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May 14, 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Positive Resonance: RTA Tie Grading Faculty Educate, Inspire and Entertain

VICKSBURG, Miss.—The Railway Tie Association (RTA) hosted a sold-out Tie Grading Seminar March 10-13 in College Station, Texas. The Koppers Inc. treating facility in nearby Somerville served as the host plant.

The seminar serves as one of RTA's premier educational events for the wood crosstie industry and is designed to educate new, current and tenured industry personnel on tie grading in railroad applications.

The student body is diverse, with representatives from across the landscape of wood railroad tie supply—sawmills, tie processors/treaters, and railroad customers.

The faculty leading the annual seminar is equally diverse, including experts from academia, operations management, quality assurance, and former railroad professionals. Together, faculty members deliver a well-rounded 2.5-day course, offering participants a broad range of perspectives through focused sessions ranging from defect and species identification to track engineering principles, treating plant operations, and the wood tie life cycle from the tree to the track and beyond:

- *Dr. Jim Ringe, Professor Emeritus, University of Kentucky: Wood Anatomy & Identification and Wood Treating Demonstration*
- *Mr. Robert Pearce, Stella-Jones Corporation: Wood Tie Specification Expert*
- *Mr. Josh Kmoch, Koppers, Inc.: Operations and Industry Veteran*
- *Mr. Brad Crawford, formerly Norfolk Southern Railroad, Stella-Jones Corporation: Railroad Engineering & Treated Tie Inspection*



- *Mr. Jordan Estes, Stella-Jones Corporation: certified NHLA Lumber Inspector, former Tie Grader and Quality Assurance Professional*
- *Dr. Nate Irby, formerly Union Pacific Railroad, Railway Tie Association/Mississippi State University: Wood Tie & Timber Procurement, Wood Treating Calculations and Treated Tie Inspection*
- *Mr. Jeff Thomas, former Railroad Construction Contractor, Nisus Corporation: Railroad Engineering*
- *Mr. Noah Babik, Koppers, Inc.: Wood Treating and Wood Science*



From left are Tie Grading Seminar instructors Rob Pearce, Josh Knoch, Jordan Estes, Dr. Jim Ringe, Brad Crawford, Jeff Thomas, Noah Babik and Dr. Nate Irby.



The energy and enthusiasm the faculty bring to the program create a welcoming, hands-on learning environment that students find deeply rewarding. Their efficiency, productivity and passion are evident in every session. The faculty not only have a deep conceptual understanding of the material, but they also excel at communicating it in a way that cultivates with students.

Each instructor demonstrates a strong sense of purpose and a genuine commitment to sharing their knowledge, with the goal of maximizing student learning retention. When test scores improve, the faculty celebrate—but they never become complacent. Driven by feedback, they continuously refine and enhance the course year after year.

“It is an honor and a privilege to serve alongside these instructors,” said RTA Executive Director Dr. Nate Irby. “I deeply respect and appreciate their willingness to volunteer their time and expertise to train our workforce and help shape the next generation of industry leaders. Their thoughtful mastery of the material and ability to effectively communicate it to others is truly impactful. Their positivity resonates.”

The 2026 edition of RTA’s Tie Grading Seminar will be held March 16-19 in Union City, Tenn, and hosted by the Stella-Jones treating facility in Fulton, Ky.