The tour began at 10:00 a.m., when Pat brought attendees to the truss design department. This allowed them to view the process and procedures that truss technicians take to ensure high-quality designs that are demanded by the industry. “They seemed to be impressed with the technology and what goes into building design today,” Pat recalled. “It was good to show them how the products are designed and that the process adheres to all safety standards outlined within the building code.”

The group asked several questions about the quality of the products, discussed certain concerns, and addressed preconceived ideas surrounding truss design. John explained the group’s concerns about truss design and construction, “Within the fire service there have been numerous rumors regarding the sub-par manufacturing of trusses and the use of gusset plates. These concepts have been further validated by fire service created educational videos and materials. The truss technician was able to show the attendees that the design process within the facility is consistent and accurate due to standards put into place for each truss built.”

MABAS (Mutual Aid Box Alarm System) is a mutual aid organization that has been in existence since the late 1960s. MABAS is a cooperative program that includes over 550 member fire departments organized within 46 divisions. All MABAS member agencies agree to send help and resources as available to other districts when they are in need. Visit www.mabas.org for more information.

Pat then led the group to the production area where they witnessed trusses being built. Moving through the facility’s various work stations, the group asked a lot of questions and showed interest in the component manufacturing process from start to finish. They responded well to the hard work being done in the plant. “It was as if there was a mutual respect for one another. From one hard worker to another, “Mike commented regarding the plant and fire service personnel. The Carbeck presentation provoked meaningful questions about structural building components and at times helped to dispel misconceptions about lightweight component construction. “It was helpful to talk about some of the basic building principles surrounding lightweight construction,” Mike said. Several sections of the Carbeck CD spawned constructive feedback from the group as the discussion turned to important safety issues. “The discussion allowed us to understand the specific areas of education that the fire service really needs. WTCA and its chapters can provide the education that the fire service needs most,” he noted.

At the end of the presentation John and others stayed to discuss the event and to offer some feedback about the education provided. With John’s experience in training MABAS 10 he was able to provide much insight into what the industry can do to engage the fire service in the most effective way. Ultimately both the structural building components industry and the fire service share a common goal-saving lives. “Between the leaders of the fire service and WTCA, we can collect data and process it so that each of us understands what the other is trying to accomplish,” John said. “Understanding building construction is one of the most vital aspects of fire/rescue tactics.”

John enthusiastically suggested that WTCA-IL and MABAS continue to develop their relationship by scheduling future mutually educational events. Some of the ideas that John discussed about future educational opportunities include:

• Putting together a specific tour concept package for Illinois that can be disseminated to fire departments along with the Carbeck CD and fire personnel binders.
• Provide props like miniature trusses to fire departments to be used in demonstrations and to ensure common terminology.
One Tour at a Time…

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• Build relationships with some of the state associations such as the Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI), and the state fire academy to conduct joint testing.

The relationship-building that occurred at Neumann Distribution Centers that day has turned out to be valuable. The dialogue was helpful to both groups as discussion of future educational events with WTCA and the fire service were explored. “The fire service is always open to furthering relationships that can improve the safety of our people,” John said regarding joint education opportunities in the future. This is a step in the right direction for the structural building components industry and the safety of fire personnel, because it has opened the doors to strengthen both industries. John is looking to adding a component plant tour to the standard educational curriculum for MABAS 10; WTCA-IL is ready and willing to host them. “All we want to do is help the fire service understand how these buildings are constructed so they can determine safer ways to fight the fires,” Mike concluded. “Everyone agrees that firefighter safety is the goal here.”

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