SURVIVING THE PANDEMIC; Moving Forward

What did the architectural woodwork industry learn from the oppressive COVID-19 pandemic? Quite simply, “how to survive,” Randy Lange, President of Lange Bros. Woodwork Company, told AWI Spring Leadership Conference attendees. He summarized what the industry has endured since March 2020 and where it was in April 2021. Randy dove into trends affecting the economy in general and construction in particular.

“We have reached halftime of what is the great social economic experiment ever, which includes the federal Payroll Protection Program,” Randy said. He noted that every state had a decrease in GDP in the first two quarters of 2020, and while “an uptick in the third quarter of 2020 helped offset the second quarter losses, every state still saw a decrease in GDP.”

Construction
As of February 2021, residential construction employment is the “one bright spot” in the market, while nonresidential employment is still high (approximately 6.5%). In April 2020, the Architecture Billings Index (ABI) produced by the American Institute of Architects declined to 30, but it climbed back to “normalcy” (above 50) at 53.3 in March 2021 for the first time in a year. This indicates building plans are in the making, according to Randy. “Our industry is 1-2 years behind the ABI, so we need to plan for the effects of the previous declines in billing inquires,” advised AWI President Sebastien DesMarais of

ANSI / AWI SMA Stair Standard Takes Effect August 15

The ANSI / AWI SMA 0643-2021—Wood Stair, Handrail, and Guard Systems Standard, which was approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) on March 1, 2021, takes effect on August 15, 2021. At that time in AWI’s case, ANSI / AWI SMA 0643 supersedes, replaces, and supplants Section 7 of Architectural Woodwork Standards, Edition 2 (2014) as the most current version of the AWI Standard for wood stair, handrail and guard systems. It is the first standard of its kind for the Stairbuilders and Manufacturers Association (SMA), with which AWI collaborated.

Availability / Access
The 0643 Standard may be freely accessed at www.awinet.org and www.stairways.org. Printed copies of the 0643 Standard may be purchased this month by visiting the website of each organization.

Standard Scope
AWI SMA 0643 provides standards and tolerances for the quality fabrication and field installation of wood stair, handrail, and guard systems, that are comprised of: stairs, which encompass stringers, risers, treads and landings; handrails; and guard systems, which are part of the assembly of stairway components. Further, it addresses common guard infill systems of glass and metal, and establishes minimum aesthetic
RANDY ESTABROOK RETIRES FROM AWI QCP

Randy (Randolph) Estabrook, Executive Director of the AWI Quality Certification Program, announced his retirement effective at the end of May 2021.

After leaving AWI QCP in 2008, Mr. Estabrook was asked to return to this position in 2013 by AWI Past President Joe Sorrelli. **In all, Mr. Estabrook was at the helm of AWI QCP for 13 years.**

The AWI QCP has grown over the years with **increased licensees and certified projects**, and ended 2020 with a 14% increase of new QCP applicants. The Quality Certification Program will continue to provide a valuable service to the construction industry.

Recently, AWI QCP donated $2 million to the Architectural Woodwork Institute Education Foundation (AWIEF), of which $1 million is designated for Randolph Estabrook Educational Scholarships for individuals, with 1/20th funded annually for this purpose. The other $1 million donation is earmarked for grants to accredited secondary and post-secondary education wood programs, with 1/10th funded annually. Each fund will be administered and managed by the AWIEF.

Mr. Estabrook noted, “QCP’s success has been from the support and vision of the Quality Certification Corporation Board of Directors and the hard work of the entire QCP team.”

The AWI Quality Certification Program (QCP) is a valuable quality assurance tool since 1995 for interior architectural woodwork, one of the most highly visible aspects of many construction projects. QCP assesses whether the millwork provided meets the project’s specifications and industry standards. The American Subcontractors Association (ASA) and the Construction Specifications Institute (CSI) endorse the QCP. www.awiqcp.org

Quality Certification Program (QCP) to Rejoin AWI

We are grateful for the years of service of Randy Estabrook to our industry,” said AWI EVP Doug Hague. Upon his retirement, the Quality Certification Program (QCP) has begun the process of rejoining AWI with the legal dissolution of the AWI Quality Certification Corporation.

“The Quality Certification Program (QCP) is an integral part of the association. I want to assure AWI QCP Licensees and all AWI members that our commitment to the program is unwavering,” Doug said. “At press time, we are in the process of preparing proposed AWI bylaws revisions for vote by the AWI membership to legalize this action and prepare the association for future success.”

(continues on page 3)
AWI NAMES JEFF BROWN AS EDUCATION DIRECTOR

Executive Vice President Doug Hague announced the appointment of Jeff Brown as the association’s Education Director, effective April 1, 2021.

Bringing 24 years of architectural woodwork experience, Jeff will coordinate AWI education opportunities offered to AWI members and leverage those opportunities throughout the industry. He also will work with AWI’s education teams of member presenters who deliver core education programs to AWI Manufacturing Members.

“I am very excited for this opportunity at AWI. Having grown up in the architectural woodwork industry, I have always been pulled back to it. It is thrilling to be on this side of the industry to influence its direction,” Jeff said.

Jeff’s connection to the millwork industry began when as a High School Senior, he worked for Fetzer Architectural Woodwork in Salt Lake City, UT, in its Engineering Department and later moved into Project Management. He subsequently gained employment with a plastics company where he was the Director of Operations. In 2016, Jeff moved to Denver, CO, where he worked for three years as Director of Engineering for High Country Millwork. Prior to joining the AWI staff, Jeff was Vice President of Engineering and Technology for a manufacturer of custom food service equipment.

Jeff earned a B.S. degree in Business Management and is currently working on an MBA. He resides in Denver with his wife Shiloh and two children. He can be reached at: jeff@awinet.org.

STANDARDS

ANSI/AWI SMA STAIR STANDARD... (cont. from page 1)

tolerances and performance requirements intended to provide a well-defined degree of control over a project’s quality of materials, workmanship, and/or fabrication.

The 0643 Standard includes sections on shop and field fabrication and additional materials that were not previously covered in the AWS, Edition 2.

The Wood Stair, Handrail, and Guard Systems Standard includes Aesthetic Grades (Premium, Custom, Economy). It contains NO Duty Levels but DOES include a structural section referencing the International Code Council’s International Building Code and International Residential Code. “It pairs well with other SMA resources, such as the Visual Interpretation of the Stair Building Code,” according to SMA Executive Director Terra Erb.”

Collaborative Effort

The new standard was developed jointly by AWI’s Technical Committee and SMA’s Quality Standards Committee in conformance with the ANSI process, making it the first collaborative Standard developed between the associations that produced an ANSI-accredited Standard. As with all ANSI standards development, the process required openness, balance, consensus, and due process.

QCP TO REJOIN AWI... (cont. from page 2)

QCP’s dedicated staff will continue administering the program for its licensees, under the direction of current QCP staff member, Greg Parham. More details will be forthcoming in upcoming editions of NewsBriefs.
Hollywood Woodwork during his presentation about the AWI Cost of Doing Business Survey.

Positive Signs
Pointing to the $1.9 trillion COVID-19 Stimulus Package Randy noted, “The biggest difference from the last recession of 2008 is that the money is being pushed down to the people who will spend it or need to spend it.” Contractors are seeing a bigger backlog, 8.20 months in February 2021, which translates into more work for architectural woodworkers. Sebastien commented on the CFMA Confindex (Construction Outlook Confidence) saying, “The return of previously delayed projects has helped to replenish backlogs and lift the collective spirits; some markets are growing significantly (data and fulfillment centers, medical); the American Rescue Plan of 2021 pumped money into the economy; and federal spending for infrastructure is being debated,” he said.

Challenges
Randy cautioned there are still challenges we must navigate, such as, “Construction will face a labor gap of 430K workers this year,” according to the Associated Builders and Contractors. Sebastien noted the new reality for commercial real estate (office, hotel, and retail) and fewer new projects being designed, along with increasing interest rates, expectations of inflation, and sharp material escalation and volatility are negatively impacting construction.

Sebastien left attendees to ponder, “Are you watching the construction economics, talking to your customers, re-figuring your budgets? What are you planning in order to remain viable and healthy during 2021 and beyond, and how will you engage your team to remain ahead of the curve? Don’t guess at what your numbers should be; use relevant, current, and industry-specific data resulting from your participation in the AWI Cost of Doing Business Survey.”

As architectural woodworkers navigate during these unpredictable times, “The best solution may be to have assets that generate cash,” Randy said. When you find that these economic trends and uncertainties are worrisome, “try to find the opportunity in them for your goals. You can’t direct the wind, but you can adjust your sails.”

Source: Associated Builders and Contractors’ Contractor Confidence Index • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING IN ORDER TO REMAIN Viable AND HEALTHY DURING 2021 AND BEYOND?

CONTRACTOR OPTIMISM

SAVE THE DATE!
69TH AWI ANNUAL CONVENTION
OCTOBER 6-8, 2021
MARGARITAVILLE LAKE RESORT
LAKE CONROE
MONTGOMERY, TEXAS

[Graph showing contractor optimism]

You won’t get Jimmy Buffet’s song out of your mind when you start planning to attend the 2021 AWI Convention! Put on your flip flops, plan your escape, and set your coordinates to fun and relaxation for Margaritaville Lake Resort, Lake Conroe, Montgomery, Texas.