

Chalk Up A Record Year For RTA

Tie Grading Seminar Adds To Impressive List Of Sold-Out Events

This year will go down as a record-setting one for RTA-sponsored meetings. In June, our members turned out in record numbers for the Annual Field Trip. At the time of the writing of this article, not only is the Annual Conference hotel space sold out but RTA members will also enjoy the largest exhibi-

tion on record at that event with every possible space taken as well.

There was not a single empty space left at the 2011 rendition of the annual Tie Grading Seminar either. Packed into the largest hotel meeting room in Russellville, Ark., 40 students and instructors spent three days

learning how to enhance product quality by improving their tie grading skills. It's not possible to show all the things that are part of three days of instruction and testing in this brief article, but the following does try to capture the essence of how the students made the grade. ■

Day 1



For the second year in a row, John Zuspan of The Track Guy Consultants started the instruction with a look into the engineering principles behind the development of standards for the wood crosstie.



Students hear how railroads have carefully honed their requirements to minimize early failure in ties and thus optimize the life cycle costs of pressure-treated wood ties chosen for use in the track structure.



Following this half-day session, students are introduced to their wood species identification box by Jimmy Watt of The Crosstie Connection and Dr. Terry Conners of the University of Kentucky.



Conners then uses the second half of Day 1 to help students establish the identifying characteristics of the most common crosstie species.



By the end of Day 1, most students have the basics in hand and understand the key macro features: color, grain pattern, porosity, etc., which distinguish one wood species from another.

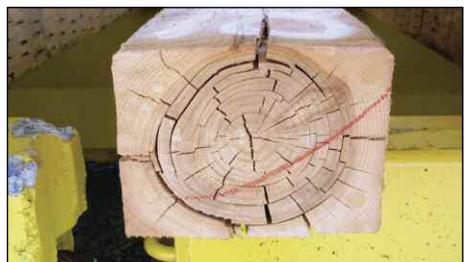
Day 2



Day 2 includes more classroom study on species but adds tie defect identification to the knowledge base. Then, students head to the Thompson Industries plant for field work where the classroom learning is put to the test.



During the field portion of Day 2, everyone is asked to ID species and grade on full-sized ties.



This clear example of "shake" would prevent this tie from ever being used in mainline track. Can you tell from the picture what species this is? Well, RTA tie grading seminar graduates can!

Day 3



Day 3 finds us all back in the classroom to take the large block species ID test and the second of two video quizzes on defects.



Conners, using his "magic pickling juice" (water with green food coloring) and a vacuum pump, illustrates how sapwood of many species is very easily treated while the heartwood of those same species is harder to penetrate with wood preservatives.



Then, Watt and Conners tag team the subject of wood preservation and treatability of species.



Then, it's back to the plant where students get a firsthand look at the practices employed in a wood preserving plant with a tour of Thompson's facilities.



The tour and process start with incoming ties and their initial storage...



...then progresses through the incising, grading and air-stacking processes.

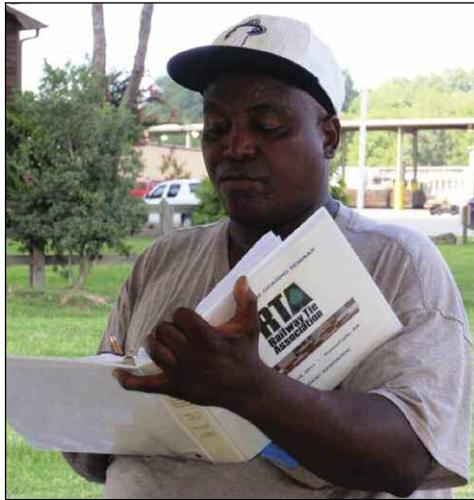
Day 3 continued...



After conditioning, the ties are loaded onto trams for creosote treatment in one of two pressure vessels.



Once they are ready to ship, Thompson can load them out on center beam or gondola railcars or truck for delivery to their intended service location for the next 35 or more years.



The last item of business is the final test of what the students have learned. Once again, grade and species must be determined and scoring completed.



RTA conducts three tests (full block for species ID, video tie defects, and the final full-sized practicum) during the last day. Winners Brandon Barb (Koppers – winner of the Big Block), Michael Jones (Koppers – Winner of Grading Station DVD) and Frank Mose (Stella-Jones – Winner of the Tie Practicum) are shown here (right) with our six instructors, Marshall Allen of Allen Railroad Services, Jimmy Watt of The Crosstie Connection, Terry Conners of University of Kentucky, Jim Ringe of University of Kentucky, and John Zuspan of The Track Guy.

All-in-all, scoring soared for this year's class! RTA expresses appreciation not only to all the students and their companies for participating but also to our all-volunteer instruction staff and, of course, our host plant, Thompson Industries. Everyone's efforts made the 2011 seminar one of the best events of its kind ever. Thanks to all! ■

2011 RTA Tie Grading Seminar Attendees & Instructors



Congratulations, Students!

Robert Murre of Ashcroft Treating; Alan Brown of Boatright Railroad Products; David Piper of Brewco Inc.; Brandon Barb, Chris Martin, Michael Jones, Cliff Schademan and Brian Johnson of Koppers Inc.; Kendall Johnson of Lee Inspection & Consulting Services Inc.; Matthew Marrs of Marrs Hardwood; Lance Ramsay of Mechanicsburg Lumber Co. LLC; Robert Herendeen and Jason Feagans of National Salvage & Service Corp.; Tilley Oliver of North American Tie & Timber LLC; Arthur Jones, Orville Jones and Tim Eden of Pacific Wood Preserving; Tim Harmon of Quality Borate Company; Robert Hendrick and Robert Humphreys of Railroad Services LLC; Tim Brown, Jeff Crawford, Frank Mose and Jason Hutzler of Stella-Jones Corporation; Tim Kizer, Roy Standridge and Scott Duncan of Thompson Industries Inc.; Jordan Estes and Baine Smith of Tucker Lumber Company.

Instructors & RTA Education Committee Members

Marshall Allen of Allen Railroad Services; Jim Gaunt of Railway Tie Association; Jimmy Watt of The Crosstie Connection; John Zuspan of Track Guy Consultants; Terry Conners and Jim Ringe of University of Kentucky - Dept. of Forestry; Robert Pearce of Lee Inspection of Consulting Services Inc.

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