



# Adventures in Advocacy

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## I'll Show You Mine

by Sean D. Shields

If you show me yours, I'll show you mine. This should be the new mantra of WTCA Chapters going forward—at least with regard to grass-roots legislative advocacy. Since the first WTCA legislative conference in 2001, the structural building components industry has been shown the inside of lawmakers' offices full of big mahogany desks, plush leather chairs, expensive carpets and enough photographs of the who's who to make your head spin.

Now it's time to return the favor and concentrate on inviting lawmakers into your manufacturing facility. Time to show your elected officials pristine bundles of 2x4s, rows of busy component saws, gantry tables, roller presses and enough stacks of freshly built trusses to make *their* head spin. It is simply the most effective way to cement your company, and this industry, into their minds.

That is why, at the conclusion of this year's legislative conference, the WTCA Board of Directors chose to pass the following resolution:

Whereas the structural components industry is committed to developing a world-class grassroots legislative advocacy effort;

Whereas the information collected and disseminated by the structural building components industry has been well received by elected lawmakers and has contributed to a credible reputation for the industry;

Whereas experience has shown building closer relationships with elected lawmakers on the grassroots level gives the structural building components industry a stronger voice in the legislative process;

Whereas an increase in communication between the structural building components industry and lawmakers allows the industry to effect public policy in a way that is beneficial to the industry;

Whereas these relationships are best formed and solidified through direct contact between manufacturers and their lawmakers;

### ***The Board of Directors of WTCA resolves to:***

Request that each of our WTCA chapters designate a Legislative Relations Chair, who will be the point of contact within the chapter on all legislative issues; and

Request that each of our WTCA chapters strive to schedule and host a minimum of two (2) plant tours each year for either federal, state or local elected lawmakers.

The creation of a Legislative Relations Chair (LRC) within the WTCA Chapter structure makes a great deal of sense. As former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, once said, "all politics is local politics." WTCA Chapters are the eyes and ears of this trade association, and are subsequently the best situated to identify key lawmakers and establish relationships with them.

In addition to plant tours, the LRC can assist in a wide variety of other essential legislative advocacy efforts. For instance, as WTCA continues to build a world-class grassroots legislative advocacy effort, the annual Legislative Conference is being augmented with Congressional District Meetings that can occur throughout the year. These meetings are set up with federal lawmakers as they return home during times when Congress is on recess. While WTCA staff would still assist in setting up the meetings, the LRC can help enlist component manufacturers to attend these meetings.

The LRC can also be a valuable point person for helping the Chapter to set up its own State Legislative Conference. These local conferences don't have to be complicated. As was discussed in the column earlier this year, the Iowa Truss Manufacturers Association (ITMA) has done this successfully for the last few years by simply inviting a handful of state lawmakers to attend one of their quarterly meetings held in their state capital. The LRC can provide the valuable service by extending those invitations on behalf of the Chapter.

Several members of the WTCA Board remarked at the conclusion of this year's legislative conference it was a lost opportunity that many chapters did not have representation during the many meetings occurring during the conference on Capitol Hill. They agreed the annual legislative conference in Washington, DC, was too valuable an endeavor to miss out on sending someone to speak on behalf of the members of a state. It was suggested by numerous Board members that every WTCA Chapter should try to send at least one representative, the newly appointed LRC perhaps, and to consider contributing chapter funds to defray their travel and room costs.

While these are just a few suggestions, it draws a clear picture there is a very real and immediate need for our industry to have an LRC in each of the WTCA Chapters to assist in these grassroots legislative advocacy efforts. It may sound daunting for some, but even if an LRC coordinated all of the activities above, the time commitment would be barely more than thirty minutes a month, and attendance at one WTCA Open Quarterly Meeting. Those who have rolled up their sleeves and participated in these efforts in the past have said it was well worth the effort. It's time for you to find out for yourself! **SBC**



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