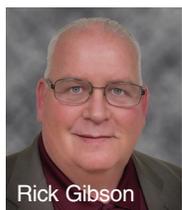


New RTA President Shares Association's 2021 Objectives

At the close of the 2020 RTA Annual Conference & Technical Symposium, Gross & Janes Co. President Bill Behan “passed” the president’s gavel virtually to **Richard A. Gibson**, president of Appalachian Timber Services LLC (ATS).

As president, Gibson, who has worked with ATS for more than 25 years, is responsible for all business functions for the



Rick Gibson

company, including sales, manufacturing, procurement, treating, logistics and customer service. His office is located at the company’s Sutton, W.Va., plant.

Gibson has been an active participant in many railway organizations, serving in various capacities, including as a member of RTA’s Executive Committee.

Gibson has also worked in the construction industry, both on the industrial side and the retail side, including working as a store manager for 84 Lumber and a sales representative for various companies in the building and trade industry. He has also worked in highway construction.

Gibson is a graduate of Glenville State College in Glenville, W.Va. He earned a bachelor’s degree in business as well as an associate’s degree in forest technology. He has continued his education by participating in a variety of business courses, graduating from RTA’s Tie Grading Seminar, and earning a contractor’s license from the state of West Virginia.

As is the annual tradition, Gibson shared details about what RTA members can look forward to from their association in the year ahead.

The 2020 RTA Conference was very different from years past in that it was held in a virtual environment. From an educational and networking standpoint, how do you feel the conference was received by RTA members?

Overall, we went into the virtual conference knowing we couldn’t reproduce the type of networking that has been the highlight of

past in-person conferences. Feedback shows, in general, that attendees appreciated the education offered, and attendance at each session was better than expected. I believe we are all looking forward to meeting in person, and right now we are planning on in-person meetings for 2021.

What were some of the key takeaways from the conference?

I believe that on the supply side, we heard from sawmills and tie buyers that the market for ties will remain stable, but we have to stay focused on keeping our sawmills healthy. Another takeaway from the conference is that we all need to work together in closing the loop on the complete tie lifecycle from its start in forestry to how we address the end of the tie’s service life.

The sawmill session is always very enlightening. What are some of the challenges sawmill members are facing in the coming year?

The first of the year was pretty tough for hardwood sawmills between the pandemic, weather and soft markets for non-crosstie hardwood products. Now that we are seeing some improvement in hardwood prices and markets, the biggest challenge for sawmills is going to be labor. This is also true for the logging crews that supply the mills.

What do you see as some of the greatest opportunities for members of the wood tie industry in 2021?

I believe there will be great opportunities to strengthen industry relationships and a real appreciation for sharing our survival stories with one another when we are able to meet again. As we move into 2021, I think we will all be looking at our operations to see where we can make improvements and consider future opportunities to grow and improve our businesses.

With so many conferences and educational events moving from face-to-face to a virtual format,

how important will it be for RTA to resume in-person member events, and can you share any details about upcoming events?

As an association, first and foremost we are focused on safety. We are planning our first face-to-face meeting for June 2021, and we are prepared to take all precautions for the safety of attendees. With that said, it is very important we meet in person. In looking at responses that are coming in from our member survey, we know that RTA members feel it is essential we hold in-person meetings and training. We have also listened and will be moving the annual meeting to the middle of the United States to try to reduce travel time and allow more people to come to the conference. We will carry over the essential presentations, but we are working hard on new speakers, different presentations, and a new feel for RTA face-to-face meetings.

RTA has a new executive director this year, among other exciting new developments for the association. What can RTA members look forward to in the way of updates for 2021?

In 2021, we are looking forward to hearing from RTA members and our industry stakeholders. We are committed to listening and hearing how the association can best respond to member needs. I know Ashley is planning and looking forward to getting out and meeting as many of our members as possible in the coming year. As a board, we are working together with Ashley to look at what our members are saying and developing strategies and plans to address their needs and strengthen RTA. While all feedback is valuable, we would like to hear more from sawmills, short lines, and small market tie buyers so we know how to best serve you.

Please address RTA’s 2021 legislative work with the Association of American Railroads (AAR) and the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA) during Railroad Day on the Hill, the date for which is expected to be formally announced early next year. RTA will continue its legislative work with AAR and ASLRRA along with

other industry coalitions. I know we will participate in Railroad Day on the Hill in 2021. We will also continue to advocate for the 45G tax credits, which support infrastructure improvements and tie purchases. We are also continuing our work with the Creosote Council, American Wood Protection Association, and Western Wood Preservers Institute to be sure our voices are heard regarding federal and state legislation concerning disposal and preservatives.

Please discuss any major RTA research initiatives for 2021.

We are looking more at how we can communicate the overall message of the wooden crosstie as the most sustainable and

economical choice for ties. Our research efforts will continue to look at the entire tie lifecycle. I believe you will see a strong focus on end-of-life disposition of ties and how we can work together to share and expand industry research efforts on both treatments and disposal.

How can RTA members get more involved in the association and play a greater role in advocating for and supporting the wood tie industry?

The first step would be to get in touch with the RTA office and let us know about your interests or concerns. From there, I would encourage attendance at one of the meetings or the Tie Grading Seminar. This is always

a good place to get to know your industry peers. In associations, we all have a little knowledge that can help someone else, so be willing to share your knowledge and experience with your fellow members. RTA needs your active participation and support to grow our strength in supporting the industry.

Please share any available details about next year’s RTA Conference.

We are currently working on finalizing the contract for next year’s conference. Look for save-the-date information and details to come in the January/February edition of *Crossties*. ■

The Devil Is In The Details

One thing is for certain, we all make mistakes. Even when proofed and reviewed from multiple perspectives, sometimes the smallest details slip through the cracks. In our September/October issue, two extra zeros crept past all of the guards and found a place within the tie reports from our railroads. You will now see correct numbers for wood relay ties and non-wood ties for 2020.

A few questions were also asked about discrepancies between the table shown below and the tie forecasts and reporting that were also included in the magazine. While these numbers are relatively close, they don’t match exactly. Part of the issue is due to timing and partly due to a slight difference between the annual reporting by the railroads and the monthly reporting by tie producers. In coming editions we will be reviewing how we are reporting our statistics and providing additional clarity to help you better understand and use this valuable data.

Table 3—Railway Tie Association Annual Survey

Estimated Crosstie Requirements • Class I Railroads • 2020-2022 Inclusive

Authorized Crossties for 2020										
District and Railroad	Total Track	New Wood Crossties		Wood Relay	New Non-Wood Crossties			Switch Ties (Units)		Bridge Timbers
	Mileage	Hardwood	Softwood	Crossties	Concrete	Steel	Other	Wood	Other	Units
Eastern U.S.	40,500	4,850,000	0	180,000	2,500	50,000	0	310,000	0	50,000
Western U.S.	98,723	6,090,000	500,000	9,000	305,000	5,000	2,000	270,000	500	70,000
Canada	32,500	3,098,500	0	0	69,300	100	5,000	53,655	0	15,000
TOTAL	171,723	14,038,500	500,000	189,000	376,800	55,100	7,000	633,655	500	135,000
Authorized Crossties for 2021										
District and Railroad	Total Track	New Wood Crossties		Wood Relay	New Non-Wood Crossties			Switch Ties (Units)		Bridge Timbers
	Mileage	Hardwood	Softwood	Crossties	Concrete	Steel	Other	Wood	Other	Units
Eastern U.S.	40,500	5,000,000	0	200,000	25,000	50,000	0	310,000	0	50,000
Western U.S.	98,723	6,190,000	500,000	9,000	305,000	10,000	2,000	270,000	500	70,000
Canada	32,500	3,256,000	0	0	76,000	1,000	35,000	60,000	0	18,000
TOTAL	171,723	14,446,000	500,000	209,000	406,000	61,000	37,000	640,000	500	138,000
Authorized Crossties for 2022										
District and Railroad	Total Track	New Wood Crossties		Wood Relay	New Non-Wood Crossties			Switch Ties (Units)		Bridge Timbers
	Mileage	Hardwood	Softwood	Crossties	Concrete	Steel	Other	Wood	Other	Units
Eastern U.S.	40,500	5,200,000	0	150,000	25,000	50,000	0	310,000	0	50,000
Western U.S.	98,723	6,190,000	500,000	9,000	355,000	10,000	2,000	270,000	500	70,000
Canada	32,500	3,250,000	0	0	73,000	1,000	45,000	60,000	0	18,000
TOTAL	171,723	14,640,000	500,000	159,000	453,000	61,000	47,000	640,000	500	138,000