

Tie Grading In **Terre Haute**

Industry Members Travel To Indiana For Continuing Education

Each summer, prospective tie graders and other industry members gather to hone their tie grading skills at the annual RTA Tie Grading Seminar. This year is the 21st consecutive year that this important educational experience has been offered to members. And, the importance of this training is growing. As Education Committee member Steve Lish of Koppers Inc. puts it, "The revised AAR M1003 standard requires function spe-

cific training for special and key processes. Koppers considers tie grading a key process, and the RTA Tie Grading Seminar assists us with fulfilling our training obligation."

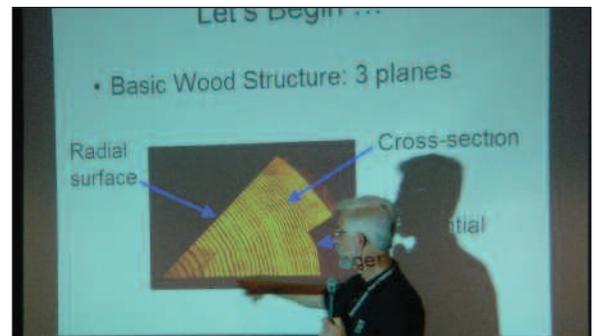
So, as this association service takes on new significance, let's take a quick look at how the Class of 2007 fared in their lab and field work. This year's event took place at one of the industry's oldest facilities, the Terre Haute, Ind., operations of

Tangent Rail. And, first class is the only way to describe our host's preparation for this year's event.

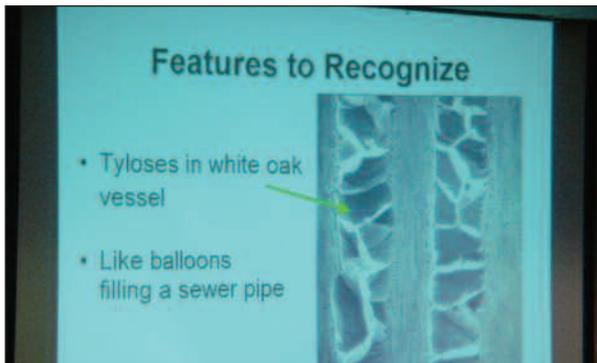
The seminar always kicks off on a Sunday with a half day bonus session on the engineering principles behind the application of wood ties in the railroad environment. Following that is a reception and then students are asked to get a good night sleep for an early start on Monday. §

Day 1

Dr. Terry Connors of the University of Kentucky kick-starts the day with an introduction to wood structure and species identification terminology.



Students quickly learn about the different ways wood species look when viewing cross-section, tangential or radial faces of a particular sample.



Certain key features, such as tyloses in white oak, are also illustrated so that students can begin to differentiate between the wide variety of wood species from which wood ties can be sawn.



Graders receive a wealth of supporting materials, including a wood sample kit that contains the 20 or so most common species that need to be identified.



Most of the morning is then spent digging into the details to help students determine how various wood species look to the naked eye and under magnification.

Then it's on to defects. Tie specifications are quite specific about what constitutes an allowable defect and what makes the tie into either an industrial grade tie or a cull.



After lunch, it's off to the Tangent Rail plant to get some first-hand experience with full-sized ties. Here, Watt reiterates what has been shown in slides in the classroom. Most students find the transition from lab work to the field very smooth.



Jimmy Watt of The Crosstie Connection reviews each of the specification's details to help everyone prepare for the afternoon fieldwork.



Then it's the students' turn to put into practice the day's instruction.



Graders are asked to identify oaks vs. mixed hardwoods on the first day...



...and everyone is supposed to be 100 percent on the question of whether the test ties are grade ties or are to be rejected for defect.

The practicum on Day One is the easier of the two days of testing in that students are encouraged to work together and ask questions of the instructors. Here, Education Committee Chairman Marshall Allen, left, works with Joshua Reitz of Burke-Parsons-Bowlby.



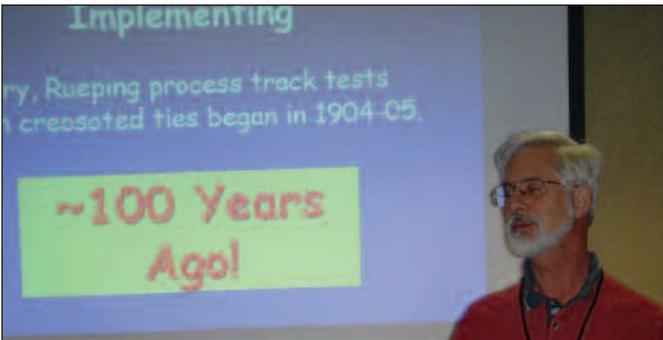
RTA's Education Committee and instructors take a moment at the end of the day to have their picture taken. Those pictured are, standing, from left, Steve Lish and Jimmy Watt; kneeling, from left, Jim Ringe, Marshall Allen, Jeff Morrell and Terry Conners. RTA would like to thank Dr. Ringe of the University of Kentucky's Department of Forestry for accompanying Dr. Conners on the tie grading seminar and for his assistance with everything from taking pictures to instructing.

Day 2

Day two starts with a review of species identification and a practicum on larger tie-end cut-offs.



Then, Dr. Jeff Morrell of Oregon State University and current president of the American Wood Preservers Institute talks about plant hygiene. Keeping a clean yard and doing things right at the plant makes for better quality control.



Following Morrell's presentation, Dr. Conners provides a presentation on many aspects of wood preserving.

By using red oak samples and soap students learn that you can in fact blow air through certain species, indicating they are easy to treat.



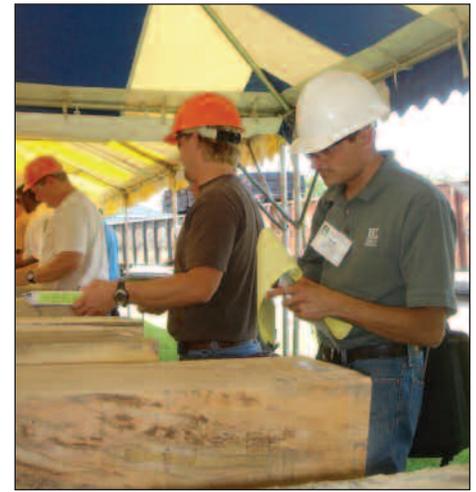
Then, using green colored "pickling" juice, Conners pulls a vacuum on wood samples to illustrate how vacuum/pressure cycles actually treat sapwood more easily than heartwood.

Later, it's off to the plant for some more fieldwork. Here, during the first part of the afternoon, attendees get to see Tangent Rail's tie inspection station.



It's here that the real action of tie grading takes place.

After this, it's back to the yard for our graders' final test.



This time, it's for real. For a final grade, everyone must work individually to identify exact species and grade the ties.



And everyone makes the grade! Our final activity after the group photo is to hand out the certificates and let the graders grade the instructors by filling out course evaluation sheets.



Our winners of the two practicums on the last day are Don Leary of Appalachian Timber, left, and Stacy Hobbs of Koppers Inc. Each received a \$100 U.S. Savings Bond for their excellent work.

A Special Thanks

The instructors, students and RTA Education Committee Chairman Marshall Allen and staff all wish to thank the staff of Tangent Rail for their efforts in making this year's rendition of the RTA Tie Grading Seminar a superb learning experience. It was truly a first-class event.

2007 Tie Grading Seminar Attendee List

Don Leary of Appalachian Timber Services; Yancey Long of Arizona Pacific Wood Preserving; Chad Rolstad of Burlington Northern Santa Fe; Robert Boggs, Mike Cinalli, Eddie Gore, Stephen Lee, Joshua Reitz and Chris Westfall of Burke-Parsons-Bowlby; David Hunsucker of Georgetown Rail Equipment; Ted Bently, Arthur Bradford, Khairi Elfarah, Scott Ellis, Jackson Gray, Shelton Hawkins, Kelly Hester, Stacy Hobbs, Jeff Hodgson, Brian MacKey, Blair Simpson, Beau Van Dayke, John Walpole, Eric Watson, David Webster, Charles West and Travis Yeoman of Koppers Inc.; Stephen Blanco and Kerry McDaniel of Tangent Rail Products; Bruce Allen of TXU; and David Koch of Wheeler Lumber LLC. Representing RTA were Executive Director Jim Gauntt, Education Committee Chairman Marshall Allen and Education Committee Vice-Chairman Steve Lish. Instructors were Terry Connors, Jeff Morrell and Jimmy Watt.