

2023 Tie Grading Seminar Draws Largest Class Ever

By Barbara Stacey

Held in the spring instead of fall this year, RTA's Tie Grading Seminar took place in March in Little Rock, Ark., drawing the largest class ever with registration filling up in record time.

The seminar included three days of intensive classroom and hands-on instruction. Attendees commented how much they learned beginning on day one and continuing throughout.

A reception sponsored by **Brewco** kicked things off on Monday night. A big thank you to Mike Goldston and Brewco for the sponsorship and contribution!



Mike Goldston of Brewco chats with Tie Grading Seminar Instructor Robert Pearce of Stella-Jones.



Reggie Montgomery and Chris Darby of Stella-Jones catch up at the reception.



Dr. Nate Irby thanks Mike Goldston for the reception sponsorship.



Calvin Matthews of CSX talks with Peter Cooper of Pan Am Railway.

DAY 1

Day one focused on classroom instruction, beginning with engineering principles and how cross-ties fit into the railroad system. An introduction to defects and grading followed. After lunch, attendees put their learning to the test with a reduced-speed grading quiz. Wood species basics came next with small and big blocks and a species test.



Brad Crawford starts things off with an overview of engineering principles and how ties are integral to the track.



Robert Pearce gives an overview of why defects matter and what they look like.



Derek Poust of Koppers pays close attention to defects.



Jordan Estes continues with the defects portion of the seminar.



Robert Pearce explains the scoring process for the reduced-speed grading quiz.



Calvin Matthews and Jason Walsh of CSX watch and grade ties from a tie grader's perspective.



Jayda Schmitz of Stella Jones was the top scorer and winner of an Amazon gift card in the reduced speed grading quiz.



Dr. Terry Connors teaches the class how to identify different species.



Joe Purvis of Stella-Jones looks for identifying features of red oak.



Jason Walsh of CSX discovers that red oak makes a great bubble blower due to its lack of tyloses.



Edgar Ruano of Koppers considers what species this big block might be.



David Hamilton of Koppers is the big block test winner and another Amazon gift card recipient.

DAY 2

Day two included classroom instruction beginning with insects, fungi, air drying, and a treating presentation and demonstration. An overview presentation of operations and inspection points followed with a review before concluding the classroom portion of day two. The students then took a trip to the Koppers North Little Rock plant for hands-on work with full-sized ties and a facility tour.



Dr. Jim Ringe discusses fungi and air drying and why they are important in the cross-tie production process.



Dr. Nate Irby discusses the journey of a tie from tree to track.



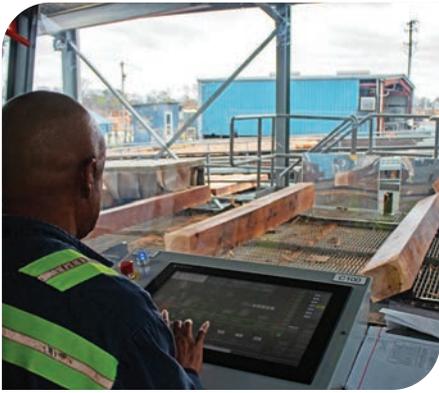
As the class looks on, Dr. Conners uses a vacuum pump to show the basics of how wood accepts preservative treatment in a scaled demonstration.



Josh Kmoch shows aerial overviews of a treating plant as he discusses operations and inspection points.



At the plant, Wayne Larson of Timber Products Inspection talks with Koppers Plant Manager Chris Martin as Amanda Battisti of Stella-Jones and Sanjay Varma of Union Pacific look on.



The students watch as Koppers tie grader Dave Brown grades ties during the plant tour.



Robert Pearce and Jordan Estes review wood species and defects with class members.



Robert Pearce helps Kenyon Brantley of Koppers with wood species and defects.

DAY 3

Day three consisted of an overview of wood tie and timber procurement and a review of wood species and defects before departing for the plant. Students tested their knowledge of wood species and defects in the Tie Grading Derby. After lunch, provided by **Nisus**, the treated tie section for inspectors and railroaders rounded out the day and the seminar.



Dr. Nate Irby teaches the class about wood tie and timber procurement specifics.



Brad Crawford reviews defects and specifications in preparation for the final test.



Dr. Terry Conners gives the students one last review of species groupings.



Derek Dillinger of Missouri Tie takes careful measurements.



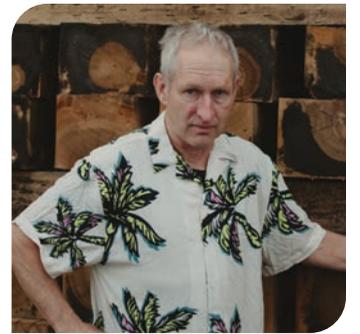
David Roberts of Genesee & Wyoming considers what wood species grouping and possible defects the ties have.



Steven Barr of Superior Tie & Timber/KCS looks for any wood species or defects that might keep this tie out of track.



Robert Pearce provides the class with the answers to the Tie Grading Derby final test.



Peter Cooper is the winner of the Tie Grading Derby and the final Amazon gift card.



Dr. Nate Irby and Brad Crawford measure a defect in the rail bearing area as Adam Whitman of Koppers, Matthew Chaffee of Koppers Ashcroft, James Sowers of Koppers, and Jim Joiner of Stella-Jones look on.



Ryan Kragnes of Koppers asks Brad Crawford how to identify species in a treated tie.



Dr. Jim Ringe takes a core sample to pass to the students as Brad Crawford looks on.



Dr. Nate Irby shares stories of working on the railroad with UP before he became RTA's executive director in 2021.

2023 Tie Grading Class Members



Tie Grading Seminar Students

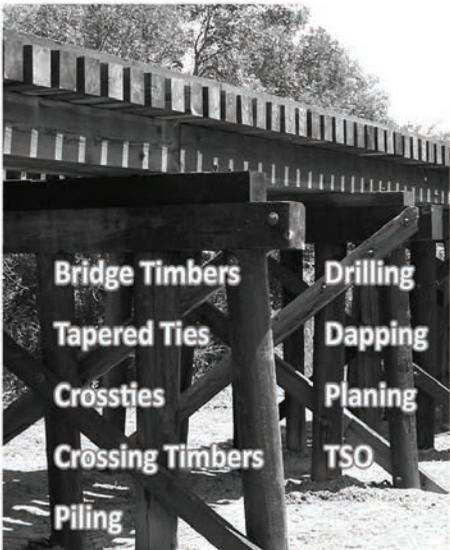
Brandon Bailey, AmeriTies South; Calvin Matthews and Jason Walsh, CSX; David Roberts, Genesee & Wyoming; Dylan Atkison, Jon Berg, Kenyon Brantley, Ted Haaz, David Hamilton, Eddie Hamilton, Ryan Kragens, Clayton Palmer, Derrick Poust, Brian Robbins, Edgar Ruano, James Sowders, Mike Stainbrook and Adam Whitman, Koppers; Matthew Chaffee and Andrew Miller, Koppers Ashcroft; Ryan Richard, Loram; Jeff Pyrtle, Missouri Tie,

LLC; Kevin Evilsizer, National Hardwood Lumber Association; Jeff Ressel and Josh Wikle, North American Tie & Timber; Peter Cooper, Pan American Railway; Ronald Aycock, Amanda Battisti, Chris Darby, Lucas Hall, Cory Hinton, Jim Joiner, Matt Kematick, Reggie Montgomery, Jeremy Newton, Joe Purvis, Christopher Ray, Anthony Reinhart, Jayda Schmitz, Carter Stone, Todd Tyler and Eric Walters, Stella-Jones; Steven Bar and Terrance Stromile, Superior Tie & Timber; Rob Fell and

Wayne Larson, Timber Products Inspection; and Sanjay Varma, Union Pacific.

Faculty & Special Guests

Dr. Terry Conners, University of Kentucky Emeritus; Brad Crawford, Stella-Jones; Jordan Estes, Stella-Jones; Dr. Nate Irby, Railway Tie Association; Josh Kmoch, Koppers; Robert Pearce, Stella-Jones; and Dr. Jim Ringe, University of Kentucky Emeritus; Jeff Thomas, Nisus; and Mike Goldston, Brewco



Wheeler Lumber

Committed to performance since 1892

QNAP™

COPPER NAPHTHENATE

Treated Ties & Timbers

Proven oil-borne preservative preferred for environmentally sensitive areas

AWPA Standards

AREMA Approved

Cleaner Handling

No Corrosion Concerns

TPI Certified Facility

Engineering and Shop Drawings services available

800.843.8304 www.wheeler-con.com dkoch@wheeler1892.com