



WTCA's First International Chapter

by Marisa Hirsch

No matter where it's manufactured, a truss is still a truss. While differences in codes, legal requirements and terminology exist in different countries and regions, a truss itself is meant to resist applied loads for a particular building in a certain way—no matter where it's built. This is one reason why WTCA members in Canada decided to form the WTCA Canada Chapter/le Chapitre Canadien de la WTCA: they can easily use the resources created by WTCA (and some already are). And, with a chapter, they'll have a more organized influence on the products and services to come.

"As an industry, it makes sense to leverage what's already been done and to not reinvent the wheel as much as possible," said Rob McLellan, WTCA Canada Chapter president and vice president of operations at Rockett Lumber and Building Supplies in Mississauga, ON.

McLellan began considering the possibility of a WTCA Canada Chapter while serving as director of the Ontario Wood Truss Fabricators Association, which is a Canadian association. As a part of that association, he saw that they were having difficulties accomplishing everything they wanted to accomplish. Rockett was already a WTCA member company, so McLellan decided to contact staff to find out if forming a WTCA Canada Chapter would be feasible. It was then he found out that the idea of a Canadian chapter was already being discussed. He was told about a preliminary meeting being held in Winnipeg, MB on March 15-16, 2007 and decided to attend.

"I think the fundamental thing, and the logic for all of this, is that there are huge resources available through WTCA," McLellan said.

Background & Motivation

Discussions about forming a WTCA Canada Chapter had actually been going on for several years between Warren Bracken, managing director of Manu-Fab Building Components, LTD in Newton, MB, and Kirk Grundahl, executive director of WTCA. Bracken was president of the Canadian Wood Truss Association (CWTA) for seven years, and Grundahl attended several of their meetings. This is how the two got to know each other and began discussing the possibility of a WTCA Canada Chapter very early on.

Bracken said the advantages of doing so were obvious to him. WTCA has already created many resources that can fulfill the needs of Canadian component manufacturers with only minimal tweaking. Bracken said it's just a matter of making sure that, when needed, the work done is compliant with the National Building Code of Canada (NBC) and the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), and then getting things translated into French, which is an official language (along with English) in Canada.

"It's really not all that difficult," said Bracken, who represents Manitoba in the WTCA Canada Chapter. "The problem was that there weren't a lot of people ready for that concept. They wanted to do [everything] themselves, which would cost a pile of money."

Grundahl agrees with Bracken, and said that leveraging WTCA's resources is a concept that just makes sense. "The issue was really about building momentum

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The WTCA Canada Chapter aims to harness available resources and fine tune them to meet their needs.

at a glance

- ❑ WTCA's newest chapter is made up of Canadian manufacturers and their suppliers.
- ❑ While legislation and building code interpretations differ, trusses and wall panels are designed and manufactured similarly in both the U.S. and Canada.
- ❑ Many Canada Chapter members see the benefits of leveraging the programs and work already created by WTCA.
- ❑ The chapter's first project is creating English/French versions of the BCSI documents, which currently exist in an English/Spanish format.

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around the concept's common sense, believing that the sum would be much greater than the individual parts and making this work out positively for everyone involved," he said.

Steve Toner, president of Timber Top Trusses Ltd. in Grand Falls, NB and current CWTA president, also quickly saw the value of a Canadian chapter. "After we met [in Winnipeg], I immediately saw the benefits because we'd been paying dues to WTCA and I was using a lot of the materials," he said.

Toner's company was sending out two sets of documentation with their products—one set for jobs being shipped into the U.S. and one for those staying in Canada. "It was a little confusing for our staff because there wasn't a unified documentation," said Toner, who represents the Atlantic Provinces in the Canada Chapter. "This is basically the goal of...developing a Canadian chapter."

Toner, Bracken and McLellan all said that creating English/French versions of the Building Component Safety Information (BCSI) documents is indeed the first main goal of the WTCA Canada Chapter. These documents could then serve as a unified North American installation guide.

"A truss is a truss and it doesn't matter where it's built," Toner said. "Once I saw that, I went back to my Canadian counterparts and explained the goal of the Canadian chapter.... It does make sense, and there's room for TPIC (Truss Plate Institute of Canada), TPI (Truss Plate Institute), WTCA and CWTA."

Bracken said his company originally joined WTCA in order to understand their American customers' expectations and to be in compliance with American standards. Now that there's a WTCA Canada Chapter, they will be more able to harness WTCA to help them meet the expectations of their Canadian customers, as well as their American ones. With a unified voice, they'll have more organized input into WTCA's goals and projects.

Defining Details

Of course, there were (and are) challenges to overcome in the process of creating a Canadian chapter of a U.S. association. Not the least of these is to make sure everyone understands the goals of the WTCA Canada Chapter—which is to add to and complement what's being done in Canada. Equally important is to ensure that everyone understands what the chapter's goal definitely isn't—to dictate what is already being done in Canada.

"I think the key challenge is trying to get everybody aligned in terms of what we're trying to achieve with different organizations," McLellan said. "It's not a competition with WTCA and CWTA and others."

Bracken also spoke about the challenge of making sure everyone understands the purpose of setting up a Canadian chapter. He said that after explaining the idea behind the

Canadian chapter to skeptical people, his explanation is often still met with concern that WTCA will "take over." He then explains that isn't the intent, and that WTCA's goal is simply to look after its members.

"The intent is to complement," said Bracken. "Therein lies the challenge: to convince people that there's a major difference between takeover and complementary. I would like to unite Canada in the sense that this is a good thing for us."

Getting WTCA publications translated into French is another doable challenge—and one that staff has made progress on. This is a process that requires a lot of time and coordination between staff and Canadian members. But, as Toner said, it is imperative—and so it will be done. "[Translation] was a bit of a challenge from the beginning because of the lack of useable terminology," said Toner.

Staff has been working with some Canadian member companies to create a list of French industry terms to be used within BCSI documents. Once this list has been finalized, WTCA will then have a list of approved French terms at its disposal when translating. With members' help, the list can grow and change as needed—making translations more accurate and consistent all the time.

Goals & Expectations

Preparing the BCSI summary sheets for Canadian use is the chapter's primary goal, but Bracken said they have begun thinking about what else they'd like to do.

The first official WTCA Canada Chapter meeting took place on October 4, 2007 at BCMC in Columbus, OH. At this meeting, members and interested parties discussed what they would like to accomplish through the chapter. One idea was to look into customizing WTCA's Truss Technician Training courses for Canadian use, and Toner said he would like to see a Canadian version of In-Plant WTCA QC.

The objective, Bracken said, is to determine what chapter members as a group want done. Based on the meeting at BCMC, the chapter has been gathering feedback from different members to help them define how to proceed and what future projects and goals will be. It may still be a little while before this process is finished, but Bracken said that once it's done, the chapter will have a firmer idea of how to proceed in the longer run.

However, immediate goals are a little clearer. "For the first year [the goal] is really to get some quick bits into Canada, starting with BCSI, and working with the Canadian organizations to try to get that alignment," McLellan said. "If we can get that, then I think other things will fall into place pretty quickly. If we're coming from opposite directions in what we're trying to achieve between Canadian organizations and WTCA, then it's just going to be conflict—and nobody wins."

Robert Baynit, director of engineering at MiTek Canada, was present at the chapter's meeting at BCMC. Baynit said he

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hopes the WTCA Canada Chapter will focus on identifying ways members can benefit from existing solutions already available from WTCA. He also said there are ways that CWTA and WTCA can work together.

"I think CWTA and WTCA members can work together by making joint decisions on areas of cooperation where synergies can be realized," Baynit said. "A good place to start is in the areas of BCSI and QC."

More Input, Better Output

As the WTCA Canada Chapter grows and meets its current goals, it will benefit both the chapter and individual Canadian manufacturers if new people continue to get involved and participate in chapter events. Fresh perspectives and new ideas are always wanted and needed.

Bracken said he wants all Canadian manufacturers, whether they're currently WTCA members or not, to think about the possibilities that may come with a WTCA Canada Chapter. "This is a win-win for everybody," he said. "Even non-members will see [the products and services offered] and order if they want to. But hopefully they would join so they can have a say."

McLellan said more people getting involved in the chapter means the industry will be able to move forward at a faster pace and that professionalism will continue to increase. "Like any industry association, [the WTCA Canada Chapter] is only as strong, and the benefits only as good, as what people put into it," McLellan said. "So, if there's a limited number of us giving input into the work of the association, then we'll get limited output from it—even if we are leveraging the work already done in WTCA." **SBC**

If you would like to participate in the WTCA Canada Chapter, please contact Rob McLellan (905/275-1800 or rob.mclellan@rockettlumber.com) or Anna Stamm (astamm@qualtim.com or 608/310-6719). If you are willing to assist in the translation of documents into French, please contact Libby Maurer at lmaurer@qualtim.com or 608/310-6724.

If you are interested in starting a WTCA chapter in your area, please contact Anna Stamm at astamm@qualtim.com or 608/310-6719.

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