Young executives step out

First convention gains unanimous praise, annual commitment

By Jim Van Loozen
Editor

ot far from the assembly stood the mission Alamo, a celebrated landmark in American history, significant for its part in Texas' battle for independence.

More than a century after the battle at the Alamo, a group of young wall and ceiling industry executives gathered in the nearby San Antonio Convention Center to take the first steps towards their own independence as managers and future owners of the complex businesses that form the industry. The occasion was December's AWCI Young Executives Convention.

If the hallmark of the historic Alamo was its relevance as a major confrontation between two armies, then it can be said the inaugural Young Executives Convention will be significant for its establishment of fellowship and new friendships among second-level managers from wall and ceiling companies.

The blending of comprehensive field and management sessions with the unique social opportunities of the Alamo City brought registrants, exhibitors and speakers together with a level of harmony best reflected in all three groups’ commitment to establish the convention as an annual event featuring a continuing education format.

In a concluding business session for the three-day convention, participants agreed to establish an annual renewal, develop an educational program cycle of three to four years, recommend the citation of the inaugural registrants and exhibitors for their "ground floor" efforts in making the convention an unqualified success, and adopted a resolution urging the AWCI National Convention in Phoenix to develop a program for the
attraction and training of young manpower for the industry.

The idea for a Young Executives Convention was born early last year, when AWCI President Robert F. Watkins and Executive Vice-president Joe M. Baker, Jr., discussed committee functions and assignments anticipated for the years.

As Watkins explained to the convention membership during his address opening the three-day affair, a gap was found to exist within the industry between the senior and second and third levels of management. The decision to fill this gap resulted in the setting up of a new committee: The Young Executives Council. “It was an idea whose time has come,” Watkins told his audience.

Some months later, the members of the Young executive Council met with Watkins, Baker and other AWCI staff to discuss setting up a major convention effort for young wall and ceiling executives. During the meeting, the council membership agreed on proposals for site selection, convention dates and a format for the convention program.

The purpose of the convention, Watkins explained, was three-fold. It would provide young industry executives with specific technical and management training to enhance their value to themselves and their member companies. It would also foster fellowship among the young executives and the exhibitors they will be doing business with in the future. And, third, it would provide many of the registrants with their first opportunity to be exposed to a convention atmosphere and the workings of the association.

YEC President John Arsena, Vice-Chairman Carolyn Mason and Council Members John Bouma, Jr., George H. Brueggeman, Jr., Michael Chambers, Ben Hogancamp, Robert L. Maidt, Jr., Daniel McGlone, David Ricca, Robert Roberts, Steve Watkins and Jack Whittle participated in the planning of the program. The members of the council attending the San Antonio convention doubled as official hosts for the event.

The convention registration opened Sunday, Dec. 9 amidst the balmy Indian Summer climate of San Antonio. Early arrivals spent part of their weekend touring the many shops and restaurants along the city’s famous “River Walk”, which was adjacent to the Hilton Hotel which served as the operating base for convention registrants, speakers and exhibitors.

The first official event, a Sunday night reception within the exhibit hall, found registrants swapping “shop talk” while circulating among various product exhibits. A unique feature of the exhibit portion of the convention was that most social events, including catered luncheons and receptions, were held within exhibit areas.
Although small in numbers, the initial exhibitors achieved their goal of meeting their young executive customers face-to-face for an exchange of information about (and often a first look at) new industry products. Typical of comments concerning the exhibits were “most helpful”, “great to see the products I’ve heard about”, and “We must encourage more exhibitors to participate in the future. We were all interested in the various products, but were disappointed more companies we do business with were not represented.” The interest in the exhibits was so high that return visits for information about products were common; interest in the exhibits was as high on the last day as on the first.

Monday’s activities opened with remarks from Arsena and Watkins and progressed with the technical and business programs. Tuesday and Wednesday sessions featured educational programs in both morning and afternoon hours, and each day included at least two social events. Although the weather began deteriorating as the week began, attendance at all of the functions was consistently high.

Particularly of interest were continuing management sessions conducted by personnel from Fails Management Systems, Inc. and a technical session on panelization, conducted by the Metal Lath/Steel Framing Association.

Also of note in the highlights of the first Young Executives Convention was the participation of spouses of the young executives. Many attended business sessions and all of the social functions and gained an opportunity
Young executives
to learn more about the industry.
When the spouses gathered outside of
the convention center, common topics
were the swapping of anecdotes and
comparing of notes about life as a
wall and ceiling family.
Two of the major social highlights
of the convention were geared
towards the spouses. The first was a
guided bus tour of the San Antonio
area, which highlighted the sights, his-
torical sites and other points of in-
terest. The second served as the of-
cial banquet for the convention.
The banquet was a candlelight sup-
per aboard flat-decked river boats,
which wound the diners through the
scenic Paseo Del Rio, the beautiful
“River Walk” along the banks of the
San Antonio River.
Between the social and general ses-
sions, key committee activity was also
in evidence. The Young Executives
Council established both a resolutions
committee and a planning committee,
chaired by Brueggeman and Mason,
respectively.
The planning committee accepted
the recommendation of resolutions
members to establish the convention
as an annual affair and targeted New
Orleans as a possible site for 1980.
The planners also agreed with the
concept of expanding the educational
program on a three-to-four-year cy-
cle, possibly to include the awarding
of a certificate of completion at the
end of the cycle.
The resolutions committee drafted
the training resolution, which later
received unanimous support during
the general business session. The
resolution urged the National Con-
vention to develop a comprehensive
program for the recruitment and
training of manpower for the present
and future benefit of the industry.
The resolution, which will be referred
to the National Resolutions Commit-
tee, also urged the program be jointly
developed with cooperation from
management and labor.
Serving with Brueggeman on the
resolutions committee were Phil Cer-
tosini, Chambers, Tim Conroy,
Duane Donaldson, Steve Nickles and
Chip Kearns. Mason’s committee also
included Bill Gargaon, Jr., Drew
Halsey, Maidt, Paul Marek, Byron
Parrish, and Rick Sundermeyer.