



UNITED to Break Down Barriers

by Emmy Thorson-Hanson

This chapter understands that knowledge is power.

In 2006 the Mid Atlantic Chapter focused on educating the marketplace and plans to continue these efforts in 2007. This chapter understands that by helping educate the marketplace, they are in fact the ones who benefit the most from the experience. In 2006 they aimed to do one presentation per quarter, with a focus on builders. **SBC** recently talked to three members who were intimately involved with the efforts to see why the Mid Atlantic Chapter finds education through teamwork so worthwhile.

The Atlantic Builders Association (ABA) invited the Mid Atlantic Chapter to give a presentation called "All About Trusses" at the Atlantic Builders Convention last April. The convention hosted various seminars for the attendees and ABA's education committee elected to invite the Mid Atlantic Chapter to participate. Russ Gervasi of U.S. Components, LLC – A Pro Build Company and the chapter's code committee chair says that they accepted the invitation because they recognize the need for information to get out to the builders and architects. "They need to be educated on trusses, what the bracing requirements are, proper installation, and where responsibilities lie," said Gervasi. They made a point to stress the importance of safety in terms of temporary bracing and also handed out a lot of bracing literature from WTCA. ABA was so pleased with the presentation that they invited the Mid Atlantic Chapter to present at their convention this year as well!

One thing that Mid Atlantic believes is very important is that each architect and engineer has their own copy of BCSI. They believe in it so strongly that they actually foot the bill and provide complimentary copies to all of the attendees at each presentation in which they participate. Gervasi explains why the chapter puts so much emphasis in this area: "From what we have seen in the field, it doesn't always get through to builders exactly what is required and what the [handling, installing, restraint and bracing] recommendations are. It is always a great opportunity to provide them with the invaluable information contained in BCSI, and we also encourage them to refer to the WTCA website for more information."

Each attendee of the Atlantic Builders Convention seminar received a copy of BCSI. Gervasi noted that the guide was new to most of them; in fact, some of them still had no idea that HIB-91 is no longer the industry's handling, installing and bracing guide. "We need to keep thinking about how we can get that info to architects and builders," commented Gervasi.

Another convention that Mid Atlantic took part in was the Pennsylvania Building Officials Conference (PennBOC) in October 2006. Ryan Dexter of WTCA staff presented "Introduction to the Structural Building Components Industry: A Metal Plate Connected Wood Truss Inspection Checklist." PennBOC had asked Mid Atlantic to educate the building officials, fire officials and framers on proper inspection procedures. According to chapter president Ken Slotter of Shelly Enterprises, the attendees gave very positive feedback and said that they learned a lot about what to look for when inspecting a structure that uses building components.

Again, all attendees were provided with BCSI. Slotter explains why they feel this is such an important part of education. "Our chapter feels that everyone should have a copy so that they can reference it," he said, "because the majority of them knew of BCSI but weren't necessarily using it."

Responding to the WTCA Board resolution asking that each chapter designate a local relationship-building chair, the chapter agreed to set up at least two truss plant tours each year. Rich Phalines of Concord Truss volunteered for the position because of his previous experience hosting tours and a strong belief that they should continue. "The more [building officials, framers, specifiers and firefighters] know about our product, the better off we all are. The more they know us, the more comfortable they become with our industry and our products," says Phalines.

Like many of the members in the Mid Atlantic Chapter, Phalines already has a lot of experience with plant tours and how education can be a great tool. Phalines recalls some of the things that Concord Truss has done to educate the marketplace: "[Concord Truss] has a close relationship with the Builders Trade School and through the years they have taken many tours. We have also provided trusses, materials and Carbeck CDs to the local fire training school, the Gloucester County Fire Training Academy. We had a personal relationship with the people who run the Academy, and they approached us for help with fire training. So we provide trusses for them to study, and they in turn are better trained. It is great for them, and really great for us."

So what exactly does a relationship-building chair do? Phalines describes his role: "The majority of plant tours that we do are for code officials who do framing inspections in our area. It is to our benefit to educate them and make them as familiar as we can with our products because if they have a question or a problem it is a lot easier to pick up a phone and call us if they can put a face to the name."

When Mid Atlantic hosts a tour they usually invite half a dozen officials to come through the plant. "We provide them with lunch, let them inspect the facility, spend some time showing them what we do, and we also include a packet with lots of literature from WTCA that they can take with them. There have also been times when officials will invite us to come to their evening meetings and put on a 30-45 minute presentation."

Phalines says that it is beneficial for all chapters to have someone who focuses on building relationships and is in charge of scheduling plant tours. "It is beneficial to all of the truss plants in the chapter." In 2007, Phalines plans on scheduling a few more plant tours. In addition, the chapter continues to build

its relationship with several contacts at the NJ Department of Community Affairs and expects them to deliver an update on codes at the May chapter meeting. It will keep offering its building officials presentations for Rutgers University, too.

TEAM=Together Everyone Achieves More

It is clear that this Chapter understands the potential they have to make a difference by working together as a team. By educating the marketplace, the Mid Atlantic Chapter has built strong relationships with officials locally. If you think your company or the industry in your region could benefit from increased educational efforts, take the next steps to get your local chapter involved. Just keep reminding yourself how to spell TEAM. **SBC**

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at a glance

- The Mid Atlantic Chapter of WTCA is using education to make a difference in the industry.
- Between presentations and plant tours, this chapter stays active year-round.
- Each attendee at the Atlantic Builders Convention received a copy of BCSI.

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