

Spreading the Certification Word

BY TODD ALWOOD

The new year will be about reinforcing—and raising—the value of AISC certification.

AISC CERTIFICATION HAS SET the standard for quality in the structural steel industry for decades and has worked tirelessly promoting the rigors that our certified facilities complete to achieve this designation. So it is with great excitement that I join this team to continue these efforts and help educate our industry about the benefits of certification and what a quality management system can do.

I hope those of you in the Upper Midwest already are familiar with me in my prior role as your Regional Engineer, and for others I may have met you at one of the North American Steel Construction Conferences or you may have read a past article of mine. Regardless, I would like to take this opportunity to give a little background and why I am so excited about joining the AISC Certification team.

Since 2002, I have been a member of the AISC marketing department with two main focuses: first as Senior Advisor with the Steel Solutions Center and most currently as Regional Engineer for the Upper Midwest. In the first position, I was able to help promote the resources of the Steel Solutions Center—most notably our Conceptual Solutions, which help demonstrate the efficiencies of using a steel-framed system on a project in terms of cost and schedule (please visit www.aisc.org/steelsolutionscenter for more information on this and additional resources). In the latter position, I had the opportunity to meet with a wide range of design and construction professionals to promote the benefits of steel construction on a project-by-project basis in my region through presentations, site tours, and office calls. For more information on our Regional Engineers, please visit www.aisc.org/myregion.

In moving over to AISC Certification, I received several questions as to “why?”—didn’t I like what I was doing? Of course I did! But this new position offered an excellent opportunity to work closer with an important facet of AISC that deserves as much “shouting from the rooftops” as I did for structural steel in my previously role.

As a Regional Engineer, the topic came up in every fabricator visit throughout my region, whether or not that fabricator was certified. If they were, the conversation would tend to focus on current changes to the certification program, the Standard, and the No Waivers Program to just name a few. If they were not certified, I typically answered a wide range of questions focusing on the challenges of writing a quality manual for the first time and what resources were available to the expected timeframe of the overall process. These conversations continued to increase my appreciation for the importance of

certification and what a significant topic it is in our industry.

My experiences with the design community were along similar lines, because engineers and architects are concerned about quality on their construction projects, too. As an engineer who had previously specified certification on my steel projects, I was able to take what I had learned in the field and while working at AISC to deliver a value-added message to this group on the benefits of our certified facilities and adding this degree of quality to their projects. They wouldn’t recommend hiring the services of a non-licensed architect or engineer, so why would they hire a non-certified fabricator?

My two different roles, with Marketing and Certification, aren’t as different as one would think. Both are a chance to highlight to our industry the strong advantages of structural steel—either as a way of providing possible solutions to their project needs or ensuring that they have a quality product when they build their project.

In 2010, I will be working with our certified fabricators and erectors to promote our current certification programs to the design and construction industry. In addition, there is a specific need for each of us to reach out and educate our local general contractors, code officials, owners, architects, and engineers about what a quality system is and what it means to the steel industry. All too often certification requirements are waived by these individuals because they do not have the proper knowledge and understanding. It will be one of my missions to work with you to aggressively combat these situations. Plus, I will be working to increase AISC Certification’s visibility and expand its acceptance through conferences, seminars, and lunch-and-learns across the U.S.

In addition this year we will be creating new resources and additions to our programs, and updating our website, to help not only our certified facilities but also to reach further into the design community. Be sure to watch for these items starting in the next Quality Corner. And, I look forward to hearing from each of you, so don’t hesitate to contact me. **MSC**

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Quality Corner is a monthly feature that covers topics ranging from how to specify a certified company to how long it takes to become a certified company. If you are interested in browsing our electronic archive, please visit www.aisc.org/QualityCorner.