A Look at Emerging Trends

Three iaWCC/GDCI Future Watchers Discuss Trends
That Will Effect Wall and Ceiling Contractors

Inflation . . .
Materials shortages . . .
Manpower shortages . . .
. . . and technological changes along with the unexpected future.

These are some of the considerations that wall and ceiling contractors will be pondering in the next year or so — and their importance came out loud and clear at iaWCC/GDCI’s 62nd Annual Convention in Atlanta. Because the Momentum established a few years ago is vital and necessary for the industry, CONSTRUCTION DIMENSIONS pulled together iaWCC/GDCI Executive Vice President Joe M. Baker, Jr., and two chairmen of the Continuing Study Council, the association group charged with the responsibility to keep an eye on the future.

These two chairmen are John Macioce, executive with Easley & Rivers, Inc., Monroeville, Pa., who is current CSC chairman and an ex-officio member of the association executive committee, along with — to lend a broad perspective — Bill Duguid, of the William A. Duguid Company, Mt. Prospect, Ill., who served as the first chairman of the CSC.

The ground rules for the three-way interview were simple: the participants were asked to discuss where the wall and ceiling industry is right now, where it’s probably going in the next year — or perhaps longer — and, what should the industry, he doing now in preparation.

DIMENSIONS: John, as current CSC chairman, we’ll throw you into the den first with the question: what is the major problem facing contractors now that will he with them for awhile?

MACIOCE: I don’t think there is any question that the answer to that is availability of materials, or, rather, non-availability of materials.

And this is not a problem that will end quickly. We simply can’t get what we need to build. The steel shortage, for example, is a chronic one.

DUGUID: I think you have to add manpower shortage, too, John. There’s still the problem of getting

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good, qualified young people into the trades.

BAKER: It’s interesting that manufacturers and suppliers are already responding to these problems. More and more work is being done at the factory level.

DUGUID: Architects and owners are ordering more and more finished products directly from the factory. And these products are supplementary to what we do as contractors.

As larger components are built in the factory, as prefabrication and factory assembly increase, we contractors must recognize and embrace these changes as progress and utilize our expertise and manpower to do this work. If we don’t, we will lose it to others.

MACIOCE: On that subject, I recall meeting a European contractor when the CSC was in Africa last year. His task was simply to plug together simple, fully completed modules into an apartment.

BAKER: That’s right. He seemed more of a manufacturer’s engineer than a contractor in the classical sense.

MACIOCE: And that’s the trend here, too. You can see entire bathroom units on the market — and they’re being installed. It’s not just completed fixtures. These units contain the walls, floor, ceiling, everything.

DUGUID: And it’s obvious in many areas of our trade. The prefabricated panels are just one example. Metal studs were developed to replace wood studs and to be erected in the field. Today a major portion of this work is put together in the factory.

MACIOCE: Jim Brunemann, in Cincinnati, and Bill Carroll, of Albuquerque, are doing this presently: they’ll build panels for you right in their shops and ship them.

DIMENSIONS: What’s the industry implications for all this erector set mentality, this assembling of larger and larger components?

DUGUID: The immediate answer has to be greater emphasis on engineering and business management.

MACIOCE: I go along with that assessment. In a factory situation you have better control on materials, labor, production and productivity. The production operation alone provides you with controls that simply aren’t available on the job site.
This means better budgeting and more acceptable cost projections. These are advantages that architects and owners find very attractive, especially with the price of money what it is today.

**DUGUID:** It’s a trend that will force changes within the contracting industry, and, I suspect, produce larger, more diversified contractors. The one getting the big job will be the larger contractor, while the smaller, one-service contractor will find more and more of his markets restricted.

**BAKER:** From an industry viewpoint, the educational element will need to be expanded then, won’t it?

**MACIOCE:** Yes, more than ever before, Joe. We’re no longer in the trolley car era where a mechanic and his tools rode to the end of the line and that’s where the contractor’s marketing area ended.

Today, we have big, traveling contractors covering a wider area — and the contractors are getting bigger and the area is wider.

**DUGUID:** As the metropolitan area changes, the contractor must change . . . and expand with it. And this means a greater emphasis on labor relations.

**BAKER:** Our national agreements are gaining in importance. With wider areas to consider, there’ll be a much greater need for these kinds of agreements — if only to accommodate contractors who travel.

**DUGUID:** That’s right. When a man travels from one local to another, it’s not just his wages but his fringes and benefits — and these can account for 30%-40% of the package — that are critical.

**MACIOCE:** These differentials represent the reason — a major reason anyway — for the trend toward consolidation among locals into single, more efficient organizations.

**DUGUID:** The trend in some labor organizations is toward larger locals or district councils. They can do more for their members, and, frankly, a better job for the industry.

**DIMENSIONS:** John, if you had to pinpoint three major goals for the association in labor relations, what would they be?

**MACIOCE:** Come up with three right now? When do the hard questions start?

 Seriously, though. I’d say we should be looking for a national agreement for wider area bargaining for uniform wages and fringes, the elimination of the differentials we were discussing.

Second, would be reciprocity between various locals on fringes.

**BAKER:** You don’t mean one big, national wage and welfare scheme for the building trades, I hope?

**MACIOCE:** Oh, no, Joe. It wouldn’t work.

**DUGUID:** There are just too many legitimate differences, in geography, Continued on next page
work requirements, that sort of thing for “one answeritis” to work. There would have to be room for individual accommodation — but provide reasonable reciprocity so a mechanic won’t hesitate to work in another local’s area.

MACIOCE: And the third, of course, would be to attack — and I mean attack — these confounded jurisdictional squabbles.

DUGUID: And these goals are all tied in with increased emphasis on apprenticeship. We need good people. My company is turning down work right now because we anticipate another summer when skilled mechanics will not be available in the numbers required.

BAKER: What about a new approach to apprentice training such as the ABC program where they’re training people on a comprehensive basis, capable of working alongside craftsmen of different skills . . . electricians, tapers, plumbers, cement workers, plasterers . . . wherever they’re needed?

DUGUID: That’s a good idea, Joe, and is part of the answer. But I think eventually we may see an amalgamation of international unions into larger building trades groups. There could be one, say, to include all of the trowel trades; another for carpenters, lathers, ironworkers and roofers, and perhaps a third for the electrical and mechanical trades.

MACIOCE: The consolidation of trades as Bill just explained certainly would help when it comes to jurisdictional problems. I swear that some times my employees are fighting so hard over jurisdictions that they forget they’re working for the company and not the union.

DUGUID: At the same time, I think we on the management side have to get our act together, too. We can’t expect the unions . . . the other fellow to be making all the changes while we go on in our own “business as usual” mode.

BAKER: If you’re talking about the industry, I think the iaWCC and GDCI consolidation went a long way toward ending much of the management fragmentation in the wall and ceiling specialties.

MACIOCE: But the job is still unfinished, Joe. The sensational success we’ve had in Atlanta proved the need for and the workability of an association of all wall and ceiling contractors. All of us now identify with the new organization and we can see the expanded benefits.

But as much as we’ve increased our influence and acceptance, we still aren’t one industry yet.

DUGUID: You’re referring, John, to CISCA. I feel that our associations should join together now and eventually all subcontractor associations should come under some sort of umbrella, such as the American Sub contractors Association, so that we can provide an even better package for the industry.

DIMENSIONS: What’s the major obstacles to such a merger effort? The iaWCC/GDCI arrangement proved it can be done and, given determined effort, made into an astounding success.

In Atlanta last month, the emphasis was on “WE” and no contractor I met referred to his former association any longer. It was “our” association.

DUGUID: The problems right now are the same ones we faced — and overcame — and these would have to be the fear of lack of identity, the social structure, and, naturally, the political element.

MACIOCE: Our problems are all the same; they differ only in degree, not in kind.

BAKER: But consolidation is the answer. Associations must exist for the good of the members, and thus contractors would be paying less for

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the expanded services they get. That’s the name of the game, anyway you want to play it.

DUGUID: From the conversations Joe and I have had with CISCA we know that the political element must be served. We have our people who are in line for the top officer jobs — and CISCA has its slate of officer-bound individuals.

To put that opportunity aside is a personal defeat for some people. Past experience between iaWCC and GDCI proves that doesn’t have to be the case, and there are some workable alternatives.

MACIOCE: The real crunch is whether the so-called “belly button mentality” must be served by keeping a private, selfish, narrow attitude — or if leaders can elevate their eyesight to see . . . in a broader sense, what is necessary to better the industry.

DUGUID: The truth is, we could combine the officers of both our associations, and we could combine staffs, too, if that’s a major hurdle. We have a great association staff, and CISCA is likewise ably served.

BAKER: Combinations hint of bigness — and bigness often scares. But we don’t need bigness. What we control is quality not quantity.

A consolidation is in both groups’ best interests. We could expand our industry influence, provide a single voice for, contractor needs in labor, government and the public, expand educational services and programs.

From the contractor standpoint, it would reduce his membership obligations and augment his ability to get things done.

DUGUID: Neither of you two mentioned another great advantage for the industry and that’s smoothing out the lines of communications with other segments of the industry. The suppliers and manufacturers would be involved with only one association and the marketing spill would be beneficial to everyone.

DIMENSIONS: The one idea that keeps coming through from the conversation here is the absolute denunciation of the “no growth” and “zero growth” philosophies that we all keep hearing about. You all speak of a construction industry with still a great deal of potential, no growth and no oil notwithstanding?

MACIOCE: There’ll always be construction. We need to build new structures, retrofit the existing ones, or tear down and start over.

DUGUID: Building technology is in a constant state of change and, likewise, building use and land use are constantly changing. For the past 30 years cities have been expanding into large, metropolitan areas and the inner cities have suffered.

I think we can expect a movement back to the city and with it new opportunities for all of us.