

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE (FORMERLY WOODWORDS)

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Knowledge is Power



"Truss Technician Training Exceeds Expectations" by Kirk Grundahl

As many of you have come to find out, having a shortage of truss technicians can be a painful and expensive proposition. WTCA developed the Truss Technician Training (TTT) program just for this reason. It is our desire to help you create and develop employee depth and skill in this critical business area of our industry.

The response to this program has exceeded our expectations. Currently, many companies in our industry are using the WTCA Certification Exam to evaluate a potential employee's skill level prior to employment. The exam provides managers with a gauge to measure the potential for success, and allows an evaluation of weaknesses so training can be more focused.

In 1999, WTCA will increase the impact of this program with the development of our industry's technical personnel. The WTCA Board has committed to investing in this program through the use of a subsidy for members to send individuals to our courses. At a minimum, the subsidy contributed by WTCA is \$160 per person. In 1998, WTCA invested more than \$56,000 in this program, and we have made the commitment to continue the subsidy in 1999.

DEVELOPING NEW TRUSS TECHNICIANS

There are two ways to obtain the number of truss technicians you need 1) you can hire them from a competitor, or 2) you can grow your own. For the latter, we have drafted letters for each truss manufacturer to use to send to their local high schools, community colleges or universities. In each letter, we define the demand that our industry has for these workers and the types of coursework that would help each succeed on the job. Each of these letters can be found on our web site at www.woodtruss.com. WTCA hopes that more truss manufacturers take the time to invest in their local communities and grow their own truss technicians.

USING TTT FOR NEW EMPLOYEE HIRING

We have many members who have been providing guidance for our program and who have successfully made the commitment to grow their own employees. The hiring approach these members suggest is to take an active role in developing relationships with local high schools, and community or technical college instructors. The teachers know their students quite well, and if

they get to know you, they will help select students who have had exposure to math, computer operations, CAD training, blueprint reading, that can help your business. The relationships that are developed with these schools will ensure that a supply of local talent is available to the truss manufacturer in time of need. Most community and technical colleges have solid construction-related courses that provide a potential employee with the needed baseline skills for our industry.

Once a new employee is found, it is recommended that they are provided with about three-to-six months of on-the-job training to gain a solid familiarity with the truss industry. At the end of that period he/she should take the WTCA Certification Exam to assess skill level, and then take the appropriate WTCA Truss Technician Training program for the desired industry competency level.

DOES IT WORK?

We have used this technique of school relationships in our own business. We had a need for a part-time job to take care of some of the details of our business that our full-time people could never get to. Through a relationship, we contacted a local high school. The teacher of the business education program was excited by our call and just happened to have two students that had the appropriate skills. Within a week we had a great young man working for us who has proven to be very valuable in our business. We will continue to use this resource in years to come. It works!

WTCA'S TRUSS TECHNICIAN TRAINING STATISTICS

- Number of Certification Exams Scored by WTCA: 501
- Number of Level I Certified by Exam: 249
- Number of Level I Class Participants: 166
- Number of Level I Certified by Taking the Course: 137
- Total Industry Level I Certified: 386
- Number of Level II Certified by Exam: 36
- Number of Level II Class Participants: 61
- Number of Level II Certified by Taking the Course: 48
- Total Industry Level II Certified: 84

TRUSS TECHNICIAN WAGES

Recently, I had a conversation about the wages for truss technicians in our industry. It was clear, based on this discussion, that there was a good deal of confusion on this subject. Fortunately, our wage and benefit survey does an excellent job of defining what is typical for wages for all truss technicians. Below, you will see what our survey found the pay ranges are nationally. These numbers represent the 25 percentile and the 75 percentile. The average pay for all employees in a classification would be the 50 percentile:

- Beginning Truss Technician \$17,100 to \$26,811
- Level I Certified \$20,373 to \$31,200

- Level II Certified \$22,804 to \$36,400
- Senior Truss Tech \$26,472 to \$39,998
- Engineer \$31,824 to \$54,080

These amounts are base salary amounts and are premised on a standard 40-hour week. The total compensation an individual can make for the year is typically more than this based on overtime, productivity incentives and bonuses. It is important to distinguish between the base salary and overtime and performance bonuses so that one is comparing apples to apples when making salary comparisons or when determining appropriate compensation.

We have seen promotions that state wages for truss technicians are in the range of \$35,000 to \$65,000. This may be true, but typically, it is for total potential compensation, not just the yearly base salary. We hope this helps you sort through the market- place information on this topic.

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