

DuBois and Burke-Parsons-Bowlby Score An 'A' With RTA Tie Graders

THE GRADES ARE IN

Over the past two decades, more than 500 individuals have been given an opportunity to fine-tune their skills at the Railway Tie Association's (RTA) pre-eminent educational event—the annual Tie Grading Seminar. This year, 35 students trekked to central Pennsylvania to learn more about this important aspect of tie production quality control. Burke-Parsons-Bowlby Corporation, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, hosted the 2005 event at its DuBois, Pa., plant.

The seminar covers engineering principles that lead to the development of current specifications, wood species identification, tie defects, quality control procedures at the treating plant, and wood preservation. Attendees also enjoy meeting industry members from around the country and learn a little about RTA's purpose and programs/activities.

It all begins with a half-day video session and a Q&A session on the engineering principles behind the use of wood cross ties.



Then, the real fun begins with the principles of wood identification or, as Professor Terry Conners calls it, Cut, Spit and Chew.



In Cut, Spit and Chew, above, the class is taught to use all their senses to ID wood species. Color, odor, along with the various wood structure features visible with a hand lens, are the keys to proper species identification. This exercise in understanding wood structure, which ultimately leads to the keys to species ID, involves looking at various wood samples. This year, an upgrade to the RTA sample box, right, gave students larger samples to work with.



Jimmy Watt of Crossties Connection, above, schools attendees on tie defects and what to look for in the full-sized ties they will grade in the afternoon session at the plant.



After lunch, the first step for the class is to review some carefully selected full-sized ties. Left, students learn to apply what was learned in the classroom to real world ties. They also see first-hand how to use the RTA TieGauge to measure various tie defects. They also see how a core borer, above, is used and how to recognize certain species, such as beech, by its color and appearance.



Then, it's the students' turn to tackle the first day's set of full-sized ties.

Not only are students expected to ID for species, but by now they should be able to recognize all the primary defects that may cull a tie. Can you tell what the defect at the right is and whether it keeps this tie from being a "grade" tie?



During a break, Koppers' Gerry Roskevensky, right, chats about the day's experience with short line attendees Ryan Coston and Bruce Fay of the Gulf Coast Seminole Railway.

CSXT's Ed Sissom, left, and Koppers' Terry Tilghman work together on the exercise.



Above, the practicum is completed, with Jimmy Watt reviewing each of the species and grades of the first day's set of ties as our intrepid Education Committee chairman, Marshall Allen, left, of Metrolink looks on.



The evening is reserved for a barbecue sponsored by Burke-Parsons-Bowlby (B-P-B), our host. Above, Marshall Allen, Harry Bressler, and Dick and Floyd Bowlby of B-P-B enjoy sharing a few relaxed moments during dinner.



The last day of the seminar starts with a review of species ID, above. Students go back to the sample box and test themselves before the final classroom exam. Then it's time for the test.



Gerry Roskevensky, above, aced the ID practicum this year.

Next up to bat is Oregon State's Dr. Jeff Morrell, who lectures on the subject of best practices at the treating plant to ensure the best possible tie production process.



Following that, students learn about Dr. Conners' magical, mystical pickle juice as he explains wood preserving.



Basically, you add the preservative (or in this case water colored with green food coloring—er, uhh—pickle juice), apply pressure and voila—treated wood! Note how in this five-minute experimental classroom approach to wood treating how easily the sapwood section of the sample block treated.



Following these and other presentations, it's off to the the treating plant for a tour before the final exam.



After learning about wood treatment processes, seeing the real thing is impressive.



B-P-B operates three cylinders at DuBois and treats nearly 20MMBF annually.



Plant Manager Harry Bressler explains the process in detail.



Newly installed equipment has streamlined the sorting/stacking and branding of ties for their customers.



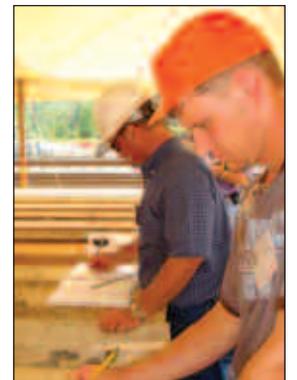
From unloading to grading, the class gets first-hand experience with the tie production process.



B-P-B also produces a significant number of bridge timbers for Class 1 roads each year.



Then, it's time for the final exam—a last opportunity for students to test themselves on what they learned.



That's it—meet the Class of 2005 RTA Tie Graders: Jim Gauntt, RTA Executive Director; Marshall Allen, Committee Chairman; Gary Williams, Co-Committee Chairman; Terry Conners, Instructor; Jeff Morrell, Instructor; Jim Watt, Instructor; Andy Andreykovich, Appalachian Timber Services; Ronnie Jackson, Arizona Pacific Wood Preserving; Ron Reagan and Dave Trout, Arizona Pacific Wood Preserving; Sean Miller, Jim Jordie, Jerry McLain, Jamie Petty, Jason Westfall, Travis Lambert and Eugene Winchester, Burke-Parsons-Bowlby Corp.; Roger Newberry and Edward Sissom, CSX Transportation; Devin Coleman, Harold Hayslip, Jason Miller, Ted Owens, Steve Lish, Russ Pfeiffer, Gregg Rokavec, Gerry Roskovensky, Rich Brooks, Brian Fralin, Terry Tilghman, Michael Ausley, Bill Reneau and Bret Skaggs, Koppers Inc.; Seth Farris, NAV FAC Mid-Atlantic; Dennis Percy, Railroad Engineering Co.; Brad Crawford, RailWorks Wood Products; Ryan Coston and Bruce Fay, Seminole Gulf Railway; Greg Ramsey, U.S. Navy.



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Pictured above, from left, are Instructor Terry Conners, Committee Vice-Chair Gary Williams, Instructor Jim Watt, practicum winners Eugene Winchester of B-P-B and Gerry Roskovensky of Koppers, and Committee Chair Marshall Allen.