Inc., a friend of Manenti's.

Steve Cabler of MiTek called his co-worker's contributions to both MiTek and the industry "legendary." He stated, "[Manenti's] leadership style is one of encouragement and empowerment built upon a foundation of personal integrity. Working with Tom (he never made it feel like you were working *for* him) for 20 years has been a tremendous learning experience, honor and blessing. He has always had an innate feel for what is best for our business by looking at things through the eyes of our customers and doing what is in their best interests."

"Much can be said of your efforts on behalf of our industry. But I'm not surprised that many [people] have expressed testimony of how you have helped them realize the need to understand God's love and purpose in their lives. You have enriched my life beyond what you can possibly imagine, as a mentor, brother and counselor," wrote Tim Rouch of Gang-Nail Truss Company of Visalia.

Grundahl was among those to reflect on the spiritual journey that brought them together. "The first time I met Tom was in 1989 at the BCMC Fellowship Breakfast in Jacksonville. This began a journey where our paths would cross often," he said. Grundahl said Manenti brought light to the industry in that he was very comfortable in his own skin, which made everyone around him feel comfortable. "His personal gifts have made a deep difference in our industry. For that we should all be very appreciative," Grundahl remarked.

As CEO of MiTek, Gene Toombs wished Manenti all the best on his journey. "Tom and I have worked together for 18 years; I will truly miss his leadership and market savvy, but mostly his friendship. His contributions to the success of MiTek are too many to list. He has mentored a number of our executives that are following in his footsteps, so he leaves us in terrific shape. I am also delighted that he will remain as a consultant to us in the future. To Tom and his wonderful wife Kathy, enjoy every minute of your well-deserved retirement."

On behalf of the entire structural building components industry, SBC Magazine thanks Tom for his many years leadership and energy. Good luck in this new phase of life, Tom! **SBC**

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