

2015 RTA Tie Grading Seminar

A CLASS OF FIRSTS IN A FIRST-CLASS LOCALE

“This was a class of firsts,” said Marshall Allen, RTA Education Committee chairman, about RTA’s 2015 Crosstie Grading Seminar. “We not only had the largest class ever at 49 students, but it was also the most diverse in terms of students’ job responsibilities.”

The seminar was held in Clanton, Ala., at the Stella-Jones tie treating plant. The 2015 seminar class was very receptive, according to the instructors. The folks at Stella-Jones’ plant provided everything students and instructors needed and more. Their attention to detail was unparalleled.

The three-day seminar, packed with instruction from some of the most knowledgeable professionals in the business, paid off with the highest test scores RTA has seen in years. Let the pictures below tell the rest of the story. ■

DAY 1

The first day begins with a brief history of the railroads and the engineering principles behind today’s complex railroad systems. The discussion begins with track structure and the vital role wood ties play every day in safe, reliable service over more than 200,000 miles of track. The class participated in an in-depth presentation of wood structure with an emphasis on why wood outperforms all other materials in the track environment.



John Zuspan of The Track Guy Consultants presents an overview of modern track engineering principles and the principles that govern tie specifications.



The students use their wood ID sample boxes and notebooks to compare different species characteristics, along the way discovering the definitions of words like “hardwood,” “softwood,” “tyloses,” “rays,” “pores,” and “resin canals.” Pictured L-R: Muriel Cormier of Stella-Jones, Gislene Gregiore of Stella-Jones, Canada and Eddie Horton of Stella-Jones, Mary Allen of Stella-Jones.



Terry Conners begins the wood ID portion with a look at the properties of different tree species.



Terry Conners and his assistant Jim Ringe illustrate how air can pass through species with open pores like red oak, and not through woods with obstructed pores like white oak.



Students use knives, smell, and loupes to discern one species from another. Pictured L-R: Chuck Shaw of Koppers Performance Chemicals, Charles Keller of Stella-Jones.



To illustrate, Conners gives each student a small block of red oak and some soap bubbles for some hands-on fun. Pictured: Ross Hickok of Koppers.



Stella-Jones generously sponsored an ample reception for the participants who dug in eagerly after a full day of instruction.

DAY 2

New this year were cut tie ends from McCreary County Hardwoods to help the students get a better idea of what different species look like when cut into ties. Students also learn what defects look like and what makes an acceptable tie for main-line or industrial use, and what requires a tie to be culled.



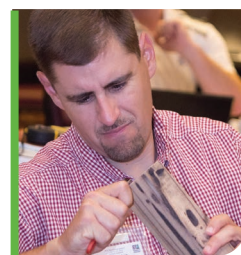
Terry Conners brought four boxes of cut-end ties for the students to examine in four groups.



Chris Caric of Stella-Jones and instructor Randy Baileys examine the tie ends together.



Instructor Adam Taylor discusses species with Ray Harris and Tim English of Stella-Jones.



The first test is with big blocks of wood. Jeremy Cole of Southern Company takes a small slice to try to determine this species.



Big Block winners Josh Wagner of National Salvage and Jim Reynolds of Stella-Jones look on as Robert Pearce explains the differences between species.



Adam Taylor calls out the answers before looking at the key. He would have aced the test had he been a student!



RTA President Kenny Dailey of Stella-Jones and Plant Manager Jeff Jordan pause for a photo at the plant.



Terry Conners helps Jamie Mitchell and Dalton Harris of Stella-Jones with the practicum with the full-sized ties.



Anthony Weiss of BNSF takes a good look at block number five of 30 comparing it to the pictures in the notebook.



Ray Harris of Stella-Jones uses Jimmy Watt's exclusive TieGauge to measure the wane on the practice tie.



A welcome reception sponsored by Mike Goldston of Brewco greeted the students as they returned to the hotel.



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DAY 3

A species and defects review is part of the third day along with a reduced speed grading station test and the mechanics of treating. After a full morning, the class takes another trip to the plant for the final exam with full-sized ties. The usual plant tour was canceled due to the heavy rain causing safety concerns.



Jim Ringe (Above) teaches the wood preservation portion of the seminar. Randy Baileys (Left) discusses seasoning, treating and quality control.

Terry Conners pours black dye into a small pressure chamber to simulate wood-treating compounds ...



...before donning his Wildcats championship T-shirt to protect his RTA polo when removing the pressure-treated wood from the container.

A tap with a hammer on the chisel and the students can see how far the dye has penetrated the wood.

2015 Tie Grading 283: Darlene Metz of Stella-Jones puzzles over the final exam.



Kenny Speigner of Stella-Jones consults his notebook for help on the final exam.



Learning Aids

When Tie Grading Seminar students arrive, they are given a box filled with visual aids to help them learn species of ties. The vast majority of species utilized today are hardwoods—mostly from Eastern and Midwestern hardwood forests. The mix of species depends on the application and locale of sourcing, but a good rule of thumb is that 50-60 percent of ties come from oaks and hickory, while 40-50 percent are from other mixed hardwoods. ■

Thank You!

The RTA Tie Grading Seminar Class of 2015 would like to extend a special thank you to Stella-Jones Director of Marketing and current RTA President Kenny Dailey and Stella-Jones Clanton, Alabama, Plant Manager Jeff Jordan for their efforts to make this year's seminar such a rousing success. We'd especially like to express our appreciation for their generosity to Brewco and Stella-Jones. These companies sponsored the receptions during the event. Finally, the students and RTA are grateful for the instructors who volunteer their time before, during, and after the seminar to make it a success. We really can't thank you enough! ■



STUDENTS:

Class Photo: Paul Kunkel of Bell Lumber & Pole; Sam Williams of Bell Timber; Anthony Weiss of BNSF Railway; Cody Fox and Brennan Smith of K&S Lumber; Mitch Bentley, Stephen Cooper, Jonathan Donelli, Ross Hickok, Justin McDonald and Keith Sanford of Koppers Inc.; Chuck Shaw of Koppers Performance Chemicals; Adam Thornburgh of Linden Lumber LLC; Luke Galan of Lone Star Specialties; Josh Wagner of National Salvage & Service Corp.; Brian Lindsey of Natural Wood Solutions; Keith Shelton of Norfolk Southern; Brian Bond, Jeremy Cole and Adam Massey of Southern Co.; Eddie Horton, James Jones, Mary Allen, Dwaine Braswell, Christopher Caric, Don Compton, Daniel Dean, Tim English, Brandon Forsyth, Dalton Harris, Ray Harris, Dave Hess, Charles Keller, Jim Laltese, Matt Maxwell, Darlene Mertz, Ed Morris, Matthew Ray, James Reynolds, Tom Riser, Kenny Speigner, Marlin Wilson, Muriel Cronier and Gislene Gregoire of Stella-Jones Corp.; Ren Heartstill of Transload Limited LLC; Dan Graham of Thomasson Company; and Matt Eller and Chaz Jones of VAE Nortrak.



INSTRUCTORS

Randy Baileys, Adam Taylor, Marshall Allen, Jim Ringe, Terry Conners, Robert Pearce and Stella-Jones Plant Manager Jeff Jordan.