

September/October 2001

President's Message



MARY PAT KELLER

"Hello—Goodbye" by Mary Pat Keller, 2001 WTCA President

As I sit here wondering what I will write to close out my year as President of WTCA, so many thoughts come to mind. Most of them are centered on the challenges that we as an industry have been facing. This is, to be sure, an exciting time in the cycle of our industry. At least 61 of our member truss plants have been merged or bought-out in the last four years. While no one can predict whether this trend will continue, one thing seems sure: The component manufacturing business is very likely to take on a different look in the next five years. One reason is that the people who started this industry are not the same people who are running the plants today. We now have ex-bankers, finance people and people from many other industries bringing their individual areas of expertise to what has been generally viewed as a "mom and pop" type of business.

Our customers have also become more sophisticated and savvy. From the field we now commonly hear phrases like "even-flow production" and "just-in-time delivery." No doubt our customers are seeking new ways of increasing margin, and if we can't help them, they will find what they need elsewhere.

Other pressures to change are presented to us from outside our industry. I am referring to code authorities, fire officials and any other source that affects how we make or sell trusses and the markets that are available to us.

The difficulty is that we don't seem to have enough time to catch our breath from one challenge before we are faced with another. In the past, we have had to rely heavily upon our suppliers for solutions to our problems. While this is always an option and something that a good plate or lumber supplier is willing to do, their frame of reference is not the same as that of a component manufacturer.

One of the most important things that I have learned this year is that in this chain of commerce, we are the closest link to our customers. We have the best understanding of what happens in the field when our products are being used. Consider the bracing issues, for example. We would be remiss if we did not provide the field with realistic documents to apply and brace our products. To look the other way, and pretend that offering this type of information to the field has nothing to do with us, is sort of like the "I just make 'em and sell 'em" attitude that will get our businesses into trouble as fast as anything else.

Another thing I have found in talking to component manufacturers is that we are a pretty resourceful group. We realize that we must strongly influence the direction that our industry is headed. Often, our suppliers can't or don't know how to solve our problems. WTCA has grown from an association that was heavily dependent on its suppliers to one that is seriously taking direction from its manufacturer members. For example, this last year we have started some much needed truss testing. We have also truly discovered this year that we can have a voice with our elected officials and effect change in surprising ways. As we mature as individual companies and as an industry, we are learning to develop relationships with our suppliers that are not based on dependency and inadequacy, but on professionalism and respect.

But make no mistake, this industry is full of change and it is occurring more rapidly than we may like. We as component manufacturers are fortunate, however, that we have a first rate association staff to assist us with gathering knowledge and keeping us informed. Just one of many examples that come to mind is the phenomenal job WTCA Staff has done in its efforts to bring us the latest news about our industry through communications like the TOP TEN list that are sent to us by email. If you've been missing out on updates like this, let WTCA Staff know and they will be happy to add your email address to the distribution list.

MORE CHANGE ON THE HORIZON

Over the past several years there has been a discussion revolving around the future direction of *WOODWORDS* magazine. While this magazine has become a truly exceptional publication, it can and must become better. The magazine's content will need to continue to change and develop to meet the growing needs of component manufacturers. You may do a double take when you receive the next issue of our industry magazine sometime in early November. It will look very much the same, but will have a different name on the masthead to reflect its more broad content. The new name is (surprise!) Structural Building Components Magazine.

Yes, it's another change, but one that should be an easy transition. One that more accurately describes what we are about, and one that won't confine the direction our manufacturing members take the industry in the years to come.

I feel extremely privileged to have been a part of this organization. Hopefully, I have made a difference in some small but positive way. I know that I have met the most friendly and interesting people and have enjoyed every minute.

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