The 2017 Railway Tie Association picked Clarksville, Tenn., as its central hub for its Annual Field Trip.

This year’s Field Trip turned out to be a fantastic trek throughout West Central Tennessee and Southwest Kentucky.

The event kicked off with a reception sponsored by Stella-Jones and featured presentations from the vice president of the Middle Tennessee chapter of the Tennessee Forestry Association (TFA), Larry Pitts, and Phil Averitt of JV Averitt Lumber Co. Erin, Tenn., (not shown).

We thank TFA Executive Director Candace Dinwiddie for making these arrangements and providing talking points for this important enhancement to our reception.

The following photos help describe some of the great locations and operations we visited. A lot of folks deserve appreciation for such a great trip. We will conclude this article with thanks to the sponsors, organizers and attendees. If you missed this year’s Field Trip, stay tuned to RTA.org and Crossties magazine for updates on the 2018 trip.

RTA wishes to thank the attendees and all those who played a role in organizing the trip. Our generous sponsors are recognized on page 12.

**FIELD TRIP**

**RTA Field Trip Attendees Visit Operations In Tennessee & Kentucky**

Day 1 starts with an early morning drive to Middleton Lumber Company in Puryear, Tenn., where the group is treated to breakfast by our hosts.

Surrounded by high grade lumber and cabinets made at MLC, Traci Middleton and Max and Rick Middleton (far right) tell attendees about their operation, which ranges from grade lumber and ties to residuals. Traci is also the youngest and only female president of the International Brangus Breeders Association, so she has quite a full plate with running sawmill operations and her farm.

When market conditions dictate and certain lumber types are out of favor you see a few cherry ties sawn for the railroad market.

The operations are finely tuned as evidenced by their attention to their air stacking protocols.

Traci and her dad, Rick, discuss dry kiln operations and how they have been able to keep some of the older mill equipment running using their internal expertise to minimize overhead.

Then its off to Stella-Jones in Fulton, Ky. The attendees break into to several groups and head out into the plant.

The plant has three operational cylinders with a capacity churn out over 1,000,000 ties annually.

Genesee & Wyoming’s Kristine Storm flanked by Field Trip Committee Chair Dave Whitted of Stella-Jones (left) and RTA President Tim Ries of Koppers (right).

Stella-Jones also thoughtfully prepared cooler packed lunches for everyone. Thanks to all in Fulton!

Then it’s off to Progress Rail’s facility in Mayfield, Ky., where they overhaul locomotives and locomotive engines.

**DAY 1**

Middleton Lumber, Stella-Jones, Progress Rail & Goodman Lumber
FIELD TRIP

Brewco is focused on four markets: grade lumber, ties, pallets and barrel staves. Brewco’s fabricators, each with 12-20 years of experience, are some of the longest tenured in the business.

Brewco is a sponsor of Lynn Ellison, the Top Fuel drag racing star who just won his ninth race in St. Louis. Lynn brought out his (and his daughter’s) Top Fuel dragsters and spent time with all of us. Bill Moss of Mitek and Kristine Storm got close-ups!

Then we head to Koppers Inc.’s Guthrie facility where plant manager Josh Kmoch (foreground) had the red carpet laid out for us (see group photo, pg. 12) and took a few of us on a behind-the-scenes tour of their proprietary borate-creosote dual treating process.

In addition to the vast styles and quantities of pallets made here they also make and keep a nice selection of crane mats inventoried.

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Inside the treating plant control room Kmoch explains how everything that can be automated...

Day 2 starts with another jaunt into Kentucky where we visit Associated Pallets. Here, we see sawn cants rolling toward a gang rip saw that will turn them into pallet blocking and slats.

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FIELD TRIP

We also get to see the terrific plant layout. Out in the plant we see how cars are unloaded and ties placed in line for processing. That processing, of course, includes incising, grading and end-plating.

No, it’s not The Borg (from Star Trek - Next Generation), but rather a fantastic Hood Industries brown paper making machine running at 30 feet per second. Our host was asked if they should think about producing the best corrugated box paper in the world and he said, “Make it so!”

The paper piles onto a two-plus-ton roll and then gets cut into manageable lengths for distribution to corrugated box manufacturers.

...the two different kinds of air stickers they use to minimize shadow lines on the lumber, and these very unique fabric-based covers for...

...use with stacks of walnut and white oak that Dr. Terry Conners of the University of Kentucky inspects in this photo.

Our final stop if the CSX Radnor Yard in Nashville, Tenn., where we are met by a familiar face, longtime RTA friend Larry Fenwick of CSX.

This facility welds these shorter pieces of rail into sections of Continuous Welded Rail (CWR) up to 1600’ long...

...as facility manager Terie King explains while we are standing ...

...next to a same length rail train that’s being loaded as the CWR rail sections are completed.

DAY 3
Hood Industries, Middle Tennessee Lumber, CSX Radnor Yard

After Hood Industries, we travel to Middle Tennessee Lumber in Dickson, Tenn., where we see yet another fine high-grade lumber mill. Bill Joyce talks about...
**Weak Residuals Markets A Concern For Field Trip Attendees**

RTA recently contacted the Hardwood Market Report (HMR) to determine the current state of the residuals problems at hardwood mills. David Caldwell, HMR partner, said that HMR was conducting a survey on this very issue.

“Our survey found that sawmills have been affected more than yards or secondary manufacturers by weak residual markets,” he said. “Sawmills have been affected in three ways. First, mills have been unable to increase production because there are not enough outlets for bark, dust, and chips. Second, prices for residuals, especially chips have declined over time, which has reduced revenue. Third, log purchases are impacted. If landowners cannot receive what they consider a fair price for all timber, including pulpwood, they will hold off timber sales. The result is less available timber at, potentially, higher costs.”

Caldwell mentioned he would have more data on this and a greater perspective on the overall state of hardwood markets to provide RTA members in his presentation at the 99th Annual Conference in San Diego later this year.

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**RTA wishes to thank all the volunteers and sponsors for their efforts and support in making this year’s RTA Field Trip a great success.**