

Lunch and Learns... and More

Offering training is a great way to build relationships with pro customers.

BY TOM DWYER

If you want to be a quality builder and remodeler, you need to stay up-to-date with what's current in terms of industry standards. Established contractors have always seen the importance of continuing education to promote and increase industry professionalism.

Building and remodeling standards have changed substantially from when I started working in this industry 35 years ago. That's why continuing education is important. There are three ways that LBM dealers can assist builders in terms of training: code compliance, installation and products.

Understanding and complying with building codes is the most important element of continuing education in the building and remodeling sector. Last year, I, along with three of my co-workers at Harbour Towne Construction, attended an event hosted by PMC Building Materials in Atlanta to learn about new deck building regulations in Georgia. This informative training session alerted us to a lot of the code changes that are critical to passing an inspection when building a deck.

The company brought in certified speakers who trained us on these new building codes, and the credits earned during the meeting were applied toward continuing education requirements needed to maintain a general contractor's license in the state. These CEU's were also good towards NARI and HBA certifications.

Keeping updated on the span tables for lumber, such as southern yellow

pine, for installation is also important. Educating builders and remodelers about what's acceptable in terms of wood strengths and the appropriate framing lumber, I-joists and related materials to adhere to building codes is essential.

An established company such as my own, which has been around since 1979, won't send employees to LBM dealers just for education on one product. Personally, I would rather have sales managers speak directly to my project managers about new products when they review the products we are currently ordering.

What I have found works best is when a LBM supplier holds what I call "lunch and learns." Atlanta-based Carolina Lumber periodically hosts these events. They have a BBQ and invite their vendors to be sponsors. The lumber companies may invite a tool company, and windows, doors, decking and siding representatives—who set up tables at the event to promote their products. Contractors can then grab a bite to eat and visit the tables to see what new products are available. This method, in my opinion, is a good way to promote new building products.

By hosting an event such as this, you get builders and remodelers into your showroom to see all the products LBM dealers have available. Often, many companies, including my own, just order the building materials we need over the phone so we don't see the new products available.

Overall, the best way to promote training is for suppliers to partner with their local NARI association because that's what NARI is all about—education. By talking to members of the local NARI chapter, you can find out what the builders and remodelers in your area are most interested in learning about. We have suppliers who will periodically host our NARI meetings at their facilities. This includes plumbing, tile and lumber distributors who then get 10 minutes at the beginning of the meeting to talk about their company and their latest and greatest product before we continue on with NARI-related business. ■

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