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Editor's Message

Keep After 'Em

by Bob Becht

When was the last time you invited an elected official into your component plant? I'll never forget the last time a legislator came to Chambers Truss, because, well...it was quite a month!

An example of why you should get to know an elected official.

Back in September 2006, six-term Republican Representative Mark Foley came to our plant to take a tour and meet our staff. At the time, Foley represented Florida's 16th Congressional District and was outspoken on immigration and child protection issues. One of our employees told Foley his wife was about to be deported to Haiti. Foley promised to help prevent her deportation (and followed through). He talked to most of our employees. The two-hour visit went great, and I felt like we had done the right thing by reaching out to him.

A common misperception is that you have to understand everything going on in the world in order to engage an elected official. Wrong.

About two weeks later, news broke that Foley had been having inappropriate communication with a young page on Capitol Hill. We were all shocked, alarmed, disappointed. But I had to laugh—the one government official we invited in resigned from the House that same month.

Even though our experience with Foley didn't turn into a long-standing relationship where we communicate on issues that affect the business, it reminds me how he became familiar with Chambers in the first place. Through repeated visits to Foley's DC office, I developed a relationship with his top aide. Granted, I never met Foley himself until he came to our plant. But in the end, getting to know his staffer paid off because it got Foley to our plant. This is why I keep coming to the Legislative Conference each year. You never know when those relationships will come in handy, as our employee and his wife discovered.

A common misperception is that you have to understand everything going on in the world in order to engage an elected official. Wrong. In fact, you don't have to know anything about government, politics or even current events to talk intelligently with one of these people. They want to know what your company does or makes. They want to know how the people you employ and the product you make impact the local economy. They want to know about the issues—like immigration or health care—that concern you as a business owner. They want to know because it's their job. And if they're doing their job right, they care about you and your business.

And you don't have to go to the Legislative Conference to get in touch with a legislator from your district. (It's really fun though.) It helps to have an issue to talk through with them. Once you make that critical connection with them, invite them out to discuss the issue further. If you're like me, a truss plant is a truss plant. But for people like Foley, they love to get out into the community and see what goes on at local businesses. It's good exposure for them, and it helps to

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correction:

We regret that Tom Zraggen's name was inadvertently left out of the project committee list in the May 2008 article, "New & Improved: ANSI/TPI 1-2007." We apologize to Mr. Zraggen for this oversight.

at a glance

- ❑ Florida Representative Mark Foley visited Chambers Truss for a plant tour in 2006.
- ❑ Bob Becht got to know Foley's top aide after attending several WTCA Legislative Conferences.
- ❑ Foley's visit was very helpful for one of Chambers' employees whose wife was facing deportation.

Editor's Message

Continued from page 7

make them more informed about the issues that hit close to home. The best way for them (or anyone else for that matter) to learn about the industry is by seeing it first hand. So contact their office and extend an invitation.

I think we can all take away from my experience the concept of reaching out to these folks. The most important thing is to keep visiting or calling their offices and talking to them about our industry. I hope your next experience with a government rep becomes a long-lasting beneficial relationship...unlike the very unfortunate experience that I had! **SBC**

SBC Magazine encourages the participation of its readers in developing content for future issues. Do you have an article idea for a future issue or a topic that you would like to see covered? Email your thoughts and ideas to editor@sbcmag.info.



2008 Legislative Conference Recap

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- Page 46** • Senator Grassley's Perspective Exclusively for the SBC Industry
- Page 48** • Agency Meetings: U.S. Trade Representative U.S. Department of Labor U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development
- Page 50** • Capitol Hill Calls
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STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS™

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The mission of *Structural Building Components Magazine (SBC)* is to increase the knowledge of and to promote the common interests of those engaged in manufacturing and distributing structural building components. Further, *SBC* strives to ensure growth, continuity and increased professionalism in our industry, and to be the information conduit by staying abreast of leading-edge issues. *SBC's* editorial focus is geared toward the entire structural building component industry, which includes the membership of WTCA – Representing the Structural Building Components Industry. The opinions expressed in *SBC* are those of the authors and those quoted, and are not necessarily the opinions of Truss Publications or WTCA.

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