

Commentary-Jerry Cvach-Retired

Following is Part 2 of the memories of Jerry Cvach and the truss industry in Canada

Becoming a salesman

My personal experiences are in *Italics*.

One day my boss Gerard asked me if I wanted to go into sales. I was astonished. I knew nothing about commercial salesmanship. To me a salesman was a shopkeeper behind the counter or, much worse, the door to door salesman.



But by then we had been in Canada long enough to know that the capitalist system out-produces demand, and subsequently selling the product is really the job number one. I could see that Gerard's selling prowess was behind our success, but frankly the science of commercial selling likely requiring more than displaying the merchandise, wrapping it and collecting money at the till, was a complete mystery to me. Marketing was not in my blood. It was an unnecessary activity in communist countries with no competition and their notorious shortages of goods.

None of that fazed Gerard at all. His management style had always been to throw people into water and see if they would sink or swim. He himself was the product of that philosophy, the "can do" attitude.

When my wife and I discussed the offer, I pointed out that I knew nothing about selling and had still a very limited use of English. Her position was we needed the extra money. Besides, it was a good career move, and if my lack of selling skills or experience didn't bother Gerard, why should it bother me? So I accepted with some trepidation.

"Never mind, I'll teach you", Gerard assured me.

My training started the following Monday. We took a car and went east, stopped in every little town and either visited plants that we already supplied, or the competition customers. If there were no fabricators in town, Gerard would ask around who were the leading builders, lumber suppliers or hardware store owners, and then went to see them to talk them into starting a truss plant.

There seemed to be no limit on expenses. We just had to save receipts for reimbursement later. As the manager responsible for profits, however, Gerard was modest so we stayed in cheap motels and shared a room. But he was also a Quebecer. The first night at dinner he ordered a bottle of wine. I was petrified, as I was convinced that it wouldn't be a legitimate expenditure and I would be on the hook for half of the cost. But Gerard said that the wine was justified if we had a good, productive day. I pointed out we had sold nothing and had no leads that day.

"Well, that's true, but tomorrow will be a better day."

That's the way it went for the whole week and a half. We drove as far as Sault Ste Marie in Western Ontario and back to Calgary, thus finishing my training. Now I knew that the key to successful selling was to try hard, have a glass of wine or two with your dinner and tomorrow would be a better day. For a salesman, hope springs eternal!

Sales and service

Even though there weren't contracts between the plate suppliers and fabricators, it was as close to a franchise situation as could be. The fabricators needed help not only by getting the drawings, but also with promotions and/or with building officials, training the customers in rudimentary design principles and solving production issues. This part of salesmanship was not written into my job description.

One had to do what had to be done, particularly when the company was small and growing. TTS for example, had a welding area by the punch presses where the operators also made equipment when not busy making plates. Bigger, USA based companies, had bona fide machine shops, but at TTS the welders were also trained as the carpenters who built the houses, i.e. very little, although it improved much later when a bona fide machine shop was set up under Walter and Burt and eventually John Maclean and Rob Kloppenburg. In the Canadian West the vast majority of workers came from farms and they were jacks of all trades people.

Setting up new equipment was done just from photographs of already existing plants. At TTS we did not have any operating manuals for the roller presses and C-clamps we manufactured and sold. So there was really very little service for the truss manufacturing equipment sold by plate companies' at the beginning.

For cutting the lumber there were some DEWALT radial arm saws around, but the dominant radial arm saw manufacturer of specialized truss cutting saws was Speed Cut from Eugene, Oregon. It was a large machine shop, independent from the plate companies. Their dark red machines were in every plant. They had a serviceman, who was also training the sawyers, travelled in a camper from town to town like the itinerant

Romas of the past. The service was likely a big part of their success in the pre-component saw era. Completely automated cutting equipment came on the market much later.



SpeedCut Saw still in use at Star Building Materials. They still have the manual!



Getting new truss manufacturers to buy the company connector plates was actually the smaller part of the job. Converting two or three competition customers in a year was a big success. Public relations consisted of keeping customers happy. Particularly in small towns, the visit from the plate supplier was an event. The salesmen were learning from their contacts with the manufacturers and the customers benefitted from hearing about what others in the industry were doing.

On the road

One of our customers in Okanagan Valley restored McLaughlin Buicks built in Oshawa, Ontario. Originally a carriage manufacturer they bought engines in Detroit and started making cars instead. They were sold to General Motors in 1918. Needless to say, there aren't that many original McLaughlin Buicks around.

Doug would look for the discarded machines in classified and then went to excavate them in the farmers' fields all over western Canada and the US. He would need several wrecks to combine them into one car. Doug was a free spirit and likely wound up with only reasonable facsimiles of the original vehicles, but the early cars were sort of one-offs anyway before Ford introduced the production lines so he got away with it.

When visiting his plant we would soon end up in one of his restored cars cruising around, one of my favorite sales stops in those days.

Going to Saskatchewan and Manitoba in winter was pretty adventurous, but it was the time, when the fabricators would have time to listen to a sales pitch and were even willing to change supplier if they had issues.

In Regina in the evening we would go curling, an exciting new game for me, the former European. I soon learned that curling consisted of throwing rocks down the ice with a goal of smashing the opponents' rocks, and drinking beer. They did the throwing and smashing and I drank and paid for the beer.

The current era

By the middle of 1980's the truss design programs could be run on PCs. The benefits of computerization are enormous. Not just that the design ability in the truss plants improved the service to builders, but also the quality of the trusses, improved efficiency of take-offs, and the management systems overall. The good things in life are so often offset by collateral damage, which in this case is loss of the intimacy that prevailed in the early days. But that is another story.

Epilogue

The roof truss association movement started in BC sometimes at the end of 1970s, early 1980s. At that time the building officials in greater Vancouver area were still hostile to trusses, and particularly to their use in commercial buildings.

Art Paul from Permanent Post & Pole Company located in Langley tried to meet with them once when he could not get a particular job approved, but nobody would talk to him. So he sat down with Ken McKinnon from Pacific Builders' Supplies and Harold Atkinson, They formed an association, called it Western Wood Truss Association (WWTA), elected Art Paul to be the first President and they were on their way. Suddenly the same Art Paul, but now the President of an industry association, albeit neither big nor influential, was listened to.

Lessons learned Alberta and Saskatchewan/Manitoba followed the BC lead and formed their own associations as well. These associations did not have much of a business plan or a clear mission other than to hold annual meetings and a dinner, but the first step was taken. Alberta WWTA first objective was to set up quality control (QC) programs, hoping it would result in getting more commercial jobs over and above selling residential and farm trusses.

In summer 1991 I became somewhat tired of working for the same industry and the same owner for 23 years, and I quit. Frankly both the industry and the company owner were good to me, but 23 years was a big chunk of my life.

As every early retiree finds out after the initial euphoria that one needs something else to replace the structure and satisfaction of having a job. Before I even realized that, I ran into Darryl Murphy, then the president of WWTA AB. Over a coffee and we were

reminiscing about the old times and I found myself hired to become the first full time truss industry association secretary in Canada. They were stuck in the same place, their membership small and not growing. The pay was lousy, but I didn't start doing it for money, but the challenge of it intrigued me.

Initially we improved the QC program to have more credibility; I did some promoting while doing the QC inspections and the association membership grew. It was the chicken and egg situation. I argued that if we have more members and more money we can do things that will benefit the industry. It worked. The next project was to reduce the cost of WCB premiums. It was achieved by developing H&S programs in the plants. Alberta government had a program called *Partnerships* and offered good incentives to join it and besides of the good outcome of improving health and safety, being able to get WCB refunds got us even more members.

Once we had a strong association with majority of manufacturers joining helped us to get good group liability insurance, develop training for the members' workers, and to support the Canadian Wood Truss Association (CWTA) and its technical arm Truss Plate Institute of Canada (TPIC) that is an influential member of the Canadian Wood Council. The tables have turned, and it is now the industry that is referenced in the National Building Code.



Jerry Cvach upon his retirement from the Canadian Wood Truss Association with CWTA President Mark Fox in 2018

All this work was already done by the subsequent secretaries, Wayne Clark and Dave Pasolli who were/are far better secretaries than I had been, and it continues today.

On a personal note, I took on a new and very interesting job of H&S auditing, everyone benefitted!

If you have an idea for a commentary or would like to submit your own commentary for a future newsletter please let me know at dave@wwta.ab.ca

Economic Update

In Alberta, urban housing starts totaled 2249 in February 2022, a year-over-year Increase of 21.3%. Canadian housing starts decreased by 1.7% over the same period. In Alberta, single-detached units, which comprised 41.2% of all units; increased by 8.3%, while apartment units, which comprised 34.3% of all units, increased by 47.3%.

Calgary starts rebounded to 1159 units up from 561 in January, while Edmonton starts were down slightly to 816 units from 909 last month. Edmonton is beating Calgary by 5 starts so far this year, unlike in hockey. Canadian starts are down 12.7% compared to last year.

Housing Starts Alberta						
	Feb-22	Feb-21	% Change	YTD 2022	YTD 2021	% Change
Alberta	2249	1854	21.31%	4029	3920	2.78%
Edmonton	816	967	-15.62%	1725	1769	-2.49%
Calgary	1159	642	80.53%	1720	1764	-2.49%
Red Deer	10	10	0.00%	16	21	-23.81%
Grande Prairie	12	6	100.00%	14	12	16.67%
Lethbridge	120	134	-10.45%	275	165	66.67%
Wood Buffalo	0	5	-100.00%	3	10	-70.00%
Canada	15403	15669	-1.70%	28623	32790	-12.71%

The average house price in Alberta was \$482,255 compared to \$417,488 in February 2021, an increase of 15.5%. This compares to the increase of 20.6% for the country.

Inflation in Alberta Hits 5.5% in February

We knew it was coming, but it is still eyebrow-raising to see the national inflation rate hit 5.7% in February. Here in Alberta, the rate was slightly lower, but still high at 5.5%.

The last time inflation was this high in Alberta was April 2007.

Driven by pre-existing factors related to the pandemic and exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the elevated level of the Consumer Price Index is setting the stage for additional interest rate hikes by the Bank of Canada.

It doesn't help consumers who are paying more for energy and food, but tracking "[core inflation](#)" (which excludes the typically more volatile categories of energy and food) helps us get a sense if the economy is overheating in ways monetary policy can actually address. Raising interest rates won't, for example, have much of an impact on oil prices driven by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the will-they-or-won't-they status of the

Iran nuclear deal.

At 3.9% in February, core inflation in Canada is also well above the Bank of Canada's target range of 1-3% and reinforces the likelihood of interest rate increases. Core inflation in Alberta was also running hot at 3.1% in February.

There is still a chance that price pressures could—as originally forecast by the Bank of Canada—ease over the course of the year, but this is dependent on a relatively swift resolution to the geopolitical morass Russia's actions have created.

Alberta Manufacturing up in January

Seasonally adjusted manufacturing sales in Alberta rose for the fourth month in a row in January.

At \$7.8 billion, shipments from provincial factories were 1.3% higher than in December and 28.1% higher than 12 months earlier.

Wood product manufacturing saw the biggest month-over-month increase at 11.6% followed by non-metallic mineral products at 8.4% and fabricated metal products at 6.1%.

Lumber's Wild Ride Continues

Chicago lumber futures tumbled to \$1,173 per thousand board feet, the lowest in near five weeks as the National Association of Home Builders urged the US to increase domestic production and to work with Canada on a new softwood lumber agreement that will eliminate tariffs. The cost of lumber hit a 10-month high of near \$1,480 earlier in the month and remains historically high despite the output volumes at sawmills recovered from the constraints of mid-2020 to end-2021.



Meanwhile, demand is set to stay strong as the large US home builders make their purchases necessary for the looming spring construction season. Still, the latest data showed builders' expectations of future home buyers in the US fell to the lowest since June 2020 due to the impact of elevated inflation and expected higher interest rates.

Russian Impact

An expanding list of multinational forest products companies, utilities and manufacturers have officially paused dealings with Russia in response to the war in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian government has asked the EU to ban all imports of Russian forestry products. Russia exported \$12 billion worth of forest products in 2021, according to Wood Resource Quarterly. This includes \$5.8 billion in softwood lumber

Both the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and PEFC International have condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and taken measures to stop wood products sourcing from both Russia and Belarus.

If you are in the market for some IKEA furniture you may find the shelves empty as Russia is the second largest supplier to them and their factories there are suspending operations.

I can't help but notice the similarities between lumber and fossil fuels when it comes to the environmentalists. It appears that in Europe the environmentalists have been successful in reducing logging in their back yard, but they have no problem importing wood products from Russia that do not have the same climate change commitments. Now they are worried that if lumber is not going to come from Russia that there will be more logging on their home turf. Sound familiar? Eastern Canada does not want the country to produce oil and gas in order to reduce our carbon footprint, but has no problem driving on gas that comes from foreign sources.

I also find it kind of amusing that Russia even produces FCS certified products, but as long as it's certified right?

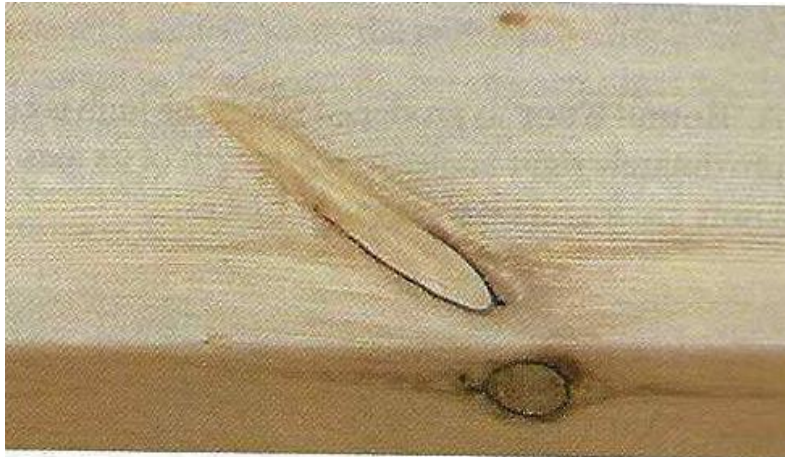
Quality Control

As we continue our series on knots this month I am going to focus on the worst kind, the spike knot.

Spike knots or narrow face knots are knots that are produced when the limb is cut either lengthwise or diagonally to the length of its axis and generally run across the width of the board. Spike knots are a result of vertical grain lumber.

Spike knots displace more of the cross section than round knots from branches of the same size, so they are more damaging.

Although the size allowable is the same for #2 and MSR you will typically see less of these knots in MSR because of their effect on the strength of the board.



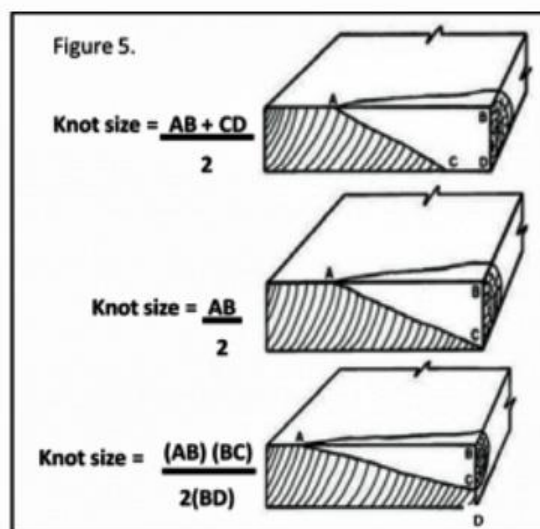
"Spike" Knot

All spike knots are restricted to the same displacement of the edge knot. So in a 2x4 1-1/4", for a 2x6 1-7/8" and 2 1/2" for a 2x8.

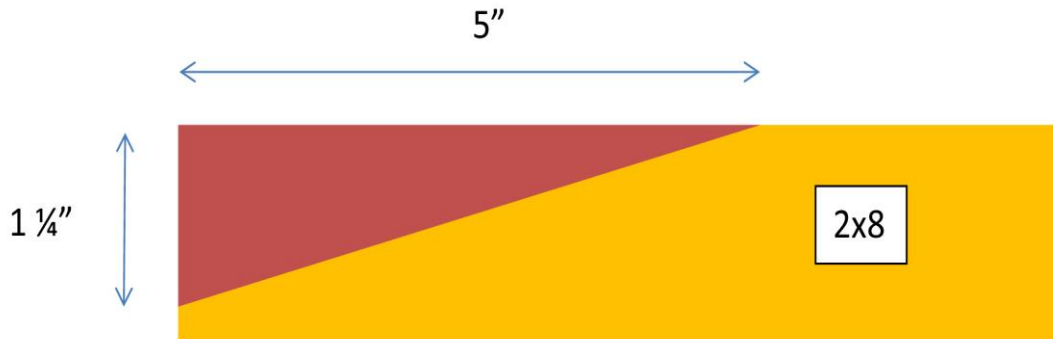
We do not expect you to be graders but bellow is an example of how a spike knot size is calculated.

Narrow face knots (**spike knots**) are measured according to the formulas in the drawing to the right.

These knots are limited in size to the edge knot sizes given in the rules.



For this calculation, measure the end of the knot that shows on the narrow face. If the spike knot shows on both narrow faces, add the two measurements together. Assume it is a round knot.



Then measure the spike knot length.

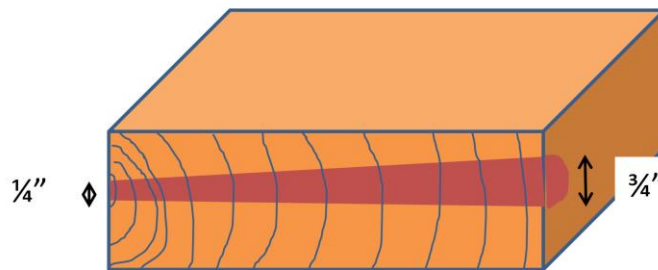
Finally multiply the ends of the knot (1 1/4") by the length (5") divided by a constant (1/3).

You can find the constant by using the equation: $\frac{1}{2 \times \text{thickness of the piece}}$

In this example for a 1 1/2" piece $1 \text{ over } 2 \times 1 \frac{1}{2} = 1/3$

Therefore: $1 \frac{1}{4}" \times 5" \times 1/3 = 2 \frac{1}{16}"$ The allowable edge knot size for a 2 X 8 is 2 1/2"

Where I do see problems with spike knots in trusses is when the knot goes from 1 narrow face right through the board to the other side. The maximum size for a knot like this would be 5/8" on a 2X4 according to the grading rules. If you have a knot like this in a 2x4 just breathing on it will probably cause it to break. Next time you see a knot that goes right through the board tap it on the ground and see what happens.



$$\frac{1}{4}" + \frac{3}{4}" / 2 = \frac{1}{2}" \text{ knot}$$

For more in depth information about lumber and knots check out the www.trustrainingonline modules #105 Quality Requirements, #107 Lumber Grade and Quality, #201 Lumber Picking, and #401 Placing Lumber.

Health and Safety Toolbox

Similarly to the Quality topic the WWTA would like to give you a monthly item you can discuss when doing your Safety Toolbox meeting.

This month we are going to focus on **Potentially Serious Incidents or what we used to call near misses**. A lot of times when there is a near miss there may be a tendency to go “Whew, that was lucky” and just carry on.

The Ensuring Safety and Reducing Red Tape Act made changes to the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act to clarify and simplify potentially serious incident reporting requirements.

Section 33(5) of the OHS Act gives the two criteria that define a reportable potentially serious incident. These are:

- The incident had a likelihood of causing a serious injury or illness.
- There is reasonable cause to believe that corrective action may need to be taken to prevent recurrence.

The prime contractor, or if there is no prime contractor, the employer shall conduct an investigation and report as laid out in section 33(6) of the OHS Act.

Once the investigation is complete, a report must be submitted to an OHS Director through the online reporting system. Immediate reporting of these potentially serious incidents is no longer required. A copy of the report must also be provided to the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative, if there is one, or made available to workers.

What's New

- Immediate reporting of potentially serious incidents is no longer required.
- Potentially serious incident reports must be submitted after an investigation is complete.
- Potentially serious incident reports will be used for information and education purposes, and won't result in remedial inspection in most cases. OHS may follow up if there is evidence of a current or ongoing serious health and safety concern.

What Stays the Same

- Provide potentially serious incident reports by using the OHS Online Reporting Service.
- Potentially serious incidents are not limited to workers. If someone who isn't a worker is involved, it's a potentially serious incident if it resulted from work activities at the work site or could have happened to a worker.
- Potentially serious incidents don't require an injury or illness to occur. Near misses can also be potentially serious incidents.
- Submitting a complete potentially serious incident investigation report through the OHS Online Reporting Service fulfills the requirement to provide a copy of the report to an OHS Director.
- Incomplete reporting may be followed up by OHS.

For more information in Incident Reporting and Investigation go to:

[Incident Reporting and Investigation](#)

The Alberta Government has a new format OHS eNews you can subscribe to with all kinds of good material at: <https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/>

News and Events

2022 AGM

The registration form was sent out for our Annual Meeting to be held May 10, 2022 in Edmonton at the Fantasyland Hotel. As we have not gotten together for a couple of years I would encourage you all to attend. The registration form can be found on the WWTA webpage at: <http://www.wwta.ab.ca/events.html>.

The deadline for booking hotel rooms at the group rate is April 10, 2022 and the number of rooms is limited.

A Call for New Directors of the Board of the WWTA

We are looking for some new Directors to be nominated to the Board at our AGM. It has been my experience that if you want to get the most out of your membership it helps to be involved and serving on the Board is a great way to do just this. If you would like to be nominated please let me know prior to the meeting.

Duties of the Board of Directors of the WWTA

The roles of the board of directors of the Western Wood Truss Association of Alberta include:

- Determine the association's vision and mission to guide its current operations and future development.
- Determine and review the goals of the WWTA.
- Determine policies of the WWTA.
- Determine strategic options, select those to be pursued, and decide the means to implement and support them.
- Ensure that the association's organizational structure, including employees have the capability and resources appropriate for implementing the chosen strategies.
- Delegate authority to the Executive Officer of the WWTA, and monitor and evaluate the implementation of policies, strategies and business plans.
- Ensure that communications to the membership of the WWTA are effective.
- Understand and take into account the interests of the membership of the association.
- Promote the goodwill and support of the full membership, including participating in objectives and programs of the WWTA when appropriate.
- Promote the benefits of the WWTA to all non-members and associate members.

Responsibilities of Directors

- Directors are responsible for ensuring that proper books of account are kept.
- Directors must act in good faith in what they honestly believe to be the best interests of the WWTA, and not for any collateral purpose. This means that, particularly in the event of a conflict of interest between the association's interests and their own, the directors must always favour the association.
- Directors must act with due skill and care.
- Directors must consider the interests of the membership of the WWTA.
- Members from the board of directors will determine any sub-committee members and those directors that represent the WWTA at other meetings, associations, or functions.
- Directors will elect from their own the Treasurer of the board of directors.

- Directors that represent the board will be expected to give a report on any meeting they attend on behalf of the association.
- Directors will be expected to offer their expertise from time to time to benefit the association.
- Directors will determine the compensation for the Executive Officer of the WWTA and any other employees.

Board of Directors Meetings

The board of directors of the WWTA will generally hold 2 meetings per year in June and December. Directors must be able to commit the time necessary to responsibly fulfill their commitment to the association.

In addition to the board of directors meetings there may be times when the board will be asked to vote or determine policy either through e-mail or teleconferencing.

The President of the board of directors will act as the chairman of the board; in the absence of the President the directors will appoint one of their own to conduct the meeting.

The time, place, and agenda of the board of directors meeting will be determined by the Executive Officer of the WWTA under the direction of the President.

Qualifications for Directors of the Board of the WWTA

The directors of the board will be elected from the membership of the WWTA at the annual general meeting. Candidates must be nominated from the membership.

Board of directors of the WWTA must be employed and hold title of a member in good standing. If the member is not in good standing then that director will be asked to resign from the board of directors. They must be in a position to act on behalf of the member.

The membership may elect a maximum of 2 directors that represent an associate member in good standing. This director must offer some expertise in the industry.

Directors are elected for a minimum of a 2 year term.

The board will make every effort to be representative of the membership including geographic regions and company size.

Directors and Officers Liability

The association is responsible for Directors and Officers liability insurance. The policy is available for review upon request.

Observations from the July 15 2021 Barrie Ontario Tornado Presentation

The presentation will introduce the work of the Northern Tornadoes Project at Western University, with a focus on the detailed findings from their forensic investigation of the July 15 2021 tornado in Barrie, Ontario. The EF2-rated storm damaged approximately 150 homes. The presentation will discuss issues with construction and resilience measures that would reduce damage to wood-frame houses in tornadoes.

Dr. Greg Kopp is the ImpactWX Chair in Severe Storms Engineering and a professor in Western University's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. He received a B.Sc.M.E. from the University of Manitoba in 1989 and a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Toronto in 1995. His expertise and research relate to mitigating damage to structures during extreme wind storms such as tornadoes and hurricanes. He works actively to implement research findings into practice, currently serving as Chair of the ASCE 49 Standards Committee on Wind Tunnel Testing for Buildings and other Structures, and as a member of various other Building Code committees. He is also the lead researcher for the '3 Little Pigs' Project at The Insurance Research Lab for Better Homes.

If you have builder customers that would like to attend the presentation please feel free to invite them.

Tornado Presentation-Greg Kopp
Tue, Apr 19, 2022 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM (MDT)

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone.

<https://meet.goto.com/697276861>

You can also dial in using your phone.
(For supported devices, tap a one-touch number below to join instantly.)

Canada: +1 (647) 497-9391
- One-touch: [tel:+16474979391,,697276861#](tel:+16474979391,697276861#)

Access Code: 697-276-861

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A Conversation with ...

Our next Conversation virtual meeting will be with Tony Fisher- Brand Champion Wesure Metal Manufacturing April 6, 2022 at 8:55. Tony will give us some insights into the custom metal manufacturing industry, and about the history of the specialty column.

A Conversation with Tony Fisher
Wed, Apr 6, 2022 8:55 AM - 9:30 AM (MDT)

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone.

<https://meet.goto.com/767672725>

You can also dial in using your phone.

(For supported devices, tap a one-touch number below to join instantly.)

Canada: +1 (647) 497-9391

- One-touch: tel:+16474979391,,767672725#

Access Code: 767-672-725

Congratulations

To Zytech Building Systems for being recognized in the SBCA for their safety record.

[SBCA Magazine January/February 2022 \(sbcmag.info\)](#)

Virtual Meetings

One day we will get back to meeting in a room I hope, but in the meantime if you have any topics you would like the WWTA to hold a virtual meeting on please let me know.

WWTA Online Training

If you have not yet taken a look at the WWTA online training program I would encourage you to, as no doubt you will be hiring new workers in the near future and it is a good method to get them productive earlier and safer. If you want an overview of the program go to the WWTA website at: <http://www.wwta.ab.ca/truss-training-online.html>

Did You Know?

This will be the 38 annual meeting of the Western Wood Truss Association of Alberta. The Association was registered under the Society's Act in Alberta December 19, 1983. The year I graduated high school.