

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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Adventures in Chapter Start-Up by Libby Maurer

Recently, Louis "Butch" Blattner has hit the dusty trails of his home state as a pioneer of sorts. His ultimate mission? To recruit members to join the West Virginia Chapter of WTCA. With the help of Carl Schoening, WTCA's Membership Committee Chair, he will stop at nothing to make it happen. Blattner and Schoening have launched a multi-city tour of West Virginia component manufacturing facilities and arranged one-on-one meetings to rally support for the future chapter. Nothing can replace a face-to-face visit with fellow component manufacturers in your area when the goal is forming a chapter. When it comes to grassroots activities, the grass really doesn't get any greener.

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

For Blattner, the motivation behind starting a chapter is many-fold. For instance, in handling matters on the level of state government, working with a cohesive team would be more effective. "I've met with a local attorney who advised me to come up with a coalition of fabricators before we state our case to the local government," he remarked. As many of our members have learned, they have more clout when they work together as a local association. According to Blattner, "There's a lot of positive reinforcement for me to make the advent of this chapter a long-term goal. My voice alone is not strong enough to lobby the state and local governments. But if other manufacturers are facing the same problems, there is a better chance that our voice will be heard."

Blattner also sees value in creating a chapter that can work in cooperation with the National Board and staff. "I look forward to a time when we can call National, as a chapter, to seek their advice and counsel on issues before we make decisions." By having an established chapter engaged in the local- and state-level issues, it would be even easier for National to lend support when needed. There will be two organizations that can be called upon when there are problems to solve or opportunities to be seized.

"WE DROVE 425 MILES"

Blattner has gone to great lengths in order to accomplish his vision of a future West Virginia chapter. He said he and Schoening recently drove 425 miles across the state to make two visits.

Has Blattner and Schoening's experience thus far been similar to Paul Simon's Graceland, where "they'd all be received" and accepted on the frontier? Blattner said, "There was some question in my mind as to how we would be received by other component manufacturers on our tour. At first they seemed really hesitant as to what to say. But just through conversation, we were able to get to a point where we looked at each other and said, 'Hey—I have that problem at my plant too!' It is an indication that this chapter could help us prioritize and forge ahead as a group, not one by one. The most important thing to remember—and I emphasize this when I'm talking to the

other guys—is that we can still be competitors, fighting for our businesses, and stand side by side while fighting for the same cause.”

Blattner noted, “This potential competitive rift we feel is not helping any of us get by day to day. [On issues that affect all component manufacturers], I think we'd all be more at ease with the assurance that we're a part of a united front.” Through these personal meetings, everyone is becoming excited by the possibilities of working together to take on the tough issues and achieve positive results.

Blattner's personal goal is to reach twelve more component manufacturers in West Virginia by the end of March and then schedule the first ever WV chapter meeting in May. “The first thing we'll need to do is lay each issue out on the table. The biggest targets are worker's compensation and insurance (tort reform). Once we come up with a strategy as a team, we'll involve National and get to work.”

While Blattner and Schoening may have many miles to go before they sleep, the most gigantic leap has been taken. The process started with one man, his vision for a united West Virginia chapter and many miles of road ahead of him. With the assistance of our National group, SBC Magazine hopes to hear more from West Virginia in the near future. Look for an update in the August 2003 issue of SBC Magazine on Blattner's progress as he and Schoening continue on their tour of the countryside.

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