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# YARDSTICK



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Want to be featured or included in an upcoming issue? Celebrating a special occasion or company milestone? Contact Stasa Veroukis-Regina stasav@wrla.org with your request.

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# WRLA: Evolving strategically in the areas that need new perspective

By Liz Kovach

**AS I LOOK BACK** on last year's issue published at this time, the theme was evolving the WRLA and adding fresh perspectives. This inevitably brings new ideas to the table, which in turn will help support the needs of an industry that continues to evolve. From developing new education programs, to co-founding a national partnership, to new staff members the WRLA has evolved strategically in the areas that most needed that new perspective.

Over the course of the last year we have approached members to provide feedback to help identify areas where we can provide solutions to issues that have been recognized both on a national and regional level.

On a regional level, the WRLA first met with Mount Royal University exactly one year ago to discuss professionalizing the industry by developing an education program that will support the recruitment needs of our members. We are in the heart of curriculum development and encourage you to read the progress update provided on page 8 of this issue.

At a national level, we learned there was a hunger for a national voice to support larger issues and as a result the Building Material Council of Canada (BMCC) was formalized. The BMCC is an extension of the ABSDA, LBMAO, WRLA, and BSIA established to respond to issues on a national scale. A progress update on priorities and actions to date is provided on page 21 of this issue.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to welcome Jessica Cranmer to our team who has taken over the management of the WRLA Buying Show. Jessica comes to us with 15+ years of event management and community relations experience and we are excited to have her join our team and hit the ground running.

I look forward to continued collaboration and am very appreciative of the support we've received from the LBM community thus far to help us develop the MRU curriculum. As an Association we are stronger together and hope that you will continue to reach out to us to identify areas of need so that we can provide you with solutions where possible.

Have a great summer! 



Over the course of the last year we have approached members to provide feedback to help identify areas where we can provide solutions to issues that have been identified both on a national and regional level.

# We Need Your Expertise: New Certification Program will Help Attract Talent to the LBM Industry

By Wynne Au, Member Services Manager



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**W**RLA NexGEN has been working closely with Mount Royal University (MRU) through their Continuing Education Department to develop a formal Certification Program for the LBM industry – the first of its kind. This will be a four-week program consisting of four courses designed to be easily accessible online. Students will complete one, three-hour course per week, for a total of 12 hours in the program. The goal of this program is to attract new hires into the industry and to facilitate

on-boarding/orientation for those in career transition.

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2. Industry Negotiation Skills
3. Industry Active Listening and Communication & Building Customer Relations within Industry
4. Industry Critical Thinking

The WRLA is looking for subject matter experts to ensure that all courses are relevant and specific to the industry. We

are relying on our members to serve as experts to help provide this content. MRU’s dedicated team is looking forward to start working with WRLA’s experts in the coming weeks to ensure a feasible program launch in Fall 2018. WRLA is very excited to be a part of this project by working alongside our industry professionals to develop education programs that support the needs of the industry and our members. Get involved. Be a trailblazer. Leave a legacy. **▶**

Contact Wynne Au, Member Services Manager at [WynneA@wrla.org](mailto:WynneA@wrla.org) to learn how you can contribute.

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because all funds raised at this tournament go directly to the WRLA Awards Program. Sponsorships, prizes, and team participation are vital to continue this tradition and to fund our young talent.

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### WRLA MEMORIAL GOLF TOURNAMENT, WINNIPEG

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### CALGARY CLASSIC GOLF TOURNAMENT

September 6, 2018

### WRLA KENOSEE GOLF TOURNAMENT

September 12, 2018

### WRLA BUYING SHOW

January 16, 17, and 18, 2019

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

January 17, 2019

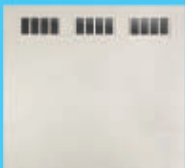


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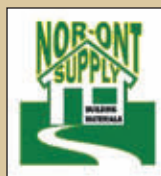
# Sexton is Looking to the Future

By Stasa Veroukis-Regina, Marketing & Communications Manager

As the weather warms up and retailers are preparing for a busy season ahead, the Yardstick spoke with Sexton Group to talk about what's new at the organization, and how they see the busy selling season shaping up.

What's new for Sexton in 2018? There have been several important changes. "Commodity Wood Products is one category of purchasing where our members needed more support. We hired Rick Royce, one of the best-qualified Commodity Wood Products managers in Canada, and recently Mike Fraser has joined the Sexton Group as the Commodity Wood Products Manager for Eastern Canada. Rick and Mike are both experienced negotiators with extensive mill relationships. Our members who consume large quantities of wood commodities now have access to the best mill-direct product and pricing across Canada," explains Steve Buckle, President. "Other members continue to work effectively with our distribution partners and now have the benefit of comprehensive real time information to help them buy better."

As the nature of how members purchase continues to evolve, Steve has implemented strategies to stay ahead of the curve. "As our supply base consolidates we see fewer and larger suppliers often headquartered outside of Canada. It is incumbent on Sexton Group to continue to develop relationships with the vendor decision makers and be effective advocates for our Members," he says. There are some key trends taking shape and they are ready for the future. "The North American market for building materials continues to grow faster than manufacturing capacity growth. We are now seeing periodic product shortages and the accompanying price escalation. This has



meant adjusting our priorities to help our members get the product supply they need."

Mark Lendrum, General Manager for Nor-Ont Supply, in Thunder Bay, Ontario has seen the benefits of being part of Sexton's team, "In terms of helping us out with our suppliers, Steve Buckle at Sexton has played a key role over the years. We've been

working on a large-scale project that has run into unfortunate construction delays. Over the extended course of the project we faced several pricing challenges. Luckily Steve was there to step in and go to bat for us with our suppliers to help us through the challenges. That's a lot to ask of Steve on a long-term project, but it's crucial to our bottom line,

especially in an unstable supply market," says Mark.


Gary Fletcher, General Manager at Trail Building Supplies agrees, "Working with Sexton definitely gives us a competitive advantage in our market. They have a small staff who are dedicated to helping the members, and they have helped us negotiate group buys, exceptional buys, quarterly and seasonal buys and bookings from individual vendors. We even have the option to go to the manufacturer directly to purchase product if we need to. In a market like Edmonton, especially in the current economy, we must purchase product at the best possible price or we won't be competitive."

Sexton has been part of the WRLA Buying Show since its inception, with a large contingent of attendees coming from Sexton year after year. When the show moved to Calgary, Sexton became the lunch sponsor, which helped make the show more enjoyable, effective, and efficient for vendors and dealers. Steve recalls a memory from this year's lunch, "WRLA set up a very large Sexton logo made from Lego. It was fun to enter the dining area and see the overflow



crowd. We then noticed some diners were using the Lego logo as a makeshift table!"

WRLA membership is a key part of Sexton's business strategy, "We believe the industry needs a common voice and we don't believe in redundancy. Sexton Group has and will continue to fully support the WRLA and its member-focused initiatives,

as we have since our inception in 1985," says Steve. "The WRLA is a way to network within the Lumber and Building Material Industry. The WRLA offers a variety of support to the membership in many different areas such as: the Buying Show, training seminars, Award Programs, Group Insurance Plans, and so much more." 

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# Plywood: The Material that Continues to Shape Canada

By Stephen Murdoch

Since its introduction to the Canadian market 90 years ago, the elements of how plywood is constructed have remained the same. The engineered product continues to provide 21st-century designers from across the country with greater flexibility in shaping everyday products. Recently, *Yardstick* spoke with industry experts to better understand plywood's roots in Canada and most importantly, where the plywood industry is headed.

Sales Manager for West Fraser, Brian Festerling, has seen a shift in how the highly impact-resistant panel is manufactured. "There has been an alignment of Canadian plywood production. The industry has gone from a little over 1.8 million square feet in 2014 to 1.99 million square feet in 2017. For the most part, Canadian production has aligned with Canadian consumption for the last five to six years. The housing sector in the United States collapsed in 2007 and we basically lost that market. At the time, the plywood industry was over producing for the Canadian market and was forced to down size. After a few years of pain, we are now benefiting from the current production and consumption balance. This balance has been good for the industry as a whole," Festerling said.

The sales lead for the specialty products division of one of North America's leading diversified wood products companies believes plywood will continue to outperform all substitute wood-based panels on the market. "The future of plywood is solid. Plywood is the original engineered wood product and is stronger, more durable, and lighter than any other wood-based panel. Plywood continues to be the panel of choice for home renovators, architects, and engineers."



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Although Festerling doesn't expect to see a new plywood mill built in Canada anytime soon, he feels existing wood manufacturers will invest heavily in new technologies and processes. "As with any industry, it's important to stay ahead of the curve. As a company, you must make a concerted effort to improve how you bring plywood to the marketplace from logging and manufacturing to sales and shipping," he concluded.

Michael Park of AFA Forest Products has seen a number of changes within the Canadian plywood industry. "Plywood's share of the overall panelboard market has shrunk, albeit slowly, over the past number of years to Oriented Strand Board (OSB) with new home construction being the largest shift. That said, many regions in Canada continue to lean on plywood more so than OSB due to climate and both builder and homeowner preference. Currently, the market share between OSB and plywood is split evenly and would be considered the norm rather than the niche," Park explained.



The national panel manager with the building products distribution company has seen a greater offering of mid-point grades. "Flooring with tighter faces and that have fully sanded features with one good side that cater to both home builders and industrial contractors are in high demand. The end-user is looking for a finished product that improves performance as well as overall installation ease. Improvements have also been made in the availability for fit for purpose plywood in agricultural, industrial, and commercial applications."

The industry veteran of 27 years continues to see import plywood competing with domestic production. "Offshore panels, particularly "A" Face Sanded plywood, have become more readily available over the past 10-to-15 years as global markets extend their reach. This has had an adverse effect on the Canadian producers with only one or two mills now offering Good One Side (G1S) plywood. At one point, there were three or four mills producing G1S plywood in Canada."

Trade between Canada and the United States on sheathing grades has become much easier. Depending on local market

conditions on both sides of the border coupled with affordability when factoring the exchange rate, we now see plywood coming into Canada from producers south of the border and vice versa. During the last 10 to 15 years, many of the mills south of the border obtained certification to stamp CSA for use in new home construction in Canada. The same can be said of the Canadian mills as they became certified to stamp for new home construction in the United States," he went on to say.

Logs costs and availability of veneer will continue to impact plywood prices. "The growth in Laminated Veneer Lumber (LVL) usage will put a greater strain on veneer availability. Mills will further scrutinize the best return on logs as they balance supply to sawmills and plywood plants. Veneer availability generally matches demand. However, the increased usage of LVL can put additional price pressure on veneer. As an industry, we have seen a significant reduction in the availability of Canadian Softwood Plywood, a direct result of the adverse effects of the pine beetle, and the trend will be a greater percentage of Douglas Fir Plywood (DFP)

There has been an alignment of Canadian plywood production. The industry has gone from 2.6 billion square feet in 2004 to 2 billion square feet five years later. This balance has been good for the industry as a whole.

being produced. Log costs are high and are reflective of lumber prices, which are historically high."

The native of Hockley Valley, Ontario remains confident that the plywood industry is on solid footing. "End-use applications will continue to rely on the positive features and benefits of plywood. Plywood is lighter than alternative sheathing such as OSB. And, plywood has more visual appeal when finished and exposed," Park concluded. **▶**



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# Expecting Further **Price Volatility** with Lumber

By Stephen Murdoch



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**T**he Canadian lumber industry is in for a ride. Record-breaking lumber prices coupled with housing market demands point to an unpredictable market.

President of The Home Improvement Warehouse, Mike Doyle, expects demand for Canadian lumber to remain high. “We should see some of the highest prices ever in 2018. Premium quality lumber is getting harder to source and the price is reflective

of this. Huge demand for this year and a limited supply will have an effect on price and availability. When all is said and done, it might not be a matter of how much the lumber costs but rather do you have product,” Doyle explained.

The head of one of Alberta’s largest home renovations material warehouse continues to see increased demand for treated wood. “Outside of the normal spruce framing lumber, treated wood is probably the most

We should see some of the highest prices ever in 2018. Premium quality lumber is getting harder to source and the price is reflective of this.

popular product for us. During the busy months we do a lot of decks and outside projects where treated lumber is required. This year, I expect treated lumber to hold a significant share of the lumber market.”

The 35-year industry veteran feels demand from south of the border will continue to dictate the price of lumber. “The United States is busy and buying what they need to keep up with demand. This is driving up the price in Canada and will continue to do so. The duties that have been introduced have done little to slow down wood headed south.” Doyle said.

While the timing of supply and demand forces for lumber can be unpredictable, the native of Calgary feels there are solutions that can be put into place. “Our plan is to align with a distribution partner that has strong supply contracts with the large lumber producers. As wood gets harder to find and the costs keep increasing, there is more of an advantage to partner our business with a distributor to guarantee consistent supply and manageable costs,” he concluded.

Shawn Schwartz, owner and manager at Schwartz Home Building Centre, predicts

continued lumber price volatility. “Prices are increasing on a regular basis. Demand from the United States and a stretched supply within our own borders has had a massive impact on lumber pricing,” Schwartz said.

Throughout his 20 years in the industry, Schwartz has seen his share of lumber trends. “The industry, as a whole, is undergoing major changes as demand grows globally. New applications for existing products, along with the development of innovative products are winning the day. This change will continue and will be driven by price along with supply and demand of a product.”

For the remainder of 2018, the resident of Stettler, Alberta feels premium grade lumber will remain a hot commodity. “We’re seeing more people wanting a premium grade lumber in 16’ and stud lengths. Demand for high-quality, environmentally responsible forest products should remain high,” he concluded.

Category Manager Commodities for McMunn & Yates, Daryl Fowler, has seen several lumber trends early on in the year. “For 2018, we’re seeing some of the highest prices in history, with transportation issues and questionable log decks, I don’t see relief in the short-term. Changes to the trucking industry have created a shortage of trucks willing to haul lumber. Freight rates have increased and I expect them to increase further. The allowable cuts in certain parts of British Columbia and Alberta have caused mills to go further to get logs, which again has caused prices to increase,” Fowler explained.

The lumber veteran of 36 years continues to see interest in framing materials. “With warmer weather arriving, treated lumber for backyard projects will be a big focus in the next couple of months. With treated lumber prices on the rise, composite decking will become a more attractive alternative.”

Fowler doesn’t believe duties levied south of the border have had an impact. “The import duties have not impacted the amount of product heading to the United States. The housing market is hot and they are buying to keep up with demand. This will continue to drive prices up and the demand will out-weigh the supply. Expect the supply of lumber to remain tight. Working closely with suppliers and logistic partners will become even more important,” he concluded. **▶**



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# Softwood Lumber in **High Demand**

By Stephen Murdoch



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It could be called the perfect storm. After nearly two decades of softwood lumber price declines, the industry has done an about-face. Softwood lumber demand south of the border, constraints on log supply in Western Canada and demands from across the globe have led to higher prices. In recognition of the changing marketplace, *Yardstick* spoke with industry stakeholders to get their thoughts on what the softwood lumber price hikes mean for consumers and retailers.

President of Pinkwood Ltd., Bradley Parsons, P.Eng., knows firsthand of the enormous burden that the price increase of softwood lumber has had on manufacturing facilities. "As a company,

we have been put at a disadvantage to larger more integrated companies that are willing to subsidize their value-added divisions. Pinkwood has needed to develop unique products, like their fire-rated I joists, provide quick turnaround times and use their freight advantage to stay competitive. Those who work at sawmills appear to think that the new price level is directly attributed to market demand. The initial driver was the application of countervailing duty and anti-dumping tariffs," Parsons explained.

The senior executive of the Calgary-based joist manufacturing facility believes the price of softwood lumber would fall if duties were removed. "If you take away the



I anticipate prices will start to decline late summer of this year. I expect the price of softwood lumber to go down about 10%.

duties, the price would drop drastically. However, both Canadian and American sawmills have never made so much money. At the end of the day, there is no impetus to come to an agreement."

The industry veteran of 20 years expects the price of softwood lumber to slightly dip. "I anticipate prices will start to decline late summer of this year. I expect the price of softwood lumber to go down about 10%. In the meantime, as a manufacturer, we are forced to pass on price increases that cover off some of the raw material increases to the wholesaler who in turn must pass the price increase onto the retailer," Parsons concluded.

Through the years, Chris Dirks of Burrows Lumber has seen a number of


price fluctuations as it relates to softwood lumber. There are a number of reasons we're seeing the price of softwood lumber creep upwards. The pine beetle crisis that took place in British Columbia some 10 years ago has played a big role. The infestation impacted the lodgepole pine forests of central British Columbia at the same time as the housing crisis south of the border. The deteriorating timber still had commercial value but limited shelf life," Dirks explained.

At the time, saw mills were forced to harvest these logs. "If the logs weren't processed, they would simply rot in the forest. This glut of lumber in the market at the time and little demand from the United States led to very low softwood lumber prices. Over time, this forced smaller operators to cease operations and sell their timber rights to larger companies that could weather the turbulent markets."

The native of Winnipeg contends the reduction in pine forests coupled with the devastating fires last summer in British Columbia has resulted in a diminished timber base. "In the past, there have been enough smaller producers across the

country to help buffer the rise in prices, but because these smaller producers have been unable to survive the low prices of the last 10 years, more production is in the hands of fewer and larger producers," Dirks went on to say.

The lumber trader equates what is happening to softwood lumber to what is facing other producers from across Western Canada. "The agricultural industry and many other sectors are facing the same challenges in that the economy of scale is trending toward larger producers. However, it is important to consider that the actual wood component in housing makes up a small portion of the overall cost of a house and for more than 30 years the price of lumber had not risen."

With 40 years of industry experience under his belt, Dirks feels we may have entered a new era in lumber pricing. "Companies will look for ways to increase efficiencies and put more products on the market. Perhaps, we will see log areas that were previously unprofitable come into play. Softwood lumber is a commodity and fluctuations are the nature of commodities," he concluded. 



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# OUR NATIONAL VOICE

By: Liz Kovach, President WRLA, [LKovach@wrla.org](mailto:LKovach@wrla.org), 1-800-661-0253 ext. 1

## YOU SPOKE, WE LISTENED, WE ACTED!

The first national leadership summit to shape the industry's national agenda took place in March of 2017 in Halifax and the following three priority areas were identified by leaders in the industry:

- Advocacy/United Voice
- Industry Image/Career Awareness
- Human Resources/People

We have now completed a full year of developing and implementing initiatives to address these three major priority areas. It is now time to provide our members with a progress update.

### 1 – Advocacy/United Voice

**Issue identified:** The lack of a national, united voice meant we didn't have a mechanism in place to proactively identify and act on issues that could have a negative impact on members of the LBM industry. We also didn't have necessary relationships with government officials to ensure that an industry that contributes 46 billion dollars to the Canadian economy and employs over 135,000 Canadians has a voice to leverage opportunities for growth.

**Action taken:** To be able to act effectively and create relationships with necessary government officials, the BMCC aligned with the Prospectus Group to help connect with and provide an in-depth understanding of the government structure thereby providing the ability to open doors for the industry. As a result, we are on the cusp of completing a political mapping project and finalizing our agenda for a productive day on Parliament Hill this coming October.

### 2 – Industry Image/Career Awareness

**Issue identified:** Lack of awareness of the career opportunities available within the industry and misconceptions that the LBM industry is minimum wage-type jobs.

**Action taken:** Developing and executing a social media campaign that shines a light on the opportunities within the industry complete with member profiles and testimonials. The following social media platforms have been activated: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.


### 3 – Human Resources/People

**Issue Identified:** Staffing has become an issue for a variety of sectors and the need

for good employees will continue to grow. We need to put our industry on the map.

**Action taken:** To help ensure industry opportunities are promoted, the BMCC has created a national job board where jobs will not only be posted free for association members, interested prospects will have the ability to apply for jobs from the main page. Association members will continue to send their job opportunities to their regional association contact and they will be sure to upload your posting. Please visit [www.buildingsupplycareers.ca](http://www.buildingsupplycareers.ca).

To ensure maximum impact can be achieved with our efforts, collaboration with our members will be key. As such, we ask you to share the career page website and social media platforms with your Human Resources and Marketing departments so they can play an active role in elevating awareness and opportunity in the industry.

If your company is interested in getting involved with BMCC and wants to help shape the future of the national agenda, please contact me at [lkovach@wrla.org](mailto:lkovach@wrla.org) or (204) 770-2416 and I will be happy to set up a meeting to discuss opportunities. 

## FOUNDING PARTNERS



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# Turning Building Materials into **a Vocation**

By Stephen Borer, TalentSphere Staffing Solutions

**W**hen you are a teenager, getting a job that pays the bills is more about finding something close to home, pays enough to fund your social life, and cuts you free from the shackles of relying on the bank of Mom and Dad.

The university student who works for a lumberyard to fund him/herself through school is learning the ropes in the yard, gaining sales skills working directly with customers, and educating him/herself about building materials products.

After completing college, a student who works on the construction site whilst looking for their 'career job' is learning a trade, using products and tools, and developing skills and knowledge of the building process.

These are just a few of the common 'seasonal' jobs within the industry that will see a new slate of fresh faces join the industry, often for a brief period each year, starting a new cycle every year. Very few are looking beyond their next pay cheque or thinking about their future career when making the decision to take this short-term position. Unfortunately, not many of these students and part-time employees, who are developing a solid foundation in the industry, are thinking long-term about a career in the industry.

How do we take this opportunity and steer this next generation to consider a career within the industry? They are employed for an entire summer, sometimes for three or four years whether that be part-time, seasonally or full-time. *What are we doing to keep them engaged in the industry?*

They may not consider their current role as a suitable 'career role' or see their employer as their employer for life.

That doesn't mean we are unable to instill an impression on their career objectives for the future and give them the opportunity to see the best sides of the industry.

The graduate with aspirations of climbing the corporate career ladder, who wants to become a manager one day, and then move to director and on to vice president might find the confines of a hometown LBM retailer too narrow. The allure of the city, bright lights, and larger companies are seemingly more attractive to a young mind exposed to

so many different options and "endless opportunities" as careers are marketed to this generation.

That same candidate might be extremely interesting to one of the big manufacturers based in the city. Their experience working with end customers, knowledge of the products, and their first-hand experience of being an end user might be invaluable experience for that manufacturer. This organization is more likely to be able to offer the candidate something that much more closely matches their aspirations. This might be a perfect match if we (as



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an industry) can make that match before their head is turned by one of the other industries competing for talent.

Almost all businesses within the building materials industry hire candidates at the very beginning of their career whether that is as a seasonal worker, an intern, a trainee, a labourer, or temporary worker. Those candidates will not necessarily stay on course within that *organization*, but it is everyone's responsibility to try to encourage them to stay within the *industry*.

Succession issues within the industry are well-known. It is obvious that we need this next generation to grow and develop in the industry to become our leaders of tomorrow.

## HOW DO WE TRANSITION THESE FLEXIBLE WORKERS INTO THINKING ABOUT LONG-TERM CAREER ROLES WITHIN THE INDUSTRY?

*1. Work as ONE industry to keep talent and effectively transition this talent into organizations that fit that individual's aspirations*

I believe the industry associations are key to providing a solution here. Can we offer information to all employees in the building materials sector to educate them on the career opportunities available to them? Can we speak to these entry level candidates and show them the career paths available to them? Can we help them start to understand that they are developing skills that can lead them into a career in this industry?

Often, the company managers who employ summer students do not want or need to hire them permanently. However, these are the first and second job seekers who we need to educate on what opportunities exist within all companies in the construction supply chain. We need to provide information on career opportunities to these individuals because they are the ones who are already working in a flexible job within the industry.

The Canadian Home Builders' Association (CHBA) for example, does a respectable job of providing information to a new home buyer or a potential renovator by providing step-by-step information online and in print on 'how to buy a new

As an industry, how do we take this opportunity and steer this next generation to consider a career within the industry? They are employed for an entire summer, sometimes for three or four years whether that be part-time, seasonally or fulltime. *What are we doing to keep them engaged in the industry?*

home' or 'how to go about a renovation.' Duplicating this model and applying it to the building materials industry could provide a similar platform for candidates and employees to access information on career development, education, training opportunities, and information on skills transferable across the industry. This should offer easily accessible and relevant information for candidates and provide a great marketing tool for the associations and industry itself. The Building Material Council of Canada (BMCC) has recently launched [buildingsupplycareers.com](http://buildingsupplycareers.com), which will hopefully provide some of this much-needed industry information.

*2. Develop career paths within our organizations that will attract the best candidates and those who aspire to lead organizations.*

There are very few organizations that are offering encouragement like: "Hey, come work for us! We will train you, educate you, and provide you with an excellent long-term career".

There are a few larger businesses in our industry, such as HomeDepot, that have their own structured intake programs and training programs for the next generation.

However, compared to other industries, the building materials industry in Canada

has been slow to create opportunities for first and second job seekers that build a foundation of skills and experience that sets them up for a successful career in the industry.

Look through the job boards as if you were an entry level candidate for the banking industry or consumer packaged goods industry and you will be wowed by graduate training opportunities, rotational programs, technical training programs, etc. Do the same exercise as an entry level candidate for the building materials industry and you will barely find any such opportunities.

Look to the US and far more firms are taking an active stance in attracting talent at the beginning of their careers. US building materials companies are more competitive when it comes to structured recruitment strategies to attract the next generation. There are rotational programs, formal training programs, university partnerships and a lot more information provided about careers within the industry.

Scale is obviously a hinderance to many building materials companies in Canada when it comes to these types of programs. Do they have the capacity to run a rotational program for a handful of new hires, for example? I would argue that it does not have to require a complete overhaul of our onboarding and training programs, but rather to be smarter with what we have.

There are natural progression paths through a building materials organization, from Inside Sales to Outside Sales; from Outside Sales to Sales Manager from Sales Manager to General Manager; from General Manager to Regional Manager, and so on. So why not advertise for someone to join your *sales career track*? Talk about the progression opportunities for top performers, sell the idea of a sales career within your organization, show them examples of employees who have climbed the ladder. It shouldn't be completely alien that when you subsequently hire these individuals, that you invest in appropriate training and development for them to prosper.

*3. Work more closely with further education organizations to give us the access to many of these potential candidates before they hit the job market.*

The WRLA'S involvement with SAIT (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology) to create pathways to employment within the industry through the NexGEN program is a great first step. Whilst the associations are probably best positioned to represent the industry and work nationally and regionally, this does not necessarily need to solely be the role of the association.

With the US as a precedent, there is an obvious trend in the industry that individual organizations are getting directly involved with tertiary education to develop and attract their next generation. My experience is that tertiary education is generally very receptive to organizations that get involved with their courses/education. These programs measure their success on producing employable graduates, so this active involvement from potential employers is strongly encouraged and markets the company as an invested organization in the industry.

#### 4. Tailor our message to the next generation.

Amongst all the industries that I have worked within Canada the building materials sector is probably the one with the longest tenured employees. It is an industry that really has built and provided careers for

thousands of individuals across the country, and yet it feels like we have lost the ability to articulate that to the next generation.

The generation that we are targeting wants to know what they get back from the employer. More than generations before them, they see the employment relationship as a mutually beneficial contract, not a one-sided agreement. We need to adapt and sell to this need by demonstrating the opportunities that we do provide. We need to better articulate and communicate to potential employees the opportunities that exist within building materials. We need to show them that they can develop rewarding careers within our industry.

As individual organizations we need to move away from advertising a 'job' and think about selling a 'career.' As an industry, and through our associations, we need to take responsibility to educate potential employees of the career paths available. We need to shift the perception of the industry from stable and conservative to dynamic and people-oriented. We need to be clear on the career benefits we offer and be proactive in communicating them to as many people as we can.

Developing a continuous flow of talent into the building materials industry is a complex challenge. Every manager in this industry is driving a margin and pushing the commercial aspects of their day to day business. Not every seasonal worker makes a great long-term employee. But with the seasonal nature of construction and the building materials industry, we do annually see an intake of potential candidates for longer term careers in the industry. We can just harness that potential.

As an industry, we need to make talent a priority and we need both the associations and individual organizations to be proactive in creating an image for the building materials industry that it can be a vocation, not just a part-time job. We have a unique opportunity to harness talent due to our flexible workforce and need all members of the industry to work together to increase the interest of the next generation. **■**

*Stephen Borer is Director of TalentSphere Staffing Solutions, Canada's only specialist recruitment firm focused on the building supply industry.*

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# WRLA Golf Season is here

By *Tom Bell, WRLA Chair*

**HELLO EVERYONE,** at this time of year I hope to find you extremely busy. Everyone I have been speaking with says business seems very positive for the year and Building Material prices are up but consistent. Oil prices are up, which should be good for the Alberta and Saskatchewan markets. Farmers are getting their crops in. Some rain would be great.

This issue of the *Yardstick* features the Lumber and Plywood Markets. There are many people who can speak on these topics far better than me, so I will leave that to the experts. My two bits though are that I find it amazing and interesting that in a world of incredible changes and in my 37 years in this industry (and long before that), we still build the majority of homes with 2x4 and 2x6 lumber, we still use 4x8 sheathing, and we still use drywall. There is nothing wrong with this I just find it interesting.

Need a fun day during your busy summer season? Join us at one or all the WRLA Golf Tournaments. All you suppliers bring a dealer, for all you dealers bring a supplier. Make it a great day of fun and business. Our WRLA Memorial Golf Tournament will be Wednesday, August 22<sup>nd</sup> at St. Boniface Golf Club in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This event sold-out early last year so book soon. The annual Calgary Classic will be Thursday, September 6<sup>th</sup> at Sundre Golf Club in Sundre, Alberta. The Kenosee Golf Tournament will be Wednesday, September 12<sup>th</sup> at Kenosee Lake, Saskatchewan. More information and registration details are available on the WRLA website, [wrla.org](http://wrla.org).

As your new WRLA Chair and with a new WRLA office staff this past year, I ask you to ENGAGE with us and send in your feedback: the good and the not so good. I am so proud of Liz and her team on the new ideas and goals they have set forth and are achieving. This doesn't mean we haven't had some growing pains along the way. I am proud to be part of this great organization. We are working hard to make the WRLA Buying Show the best in the industry. We are taking the Educational Programs to a new and higher level. We have an Awards program second to none. We have a first-class magazine published six times a year. We are part of the BMCC working as a national voice. Plus, industry surveys, golf

tournaments, WRLA News, free career postings, group insurance plans, and many other benefits.

Please take some time to read this issue of the *Yardstick* and pass it onto one of your younger staff to help your company and the WRLA grow stronger. Help us grow together.

My phone is always on (204) 479-9386.

Thank you and have a great selling season! **▶**



Need a fun day during your busy summer season? Join us at one, or all of the WRLA Golf Tournaments.

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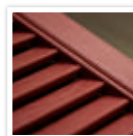
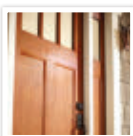
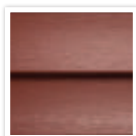
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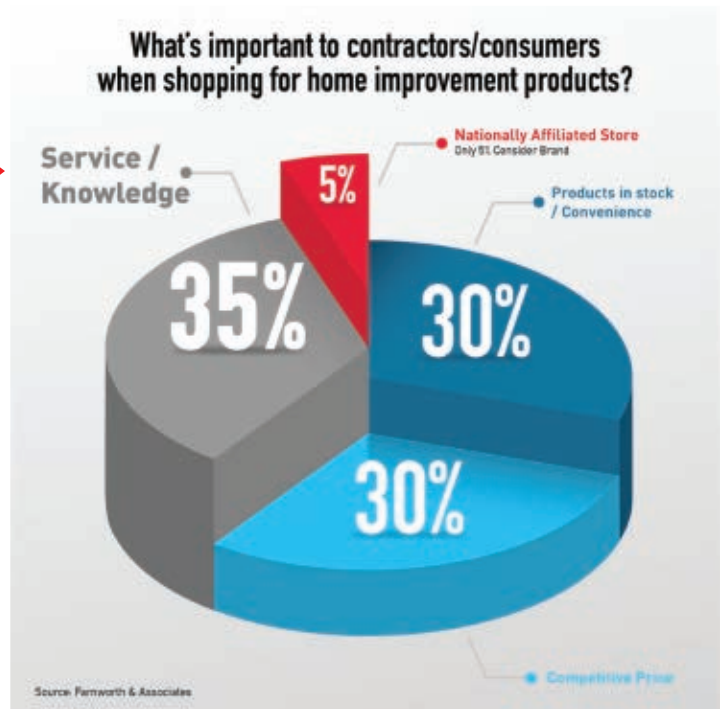
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