Meet the best team in Minnesota

If there’s ever a drywall Super Bowl, here’s a team to watch!

By Jim Van Loozen
Editor

All right, class. Which is the best team in Minnesota? Multiple choice:

(a.) The Vikings.
(b.) The Twins.
(c.) The North Stars.
(d.) The Gophers.
(e.) The Gypsum Drywall Contractors Association.

Before you rush off to snap an answer this particular “pop quiz”, you would do well to consider a few of the basic facts:

For instance, the Vikings have never won the Super Bowl. The Twins lost the World Series and Rod Carew. The North Stars are not synonymous with the Stanley Cup, and only an alumnus could remember the last time the Gophers made the Rose Bowl.

The correct answer is (e.) The Gypsum Drywall Contractors Association. It has taken some time, work, money and promotion to accomplish the feat, but the association is growing with a solid, winning membership. Back in 1955, the Gypsum Drywall Contractors Association of Minnesota, Inc. was founded by seven contractors. Although the organization grew some over the years, it had its ups and downs.

It almost became a casualty of the building disaster of the mid-1970s. Instead, it turned its fortunes around out of that adversity with a membership that simply decided it was worth the investment to have a quality association pushing for education, legislation and improved craftsmanship within the industry and an improved image of the industry within its community.

“In the beginning, we were like a team of horses pulling away from Minnesota Association highlights the contractor as a multi purpose businessman.
"We’re possessed of some of the most effective expertise in the U.S."

Some expert opinions on association membership:

• Bruce Chase, National Gypsum Co.:
  “I feel a definite pride when I hear our commercials on the radio. We are getting to the public and creating the image of a professional contractor, not just a fly-by-nighter.”

• Jim Hays, Hays Drywall, Inc.:
  “I have been an association member for four or five years, and the association provides me the opportunity to get to know my fellow competitors and to learn more about the situation in our local area.”

• Ty Berg, Wm. Poppenberger & Sons:
  “The association has been beneficial to our company. Some associations seem to try to dictate to their members on running their businesses. This association has many things to offer. We have a fine insurance program. We gain fellowship through meeting together. We present a good image.”

• Erwin Johnson, Drywall, Inc.:
  “Through local affiliation with AWCI, we receive many benefits. One of the best things about the association is Construction Dimensions magazine. I have received many good ideas from this publication.”

• Bob Wefel, Acoustics Associates:
  “I belong to many associations, and I’m impressed with AWCI. Their main concern is for the people who belong to the association.”

• Bud Korsmo, Wunder Klein Donohue:
  “The association has grown very much in the last few years. I see an important place for the association in the drywall industry. The association meets an educational need for the contractor. It provides them help in their businesses, with organized labor and many other benefits.”

• Wayne Larson, U.S. Gypsum:
  “The association has taken giant steps in the last few years. It is time to further identify the local association with the national and marry up with the local wall and ceiling association. We can clarify how we stand [as an industry].”

• Kary Wicks, Canaan services:
  “What new members expect from the association is educational materials. The insurance program tipped the scales for us, but we’re very impressed with the association management.”

• Mike Nelson, McAurthur Co.:
  “Association membership is of benefit to suppliers, who are associate members, because it keeps us in touch with the contractors. We can provide valuable service to them by introducing them to new products, answering their questions or directing them to the proper people.”

• Gary Mulcahy, Mulcahy Drywall, Inc.:
  “The association often serves as a third party in discussions with unions, suppliers and others. It is also wise to meet with competitors and with suppliers to keep abreast of what is happening within the industry. A person can learn a lot just by listening to his peers.”

• Bob Korman, U.S. Gypsum:
  “Associations should encourage more educational meetings and product information sessions on development, testing, etcetera. The manufacturers are more than happy to pass on information of this kind about their products.”

• Bill Plourde, U.S. Gypsum:
  “The people who are making it in the industry are the ones who do get together with manufacturers to discuss new technological advances.”

• Roger Zack, Viking Drywall, Inc. (And president of the Minnesota association):
  “Being involved in the association has encouraged me personally to become involved with civic and church groups in the community. When you begin to come to association meetings, you learn the importance of being involved. Any association boils down to its members; it is only as good as its members.”

Each other,” says Dave Green, who directs the association from its Minneapolis-area offices. “I guess my role was to be the person who gave the reins a tug and got us all pulling in the same direction. Today, the business knowledge and the professionalism within our organization is nationally respected. We’re possessed of some of the most effective expertise in the U.S. We’re the best of teams.”

Putting it together

Green is the second association manager to head up the Minnesota group. He succeeded Harry Pearson, who managed from 1971-74. Green, a former sales representative for an industry manufacturer, offers this description of the association management job: it began as part-time, but the job simply took no time at all to become full-time, then overtime.

When the big crunch hit the building industry in the mid-70s, it appeared for a time that the association would come apart. Instead, Green recalls, the members put it all together.

“We had a meeting and discussed closing down for at least six months,” Green says. “Nobody much liked that idea, particularly not me. That’s when the membership invested more time and money to build the kind of association we have today. They felt it was desirable to have a collective effort in behalf of themselves and their industry.”

Green, a former recipient of AWCI’s Outstanding Industry Employee Award, flatly refuses to credit himself with the success of his association.

“I don’t feel I deserve the credit,” he responds. “All that I have done is meld together the great talent of members who tell me what they want. The success belongs to the membership.”

When he talks about that membership, Green reflects the pride he has for the association.
“Our group is one of the most unique groups anywhere. Our membership still takes pride in hand finishing, although they’re sophisticated enough that you’ll see machine tools on some jobsites. We’re basically from farm communities, hard workers and hard players. You’re likely to find, in our membership, the former mechanic who worked his way up through the business and formed his own company,” Green says.

“Another thing that’s unique about this association is the attitude members have toward their peers and contemporaries. Sure, there is competition here, but it’s friendly. It really is something to see people who are competing for the volume of business in this market coming together as friends because of the fellowship of their association membership.”

“We’re professionals”

Green says it is easy to provide leadership assistance for his membership. “We have several contractors who are successful simply because of their aggressiveness, their ability to think and their progressive attitude about staying abreast of the future. Any of our sizeable contractors will be diversified,” he says. “We’re professionals.

“As an association we work because our personalities are suited to each other. I may provide a degree of leadership, but the leadership stems from the direction of the industry leaders who make up the membership. I sometimes feel I’m walking a thin line when they ask my opinion. These are people well educated about their businesses, they are, in fact, great businessmen. I get a feeling of personal awe when they ask for my opinion.”

Green points to a new promotional brochure to illustrate his point. It says “He’s the gypsum drywall contractor, the most versatile man in the entire construction industry. You can look high and low (and in between) and you won’t find a bigger, more important segment of the industry, because the gypsum drywall contractor erects walls and partitions, installs ceilings, puts down floors, puts in insulation, etc., etc., etc.

“He’s a professional who probably came up through the ranks tapping and finishing or installing as a journeyman. He’s also probably a graduate of one of the best apprenticeship programs in the industry. And he stays abreast of all new product developments and techniques through seminars and through his contractor’s association membership.

“He’s built his sound, healthy business through similarly trained, conscientious craftsmen and he furnishes them with top quality equipment and supplies.”

Still holding the promotional material (the association also buys radio time to promote the industry’s image), Green amplifies some of its points.

“Diversification has made the really significant changes we’ve seen in the industry over the past few years,” Green says. “The association can provide the materials, the tools, with which the contractor can stay abreast of new developments and remain diversified.

“That’s important. More and more, the contractor will be required to keep up with new techniques. He’s going to expect the maximum in production quality and quantity from each of his employees. And, that employee is going to have to become more versatile.

“In this decade, and for a long time to come, the term ‘interior specialist’ is going to become more definitive.”

The association

Green views the Minnesota Association as two associations, one local, one national. The state group is an affiliate of the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries—International, and Green says “Sometimes it is hard to tell where one leaves off and the other begins.”

At the state level, his members receive a number of services. They have engaged in group labor discussions. They monitor state legislation. They developed a state license law for presentation to the legislature. Director Green maintains liaison with union representatives for expe-
ditious action on disagreements or mutual problems. Monthly meetings are geared toward education. There’s an industry newsletter. There is a major group insurance program that has saved members a bundle with a dividend package based on loss-income ratios. There’s a safety group insurance program. There’s advertising and promotion of the industry. There’s a new apprenticeship training program in Minneapolis. And there’s the work in conjunction with the AWCI—International.

“That’s my point about where one leaves off and the other begins,” Green says. “The difference is not what we provide, but where we provide it. On the local level, what we give to AWCI is a local input, a local opinion. You can say it in a single word: involvement. We want to be involved in a process where we bring things to them, and they bring things back to us. It goes both ways.”

Green says the AWCI affiliation provides his local membership with legal advice, labor negotiation information, top-notch educational programs, the availability of international contacts, communications of value, information about products and techniques . . . “and, fellowship, the value of friendship,” he says.

“I look at it this way,” Green says. “We’re all aware that association members make a significant investment into their organizations. But look at the return. How do you place a value on a longtime friendship? How do you place a value on the information they exchange when they come together at a local or national function? How do you place a value on that one idea they pick up that turns their business around? And how do you place a value on what all of this means to the industry?

“They care enough about the industry to contribute time, money and intelligence to the betterment of our business. As a result, they are becoming recognized by the public for having the highest integrity and skills available at any price.”

If industry betterment, business and personal growth and safeguarding the interests of the persons who buy the services of the wall and ceiling industry is the name of the game, it can be said Green is playing on a winning team.

Say again, sorry Vikes, Twins, Stars and Gophers . . . the best team in all of Minnesota.