

editor's note



AS MY DAUGHTER JULIA ENTERED THE FOURTH GRADE LAST FALL, SHE WAS OFFERED THE OPPORTUNITY TO STUDY AN INSTRUMENT. After carefully considering her options (her school gives the kids a couple of weeks to play with a variety of instruments ranging from drums to violas), she chose the clarinet.

At first, all that emanated from her room were a series of discordant squeaks. But over the next few months a tune gradually emerged, and at the recent fourth grade band concert, I was amazed how a group of students who had never picked up instruments before could form an ensemble and play recognizable songs.

The process isn't that dissimilar to when a new employee starts in a new industry. Many of the non-technical employees at AISC have never before had much experience with the design and construction industry. And for some, their first real exposure comes at NASCC: The Steel Conference. They're suddenly exposed to the full range of products used in the industry, from design and detailing software to bolts and welding equipment to coatings and safety equipment to full beam lines cutting through steel like butter.

But even for those with long experience, the exhibition floor at the conference is often an eye-opener. For me, the **wow** effect started with something pretty simple. Like several other exhibitors, International Paint was showcasing their line of intumescent coatings. (Intumescent coatings are a type of fire protection that is applied like paint, looks like paint, but expands to protect the steel in the event of a fire. If you do a quick Google search, you can find several videos of the process. It's pretty cool stuff.) In Europe and Australia, the trend is to shop-apply the intumescent. But in the U.S., a lot of people are concerned about the coating's durability. So International Paint's solution was to coat a piece of steel and let people hit it with a ball peen hammer. After three days of abuse, the sample showed nary a scratch. Right now all that's holding intumescent paint back from dominating the fire protection industry is its cost. Its advantages are better aesthetics, better durability, and the potential for off-site application (which removes one trade from the job site). And rumor has it that another vendor is expecting to introduce a new system into the market that will substantially reduce the cost of off-site intumescent applications.

The next **wow** moment was at Peddinghaus'

booth. They showed a working beta version of their new "Ring of Fire." This new fabrication tool consists of a plasma torch on a rotating ring—though this description does it no justice. The ring can rotate or spin, so it can reach the steel's entire surface. It can cut, make holes, cope, etc. It does it quickly and cheaply in a relatively small footprint machine. Peddinghaus isn't alone in introducing new plasma equipment (several other vendors showed pictures of machines).

And it wouldn't surprise me to see the industry moving in that direction in the near future. (For a more detailed look at the show, check out Geoff Weisenberger's story on page 20.)

One concern I saw as an undercurrent to all of the excitement on the exhibition floor was over BIM. While every software manufacturer was jumping on the Building Information Model bandwagon, and while almost every designer acknowledged it as the future of the design industry, there were some concerns that we weren't paying enough attention to the details. By that, I mean it appears that everyone is trying to get the model going, but they're sometimes forgetting to also concentrate on interoperability, to make sure that all of the programs can talk to each other so that the information can be transferred in usable form.

The steel industry has essentially solved this problem through the CIS/2 neutral file format, but it's important that other industries don't lose sight of this essential issue. Otherwise, it would be like a band playing from different sheets of music. And even my daughter knows better than that.

SCOTT MELNICK
EDITOR

P.S. On a personal note, I'd like to extend best wishes to Bill Liddy. After more than 50 years in the steel industry, including more than a decade as an AISC regional engineer and a stint in the AISC Steel Solutions Center, Bill has retired.

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