

# Grade A Students, Instructors & Locale Make Tie Grading Seminar A Grand Success

The Railway Tie Association (RTA) hosted 35 wood tie industry representatives involved in processing, inspecting, specifying or using treated wood crossties for the 30th annual Tie Grading Seminar.

Held in Bangor, Wis., Aug. 2-4, the seminar was hosted by Stella-Jones Corp., who also graciously hosted the welcome reception during the seminar. A second reception was hosted by Brewco Inc.

This annual seminar is a shirt-sleeves-and-blue-jeans type of educational/working event, where students don protective gear and are treated to instruction both in the classroom and in the field.

Students also participated in the annual

Species Identification and Crosstie Grading Derby. This year's winners, shown on the cover, were Jason Kennedy of Stella-Jones Corp., Kevin Costanzo of Koppers Inc., Mike McHenry of TPCI, Tim Brown of Stella-Jones Corp., and Trent Marking of Stella-Jones Corp.

Instructors were Marshall Allen, owner of Allen Railroad Services and RTA Education Committee chairman, John Zuspan of Track Guy Consultants, Terry Conners of University of Kentucky, Brad Crawford of Norfolk Southern, Jim Gauntt of RTA, Robert Pearce of Stella-Jones and Jim Ringe of University of Kentucky. ■



### A Stella-Jones Welcome

Stella-Jones treated students to a welcome reception on Monday evening. Marshall Allen, chairman of RTA's Education Committee, introduces Bangor Division Manager Liz Russell and RTA President Kenny Dailey of Stella-Jones.



### Take Me Out To The Ballgame

Some of the RTA crew enjoyed attending a La Crosse Loggers of the Northwoods League baseball game before the Tie Grading Seminar. The Loggers are a collegiate summer baseball league whose home field is Copeland Park in La Crosse, Wis.

## DAY 1

Day one begins with an overview of the history of railroads and the engineering principles behind today's complex railroad systems. With over 200,000 miles of track in the United States, safe, reliable track is essential. How the wood tie helps to provide safe and reliable service is the focus of the discussion. In-depth wood identification rounds out the day's instruction.



John Zuspan of The Track Guy Consultants gives an overview of historical and modern track engineering and tie specification principles to start the seminar off on the right foot.



RTA Executive Director Jim Gauntt discusses the new real-time Trends Report page (<https://www.rtastats.org>) and the upcoming smart device Tie Defects app in the works.



Terry Conners emphasizes safety first when cutting into wood to discern characteristics.



The students begin wood identification with their sample boxes and notebooks to help them ID characteristics of different species. It's an intense overview where they learn about the difference between hardwoods and softwoods and what rays, pores, resin canals and tyloses are.



Students use loupes, knives and their sense of smell to determine species.





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Learning first-hand about red oak characteristics with a little fun experiment. Soap bubbles form because red oak doesn't have tyloses blocking the pores.



Students got plenty of hands-on training throughout the seminar.



Brewco President Mike Goldston and Jim Gaunt chat at the reception generously sponsored by Brewco.

**DAY 2** Day 2 continues with wood ID, defects, and a trip to the plant to look at full-size ties. Students use their classroom instruction to identify species and defects on the ties at the plant.



Stella-Jones' Robert Pearce discusses the properties of different species using tie ends.



Marshall Allen explains how to recognize species.



Robert Pearce explains tie specifications, RTA style, before going into the first tie grading station test.



The Stella-Jones Bangor plant is a beautiful sight to see in the midst of the corn fields of western Wisconsin.



University of Kentucky's Jim Ringe helps students look critically at full-sized ties.



Students use their notebooks, tie gauges, knives, tape measures and loupes to discover species types and defects in the full-sized ties.



Enjoying the process of learning how to identify species and defects.



Terry Conners explains the finer points of defects.

**DAY 3**

Day 3 begins with a video defects test followed by the first species ID test. More instruction on treating, quality control, environmental and disposal concerns. Then it's off to the plant for the final test, the Tie Grading Derby.



Butch Bernhardt of Western Wood Preservers Institute demonstrates the new app that will bring tie defects identification into the 21st century.



Students get a short time to look at each big block and determine species before moving on to the next one.



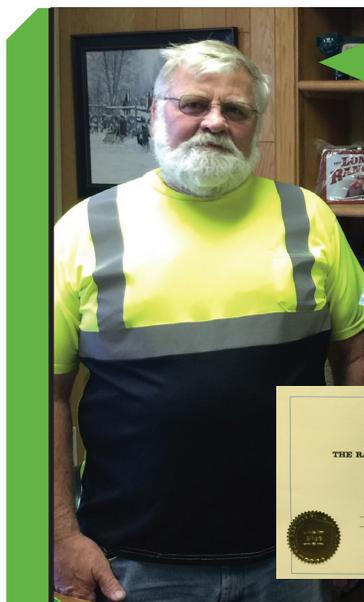
Jim Ringe goes over the basics of wood preservation



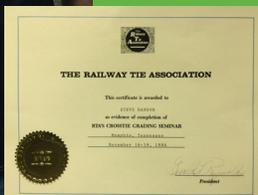
Norfolk Southern's Brad Crawford discusses seasoning, treating and quality control.



Terry Conners uses black dye and a model pressure treater to explain the treating process.



**Inaugural Graduate:** Steve Hanson, who works as a Tie Buyer at Stella-Jones' Bangor plant, was among the graduates of the first Tie Grading Seminar class 30 years ago.



Liz Russell explains safety protocol before the plant tour.



Ryan Peterson, 2012 Tie Grading Seminar graduate, shows the group the plant and explains the operation.

**Using The Skills I Learned Every Day**

*“The seminar was a great hands-on opportunity to learn about common wood tie species and how ties are graded, processed and treated. I was able to see first-hand the importance of these processes to the industry. Within weeks, I was using the skills I learned at the seminar in my day-to-day work.”*

— Mike McHenry, Senior Engineer  
Transportation Technology Center, Inc  
Pueblo, Colorado



Liz Russell and her team operate a first-class operation in Bangor. From grading and incising to an incredibly clean air-dry yard, to the treating plant, there’s few that can match this facility.

# Thank You For Being Part Of The Tie Grading Crew!

**RTA Tie Grading students include** Guy Bertini, Matthew Gibbs, Adam Whicker and Derek Boeldt of Chicago Transit Authority; Jackie Archer, Mike Feerrar, Cory Bishop, Robert Pelton, Kevin Costanzo and Daniel Gray of Koppers Inc.; Larry Rasenen and Jesse Zimmerman of Lake Superior & Ishpeming Railroad; Ron Gaskins of S&A Railroad Ties; Tim Brown, Jacob Nelson, Eric Crawford, Jason Kennedy, Melvin

Porter, Ben Wyland, Wade Fladhammer, Alex Irvine, Jason Libbey, Terry Loveless, Trent Marking, Brad Martin, James Perz, Ed Via, Cory Welsh and Ryan Uponen of Stella-Jones Corp.; John Lamb of Trackmasters Inc.; Michael McHenry of Transportation Technology Center Inc.; Shane Sudduth of Voestalpine Nortrak; Butch Bernhardt of Western Wood Preservers Institute; and James McKay of Wood Products Industries.

**Also on hand were instructors and RTA representatives** Marshall Allen, Terry Conners, Robert Pearce, Jim Ringe, Brad Crawford, Jim Gauntt, Barbara Stacey, Kris Hedding and Ted Woerle. Kenny Dailey, RTA president, represented Stella-Jones as sponsor and Mike Goldston was on hand representing Brewco Inc. as a sponsor



A view of the Bangor, Wis., Stella-Jones plant from above.