

RTA Convention Makes History

85th Annual Convention In Charleston, S.C., A Huge Success

Since 1919, the Railway Tie Association (RTA) has held an annual convention without interruption. The world has seen a lot of crises during that time period—WWII and other major conflicts, the Cold War, 9/11, and now the ongoing strife in the Middle East and Iraq.

Throughout it all, railroads and tie suppliers have done what they do best—help keep America running by providing transportation services that are vital to our nation's economy and security.

This does not mean that there have not been problems to overcome, and that is where a meeting like RTA's annual convention comes in. At this event, producers and users of ties convene to discuss the important issues of the day, namely how we can better serve each other and the interests of all the people affected by modern day railroads throughout North America.

The following pictorial illustrates the business sessions, the fun and fellowship, and the political issues that were grappled with in the most recent session of the RTA annual convention.



Above: From left, Scott Holness, Guy Richard, Rob Badmington and Glenn Whitham.

Below: From left, Billy McKa, Byron Hawkins, and Rosalie and Stan Thomas.



Above: From left, Jack Rahmes, George Caric, Denver Naugle and John Heller.

The Beginning

Since 1996, RTA has compressed the business schedule into a tightly packed day and a half of intense forums and panels. The content of these sessions are outlined in the accompanying article titled "What They Said."

But, before the general sessions began, an optional day of golf and the traditional President's Reception allowed attendees to enjoy a few hours of fellowship and one-on-one time to add a bit of spice to the business flavor of the event.



Above: From left, Guy Richard, and Don and Marnie Adamski.

Right: From left, Tomi and Gary McGee, and Angie and John Falstrom.

Below: From left, Gene Dodson and Byron Hawkins.



Below: From left, Tony and Farideh Reck.



Above: From left, Rick Harris, Jim Moore and Tom Niederberger.

Left: Bob and Josie Cunningham.

Below: From left, Joe Delahoussaye, Tom Mitchell and Dick Bowlby.



Below: From left, Buster Julian and Doug Mellott.





Above: From left, Walt Turner and Gary Ambrose.



Left: From left, Barb Rousis, and Billy and Jan Davis.



Above: From left, Evelyn and Byron Hawkins, Alfonso Chavez and Oscar Murra.



Right: From left, Dr. Allan Zaremski, John Davison and Karen Zaremski.

The Annual Luncheon

The morning after the President's Reception, attendees began their business sessions with the election of new RTA officers and several presentations from the assembled speakers. After four hours of exceptional presentations, everyone adjourned to the annual business luncheon to hear from conference keynote speakers John Scheib and Wendall Cox.



Above: The Short Line Panel during morning business sessions. From left, Phil Ogden, Tony Reck and Steve Gedney.

Below: Keynote speaker Wendell Cox.



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Right: Ken Laughlin (sitting) and Gary Ambrose.

Below: Ken Laughlin, John Scheib and Jim Gauntt.



The Banquet

The afternoon following the luncheon is set aside for presentations on engineering research and Class 1 planned programs. A tremendous amount of information is jammed into the three-hour session (See "What They Said" article that follows). This year, Pandrol's new VICTOR system for wood ties was unveiled and had everyone talking.

Afterwards, it's headlong into the annual banquet, which had a distinctly Polynesian flair this year. The luau was complemented by soothing music from the South Pacific in the background, hula dancing, awards and recognitions (see sidebar below), a nationally recognized humorist, and even a U.S. Congressman who came to visit and share his thoughts with the attendees.



Above: From left, Joyce and Jim Duncan and Dave Larson.

Below: From left, Barbara Ambrose and Kristin Gauntt.



Left: Jimmy and Brenda Watt.



Above: From left, Matt Clarke, Klint Tuft and Wes Piatt.



Above: Glenn Whitham and Barbara Ambrose.



Above: From left, Susan Gauntt and Debbie Corallo.



Above: From left, Gary Ambrose, Mac Collins and John Basso during the presentation of the Branding Hammer Award to Basso.

Below: From left, Gary Ambrose, Mac Collins and Darrell Beasley during the presentation of the Silver Saw Award to Beasley.



Above: From left, Gary Ambrose, Mac Collins and Byron Hawkins during the presentation of the Broad Axe Award to Hawkins.



Above: From left, Gary Ambrose, Mac Collins and Matt Clarke.

Below: From left, Gary Ambrose with Mac Collins and Harry Scott.



Right: Kerr-McGee staff being recognized for contributions to the industry and to RTA. From left, Gene Dodson, Jim Moore and John McGinley.

The Fund-Raising Event

The next morning, everyone was back at work early. The day kicked off with a breakfast fund-raising event for Mac Collins, R-Ga., a six-term congressman and member of the House Ways and Means Committee who has announced that he is running for the U.S. Senate in 2004. A huge supporter of the tie and short line railroad industry and co-sponsor of HR 876, the short line infrastructure bill now in his committee, Collins spoke about the importance of short lines to America.



Above: Jim Gaunt leading a discussion.
Below: Mac Collins speaking to fund raiser participants.



Above: Mac Collins.



Above: From left, Gary Ambrose, Mac Collins, Rich Timmons and Jim Gaunt.



Above: From left, Mac Collins and Matt Clarke.
Right: From left, Tony Chambers and Rich Timmons.



Closing

Following breakfast, conventioners heard presentations on Class I purchasing issues from Colin McCown, executive director of the American Wood-Preservers' Association; on RTA's strategic planning process; and on the new Visual Guide to Tie Specification. In addition, an impromptu panel on alternative preservatives was assembled and generated much discussion.

This year's RTA convention was in many ways a landmark event. The industries RTA serves are changing as railroads continue to evolve and producers grapple with this evolution and with the loss of one of its largest producing companies. But RTA and its membership continue to stay focused on moving forward with purpose and foresight. The annual convention remains one of the most important components in this quest for improvement, and this year's event proved that point once again.

And, as always, RTA expresses sincere appreciation to all convention exhibitors.

