



Tie Grading Seminar Instructors



JAMES M. RINGE, Ph.D., is an Emeritus Professor of Forestry at the University of Kentucky, where he teaches wood science, identification, and utilization, among other subjects. He holds Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees from the University of Kentucky and a Ph.D. from Purdue University. **Dr. Ringe joined the Tie Grading Seminar faculty in 2012 and currently serves as the Chair of the RTA Education Committee.**



ROBERT PEARCE is the Quality Assurance Technical Services Manager for Stella-Jones Corporation's Railroad Products division. He began his career in 1991 as an inspector of industrial-treated wood products for an independent inspection agency, where he held various roles until 2015. In 2015, he became the Production Manager at Stella-Jones' Goshen, Va., facility. In 2018, Rob transitioned to the Quality Assurance Department for Railroad Crossing (RXR) products at Stella-Jones. **He has been an instructor for the RTA's Tie Grading Seminar for 13 years and is a member of RTA's Education Committee.**



BRAD CRAWFORD, with a B.S. in Forestry from the University of Kentucky, has a family furniture business background. He began as a Procurement Manager at RailWorks, then moved to Tangent Rail and Stella-Jones in the same role. Joining Norfolk Southern in 2015 as a Forestry Specialist, he inspects new ties and timbers and collaborates on track inspections. Brad became Director of Quality Assurance for Stella-Jones in 2020, overseeing Railroad Tie Division quality. Involved with the Tie Grading Seminar since 2005, **Brad began serving as an instructor in 2016**, and is active in AAR, AWPA, and AREMA. In his free time, he enjoys hunting, fishing, and playing bass at his church.



NATE IRBY, Ph.D., is a wood scientist from Mississippi and the current Executive Director of the Railway Tie Association. He attended Mississippi State University and North Carolina State University, where he taught classes, conducted research projects, and performed cooperative extension work in the forestry and forest products fields. In 2013, Nate joined Union Pacific as Category Manager of Engineering, overseeing its wood tie and timber programs. **He became an RTA Tie Grading Seminar instructor in 2017.** Nate was hired by RTA in November 2021 as its 10th Executive Director.



JOSH KNOCH graduated from Illinois State University with a Bachelor's in Business Administration and has worked at Koppers for over 15 years. He has held various positions of increasing responsibility, primarily at production facilities. Josh has worked at three treating plants, holding different positions and responsibilities at each. Currently, he is an Operations Manager based at the company headquarters in Pittsburgh, overseeing five Koppers treating plants. **Josh has been an instructor at the Tie Grading Seminar since 2021.**



JORDAN ESTES entered the hardwood industry in 2005 as an NHLA-certified Lumber Inspector. In 2008, he attended the RTA tie grading seminar and shifted focus to ties in 2010 with Gross and Janes. Transitioning to a third-party inspection role with Lee Inspection in 2014, Jordan inspected ties and utility poles and conducted plant quality audits for Norfolk Southern RR. He joined Stella-Jones' Quality Team in April 2021 as a Quality Assurance Supervisor. **Jordan is currently in his second year as a Tie Grading Seminar instructor.**