

Business Connection Made Through SBCA Spurs Grand Canyon Hike

by Libby Maurer

“When you see it in person, there’s so much more depth to it than you can ever imagine from seeing pictures.”

—Jess Lohse

group 6



“Group 6” is one of seven Business Solutions Groups that meet monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly via SBC Connection. Component manufacturers who are interested in joining a group fill out a short questionnaire to get started. Groups are organized by interest areas and geographic location to make sure there are no competitors. Each group decides when and how often they will meet, what topics they want to discuss, etc. Meetings can touch on a wide range of issues, such as raw material costs and buying practices, economic conditions and expectations for market growth, health care and benefits, production and sales training, typical design take-offs, business management best practices and building codes to name a few.

Interested in joining? Contact Anna (astamm@qualtim.com or 608/310-6719) or visit sbcindustry.com/bsg.

When Gary Weaver, Dave Mitchell and Jess Lohse were on their Business Solutions Group (BSG) teleconference in January, they thought they’d be talking about usual topics like tracking leads and expectations for market growth. By the end of the call, they were talking about hiking the Grand Canyon—together.

Gary (Timber Tech Texas, Inc.), an avid Grand Canyon hiker, had arranged a similar hike after BCMC 2009. Incidentally, Gary and his fellow BSG members first met in person during that show in Phoenix, too. “We’d talked twice by phone, and we wanted to put a name with a voice,” he said. He refers to them as Group 6 because they were the sixth SBCA group to form. “We met at the SBCA booth, and Gary invited us to join his hiking group the next day. I couldn’t go because I had a plane to catch,” said Dave (Engineered Building Design, L.C.). Jess didn’t go either. “But I’ve been kicking myself ever since,” he said. Gary promised them that the next time an SBCA meeting was scheduled in Phoenix, he’d organize another hike.



Jess Lohse, Dave Mitchell and Gary Weaver stop to take in the view at Skeleton Point on their way down South Kaibab Trail.

A year-and-a-half later, near the end of the group’s January phone meeting, Jess asked if anyone was attending the OQM in Phoenix. It just so happened Gary was not only attending the meeting, but also in the process of organizing another hike! Dave and Jess were both very interested in joining him. “I immediately thought it would be a great chance to get to know each other better,” said Jess (Rocky Mountain Truss Co.). Unfortunately, two other members of Group 6, Mike Ruede (A-1 Roof Trusses) and Craig Anderson (Trussworthy Components, Inc.), weren’t able to join them. When Gary extended the invite to the rest of the SBCA membership, Carl Schoening (Eagle Metal Products) decided to come along as well.

They began on South Kaibab Trail on the south ridge of the Canyon at 5:30 a.m. on Monday morning, February 21. The temperature was about 10 degrees; it was a rare, windless day. They used head lamps to see the snow-covered trail until dawn broke near 7:00 a.m. Dave remembers they were the first group on the trail that morning, and within three miles the snow began

to melt. Throughout the day, the hikers encountered snow, ice and mud on the trail as the temperature warmed to about 55 degrees toward the bottom of the Canyon and then back down into the 20s at the top. Once they reached the bottom of the Canyon, they took a lunch break and followed Continued on page 14

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Carl nearing the bottom. The hikers experienced a 40° temperature difference from the top to the bottom of the Canyon.

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Bright Angel Trail back up to the top. "It was very strange to start in the snow, go down to where there's no snow and then back up to snow," said Dave. He and Jess emerged at around 4:30 p.m., then Carl at 5:30 p.m. and finally Gary at 7:00 p.m. after hiking a total of 16 miles.

Just how boundless is 16 miles at a 20-degree slope? Imagine stacking the stairs of five World Trade Center towers together, and then climbing them down and up again in the same day. "When you see it in person, there's so much more depth to it than you can ever imagine from seeing pictures," Jess said. Although he, Dave and Carl had never done a challenging hike before, Gary was blown away by their strength.

Although they operate in three very different markets, these BSG Group 6 members are committed to maintaining the relationships they've developed through SBCA. In

fact, coming from three different states is an advantage according to Jess. "The competitive tension that can sometimes be present at chapter meetings is gone. We can talk more specifically about business issues without being guarded." One of the topics he's found most useful is comparing material buying practices.

Gary pointed out that while some of what they discuss may seem like small issues, they make a big difference in an operation. "One of our recent topics was how many different connector plate sizes to stock. Seems small, but it really helped me out."

Commiserating about how to handle the challenges of a down market is another big bonus of participating. "We've all had to make cutbacks and tough management decisions; there's comfort in knowing that others are doing the same things," Gary said.

Jess said he learned early on in his life that shared adversity creates a bond, which is how he describes the camaraderie he feels with members of BSG Group 6.

Although the beauty of their surroundings and physical challenge of the hike took most of their attention, they discussed a bit of business here and there. "I was pretty overwhelmed by the view and scenery. It was hard to focus on business," said Jess.

Gary said he's been in the industry long enough to know that simply getting to know other business owners helps him. "Some people bond on the golf course—I've seen that at the TMAT [Texas Chapter] meetings. Others bond over a meal. In this case, preparing for the hike and going on this adventure together bonded us."

Their experience shows that the work of furthering the industry or improving your business doesn't always happen inside a meeting room. Sometimes the most important work is done on the trail. **SBC**



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