

One-on-One With New RTA President Jeff Parrett

During the 2012 Railway Tie Association (RTA) Symposium in Tampa, the president's gavel was officially passed from Jeff Broadfoot of National Salvage and Service Corp. in Bloomington, Ind., to Jeff Parrett, vice president of Wheeler Lumber Co. LLC in Whitewood, S.D.

With two years of RTA work ahead of him, *Crossties* recently caught up with Parrett to learn more about his experiences in the wood tie industry, his thoughts about the future of the industry and the association, and his plans as president for 2013.

Tell me about Wheeler Lumber and your treated wood division.

Wheeler Lumber was started in 1892 in Des Moines, Iowa. Sam Wheeler sold industrial treated wood products and building materials in Iowa and Minnesota. (A complete history is located on our website.) The grandfather of David Hoak, our current owner, bought the company from Wheeler. Wheeler Lumber has sold just about every treated wood commodity over that span, along with many other diverse building products, to customers in the upper Midwest. Our customers are railroads, heavy highway and landscape contractors, along with bridge builders and building contractors. The railroad business represents a good portion of our treated wood business, therefore it is a very important component to our overall



business structure, and has been for many years.

What do you see as the greatest challenges to the wood tie industry in 2013?

Tie purchases are at an all-time high, and the RTA forecast model predicts the need for ties to continue at these levels for the near future. In order to sustain the production of hardwood ties, we need a healthy forest products industry and a sustainable timber harvest program. With the downturn in the economy, our sawmills were hurt badly. We have fewer and fewer producing mills for a variety of reasons, but long term this will continue to be chal-

lenging as the competition for raw materials only increases.

Another challenge is the regulatory climate against the wood preservative industry. We are seeing continued pressure from the environmental community trying to ban the use of wood preservatives. We must continue to show the public, and the regulators, that wood preservatives are very safe, highly effective, highly regulated and cause no harm to the environment.

How do you view RTA's role in helping members meet these challenges?

The RTA is continually looking for new ways to bring value to its members through its standing committees, which are tasked to bring new ideas to the table. Our new website, which was just completed this year, is a great example of this. We now have a very interactive site that brings together the vast amount of information we have accumulated over many years into a format that is fresh, informative and interactive. By informing and educating our members, we are giving them tools to help them make informed decisions on many different issues that affect our industry.

What excites you the most about the wood tie industry today?

We continually investigate ways to lengthen the service life of the ties, and just in the last few decades have developed new ways to do that. RTA has ongoing research to look at new preservatives and fastening systems to get even more life out of a wood tie. I am amazed at the time, dedication and ingenuity of the companies out there that continually bring new products to the industry to add value to their customers.

Do you have a theme for your years as president? What are the plans for next year's conference?

We have been dedicating the last few issues of *Crossties* to the sawmillers who play such an important role in our successes. I tip my hat to these companies, as

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