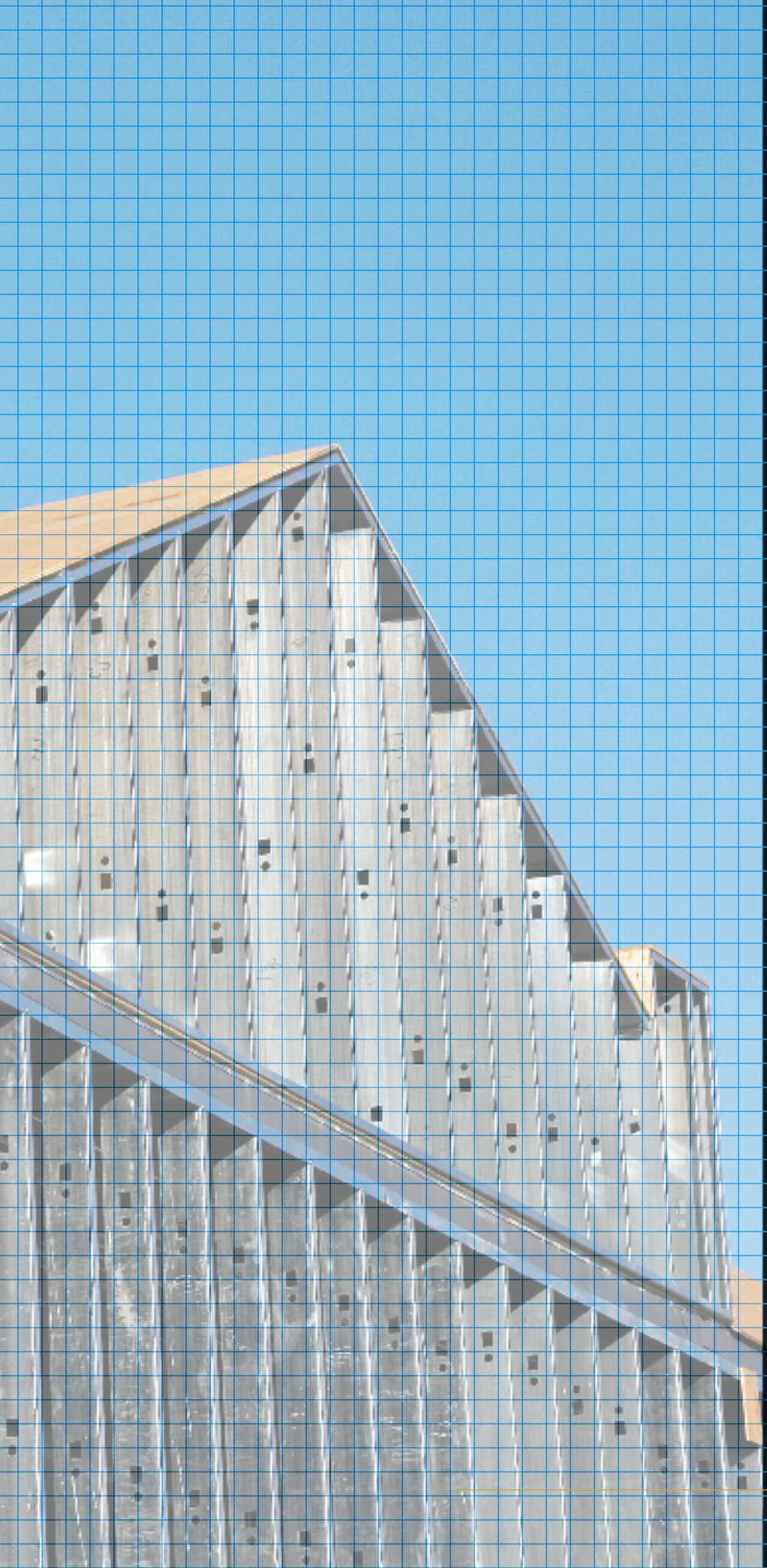

STEEL–DOING IT RIGHT:

MAKING AN IMPACT

Think You Know Everything There Is to Know About Steel Framing? Think Again.

BY DON PROCTER

The Steel–Doing It Right program follows in the footsteps of the Association of Wall and Ceiling Industry's successful EIFS–Doing It Right program. Its aim is to provide the essentials of the load bearing cold formed steel industry and how attendees can garner more work in the field. ▶▶▶

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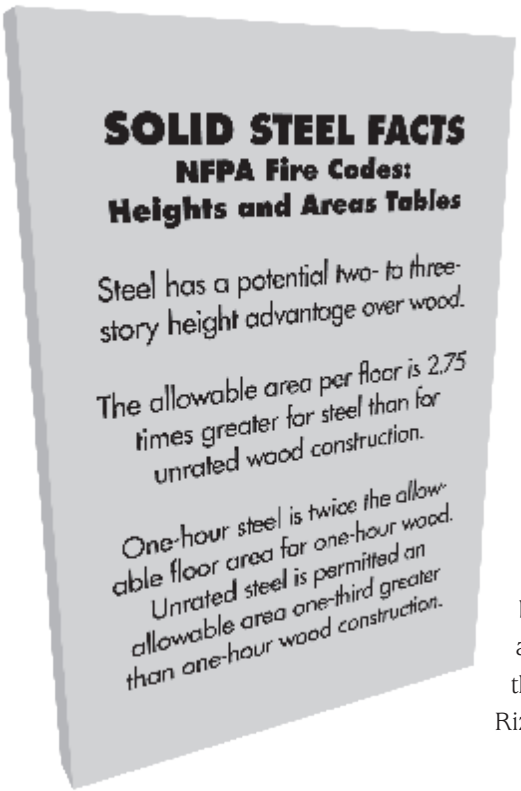
Organized in partnership with the Steel Framing Alliance, the two-and-a-half-day seminar covers installation methods of cold-formed steel for most load-bearing and non-load bearing projects. "We see it as an 'information buffet' for our members to learn more about this market," says Nancy Roylance, the AWCI's director of education and certification programs.

Maribeth Rizzuto, director of training and education of the SFA, adds that the content of the session will help people already working the field follow best design and installation practices. "Unfortunately we have a considerable number of practitioners both on the design side and the installation side who think they know what they really don't know. Most are stunned to learn that the steel framing industry has very comprehensive standards, guidelines and installation details that need to be followed."

The program is a "broad sweep" of the cold-formed steel field and feedback from attendees at the six seminars put on since February 2006 has been "very favorable," says Roylance.

The seminar's two instructors are industry experts with backgrounds in steel and engineering. PowerPoint presentations feature text, graphics and pictures. Real-life scenarios are portrayed, and each attendee is given a four-color workbook that can be a handy resource later on in the field.



The program also includes tabletop exhibits that illustrate examples of products and installations discussed in class. "Our goal is to bring the latest and greatest to the audience," Rizzuto points out. "Remember, most of the attendees are relatively new to structural cold-formed steel framing. We want them to walk away with the most up-to-date information and best practices."

The seminar also offers information-sharing opportunities between attendees and instructors. "That in itself is a rich experience," Roylance says.

Steel—Doing It Right is broken down into 13 modules, ranging from a look at steel framing materials and engineering considerations to basic and specialized construction. Load bearing, wind-bearing, curtainwall framing, interior systems, roof assemblies and panelization are covered in detail.

The idea is to feed as much practical information as possible to attendees over the 2.5-day duration, says Roylance, noting that many members simply don't have the time or the resources to educate themselves or their workers by other means. "They may not have the time to go to lengthy seminars or cull information from trade journals," she says.

Roylance makes a convincing case for why AWCI members should consider taking the course. The payoffs, she says, include increased production, better estimating techniques, improved project management skills and fine-tuned quality control methods.

More Than You Know

Mike Heering, regional vice president of F.L. Crane & Sons, Inc., Fulton, Miss., and nine fellow employees ranging from estimators to field staff, took the first seminar presented in Atlanta in February 2006. It exceeded his expectations: "I saw that it would fit a large group of participants, from field employees to managers and estimators. Every one of us came out of there, I guess you could almost say, 'excited and surprised' by the things we heard and learned."

While some experienced people in the industry might think they don't need the program, Heering says a lot of people might be surprised at how much they learn. "With the way technology has been advancing, we see new products all the time and sometimes they have to be installed in a new way. Sometimes they just have to be installed differently to meet codes. Programs like this bring you up-to-date."

He says the program taught him various methods of calculating how to frame wall assemblies that could help reduce

costs—an important factor on bid day. On the last day of the program, practical estimating problems were dealt with, giving attendees an opportunity to put what they learned through the course into practice. For instance, estimators, field mechanics and field managers were required to calculate the hours it takes to perform various framing details. "It is a great way to start a person thinking while it is still fresh in their mind."

Heering adds that tabletop demonstrations helped make sense of assemblies discussed, such as a mock-up of details of Dietrich and The Steel Network Inc. products. In addition, a design firm provided software to illustrate how to design projects. "There's not much more you can do unless you take everyone out on a job site for hands-on demonstrations," Heering says. "The problem with that idea is that you'd have to stretch the program out to four or five days."

At F.L. Crane, Heering is responsible for keeping abreast of new technology that could benefit the company's 13 branches. "One of the ways I can help is to bring good seminars like this one to the attention of my division managers. It might help in the continuing education of their estimators, field managers and their field employees," he says.

He expects that more employees of the company will go through future editions of the Steel—Doing It Right program. The key is lining up sessions that are accessible to employees from different branches.

Some Tweaks Still Needed

Another fan of the program is Fadi Abouhadid, estimator and project manager of Pillar Construction, Alexandria, Va. He signed up because he wanted to update his knowledge of the metal framing field, learn more about the bidding and building methods and network with industry counterparts.

One of the 13 modules focused on metal roofing assemblies. That's not normally a part of Pillar's business, but he says the session was stimulating. "Some day we might pursue it," Abouhadid says.

Other sessions in the program proved helpful, too. The practical estimating exercise at the end of the program is an example. It gave students an opportunity to test themselves on what they learned. Still, Abouhadid says he'd like to see more emphasis on estimating early in the program.

"Overall the program was well structured and explained," Abouhidad says. "But there was so much information, it was little bit hard to digest it all in the two-and-a-half days." The estimator/project manager suggests graphics—possibly film presentations illustrating construction methods—could facilitate the learning process.

Jon Wies, estimator and project manager, of Wies Drywall & Construction Corporation in St. Louis, Mo., says the program met his expectations. "It is an excellent program for anyone who wants a comprehensive understanding of the nomenclature, construction methods and contractors' issues concerning cold-formed steel framing," he says.

Wies points out that when he took the course, considerable emphasis was placed on the importance of bridging, bracing, blocking and backing. "They are peripheral items that might not come to mind when cold-formed steel framing is mentioned, but they are important nonetheless," Wies says.

How much a participant gets out of the program will depend on his or her level of skill and knowledge going into the course, Heering says. "I think that the PowerPoint session illustrated everything I needed to see." Heering has experience as a field manager, project estimator and a manager of several divisions at F.L. Crane.

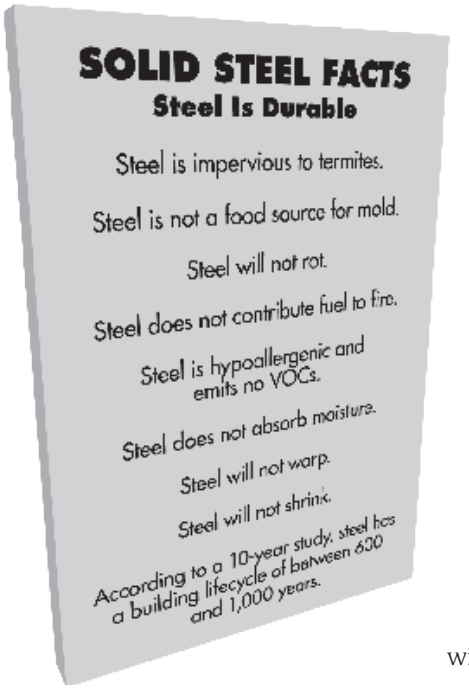
It's All in the Delivery

Steel—Doing It Right was produced because of the potential growth in load bearing cold formed steel, Roylance says. "AWCI wanted to provide education to our members to bring the awareness and the knowledge of this market to them."

Roylance says the means of delivering the program material is as important as the material itself.

Her role is to get the word out, not only to the membership in the AWCI and those in the SFA, but also to others in the building industry. "Up until now our energy has been put into building the program and honing it," she says. "The Expert Advisory Group has done that; now, staff will focus on letting everyone know of this informative seminar."

In the first six seminars held since February 2006, the program has drawn 286 attendees. Roylance says the objective is to get 50 or so attendees at each of the four or more seminars planned over the next year. "With increased marketing and awareness of the program, we could see the need to add more seminars," Roylance says.



Roylance expects that, similar to what happened with AWCI's EIFS—Doing It Right program, word-of-mouth marketing will carry a lot of weight as the program's reputation grows. She says future seminars will be held in cities where the interest is strong and the location is easily accessible. Organizers are even willing to hold "by-request" seminars for the employees of individual companies.

One of the first Steel–Doing It Right seminars was held in St. Louis, Mo.

Rizzuto says she's pleased with the program to date. "It has given the SFA an opportunity to work in concert with AWCI to bring comprehensive education and training to those who are looking to expand their work with cold-formed steel in structural application, in an interactive setting." She's also pleased that the program has been well-received by participants.

However, based on a complete review of the program in December 2006, which included feedback from participants, some adjustments to the curriculum have been made. The newest version launched in February 2007 has been field tested and positively accepted. Most of the changes relate to the length of some of the modules.

"It is difficult when you are trying to cover so much territory in a condensed format to make it meaningful for the very diverse audience that we draw," Rizzuto says.

The need and the interest for the program came from the members of AWCI and SFA. The drivers were AWCI Executive Vice President Steve Etkin and SFA President Larry Williams, who worked with subject matter experts for the

content. Program sponsors include the American Zinc Association and the Steel Stud Manufacturers' Association.

Since the program has proven a success and organizers want to reach a larger audience, they are looking at a self-study alternative for people who don't have time or need a more flexible learning means Roylance says. A late summer or early fall launch is planned for an on-demand interactive DVD format.

About the Author

Don Procter is a free-lance writer based in Ontario, Canada.

For More Information

Steel—Doing It Right costs about $450 for members of AWCI and SFA and $525 for nonmembers. For more information, contact AWCI at (703) 538.1613 or visit www.awci.org/steel or SFA at (202) 785.2022 or visit www.steelframing.org.

The Steel Framing Alliance offers a variety of other seminars on cold-formed steel framing that are likely to fit specific needs. For more information on these seminars, contact the SFA at (202) 785.2022.

Tabletop exhibits help attendees learn even more about steel framing.