

Biggest. NASCC. Ever.

No Blues in St. Louis

BY GEOFF WEISENBERGER

OPTIMISM. GENUINE OPTIMISM.

That was the tone of this year's NASCC: The Steel Conference, the largest one yet (see this month's People to Know column for more on that).

Conferences, as a rule, tend to create a buzz and send people back to their daily work lives with a renewed sense of purpose and energy, even in bad economic times. But at this year's show—which took place in the America's Center Convention Complex in St. Louis, just down the street from the historic, steel-framed Eads Bridge over the Mississippi and a stone's throw from the steel-clad Gateway Arch—there seemed to be a more insistent, widespread attitude that things are actually getting better in the construction world. As John Cross indicated in his session “Building Construction Forecast: Who, What, I Don't Know, To-

morrow and Naturally,” the design and construction market is “coming off the bottom—albeit slowly.” And NASCC's organizers, exhibitors and speakers did their best to prepare attendees for the improving economic climate.

Jim Pancero, Wednesday's keynote speaker, challenged attendees to improve upon their organizations' best practices. When developing relationships with new or existing clients, he explained, listening to their needs and responding to them—instead of making assumptions about what they want—is essential to winning or maintaining business. It's especially important in this day and age, as business decisions have become much more social—especially amongst those who have never known life without technologies and platforms like the Internet, email, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. In short, it's important to know how clients from different generations—not just yours—make their decisions and to engage them accordingly.

Speaking of those who have never known life without technology, dozens of college students were on hand for the third annual Students Connecting with Industry Sessions. The half-day program, sponsored by the AISC Education Foundation and organized in cooperation with SE Solutions, began with the session “Tips for Starting Your Career,” presented by John Hooper of Magnusson Klemencic Associates and Karl Frank of Hirschfeld Industries (AISC/NSBA member and AISC Certified fabricator); continued with a tour of the exhibit hall; and concluded with the Direct Connect Student Career and Mentoring Session. The latter was an opportunity for the students to converse one-on-one with industry experts and representatives from more than 30 companies.

“SICS provided me a great platform to develop my network,” commented one student.

Another praised the program for “developing experiences that are impossible to obtain from just being in the classroom.”

Those who have been in the working world for a while were also able to learn something new—or be reminded of age-old lessons like “The best designs provide fabricators with flexibility” (one of Cliff Schwinger's suggestions in his session “50 Tips for Designing Constructible and Economical Steel Buildings”). Other sessions posed questions like “Is Your Structural Software Really Doing What You Think it is?” “Are Your Detailing Standards Achieving the Quality You Want?” “Long-Range Planning Erectors: Does it Work?” and “What Does it Mean to Be a BIM Coordinator?”



The exhibit hall also did its part to spur the sense of a bright future, with roughly 200 exhibitors putting their innovative products and equipment on display. In fact, attendees had even more incentive than usual to chat with exhibitors, as this year they were given the opportunity to vote for their favorite products for the NASCC Hot Products competition. (The winners will appear in our August issue.) Most exhibitors reported significant traffic at their booths, and the general consensus was that conversations weren't so much about what would happen when things get better but rather what will happen now that things are getting better.

"People are talking to each other—really talking," noticed Mark Selvaggio, president and CEO of Selvaggio Steel (AISC member), who brought his entire fabrication shop staff to the show from Springfield, Ill.

Jim Long of J.B. Long, Inc., had an unorthodox but effective way of spurring conversation. Dressed in lab coats and thick "scientific" glasses, he and a fellow employee amused attendees with gag products such as magnetic holes, Insta-Beam (Just add water!) and the Sky Hook (which magically comes out of the sky for those "impossible" lifts).

"I could bring drawings," said Long, a detailer. "But this way people remember me."

One could argue that the venue for this year's conference dinner, the City Museum, also boosted optimism—if for no other reason than that the venue itself makes a strong argument

for the idea that anything is possible. The City Museum is... difficult to describe. Housed in an historic building (which used to be a shoe factory and warehouse) in downtown St. Louis, it is a bizarre, surreal, whimsical space composed of mismatched architectural and art objects and recycled or repurposed materials. There is a ten-story spiral slide, a network of caves and tunnels and a multi-story tree house—and that's just the beginning. Attendees were able to gather and mingle in countless strange and varied spaces, such as a giant, stone whale or an old walk-in bank safe. If anyone was nervous about approaching someone they didn't know, the museum itself served as an instant ice-breaker (as did the barbecue sauce fountains). It spurred the imagination and encouraged new perspective—both very important as the construction market turns upward again.

Speaking of upward, next year NASCC heads north of the border to Toronto. Be sure to bring your passport, a coat and an appetite for poutine!

MSC



SteelDay Sculpture Competition Winner

Entries for the second annual SteelDay Sculpture Competition were on display at NASCC in St. Louis, where attendees voted for their favorite. The only rules for the competition are that entrants must be AISC Full or Associate Members and entries have to fit into a 2-ft x 2-ft x 2-ft box and be made entirely of steel.

Five sculptures were entered into the competition this year, and the winner is "Steel Life-Cycle." Designed by Bruce Helmreich of Michelmann Steel Company, Quincy, Ill., the sculpture illustrates the various stages in the life of a structural steel assembly, from design to pouring molten steel into a cast to tightening the bolts on the final assembly.

Helmreich, who has been with Michelmann for 38 years, built the sculpture in his home workshop in the evenings over a period of roughly six weeks (his son, Ryan, also a Michelmann employee, assisted with some of the welding).

"The guidelines for the competition mentioned some of the benefits of steel construction, including sustainability," said Helmreich. "As I thought of this, a ladle pouring steel came to mind. I took a few steps out of the actual process and 'poured' the molten

steel directly into a wide-flange column shape. The erection step is represented by an ironworker's spud wrench and the bolted connection, with one bolt still to be installed. The *Steel Construction Manual*, shop drawing and pencil show the detailing and design phase of steel construction."

Helmreich used several different processes, from old-fashioned blacksmithing to modern laser etching, to make the sculpture. All of the material used came from scrap hoppers or from short drops at Michelmann's shop. The ladle was made from a section of 6-in.-diameter pipe. Tapered sections were cut from the pipe, which was heated and hammered, then welded and ground to its final shape. The "molten" steel is a piece of 1/2-in. plate that was cut to fit into the ladle, then heated, bent and welded to a 1 1/4-in. round rod, which was welded to the top of the W5x16 column.

The base is a piece of 16-gauge plate steel with a shop drawing laser etched on it, and the mini *Manual* is made from 16-gauge plate that was bent and welded together; the cover is also laser etched. The pencil is made of a 3/16-in. steel hex Allen wrench that was straightened, sharpened and painted.



You can view all five entrants at SteelDay's Facebook page (visit www.aisc.org/steelday and click the Facebook link or login to Facebook and search on "SteelDay").