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## Center Research Steering Committee Conducts Brainstorming Session

This year, the Center for Forest Products Marketing and Management Steering Committee meeting followed a somewhat different agenda from past meetings. Dan Cumbo, Research Associate for the Center, led the group through an exercise known as the Nominal Group Technique (NGT). The NGT was used to solicit ideas regarding important issues facing members' firms and the industry at large. The goal of this exercise was to identify broad focus areas for future Center research projects and funding procurement. The process began with a question posed to the group "What significant challenges will your company/industry face in the next five years?" Participants then silently generated responses to this question, for a period of time, writing their responses on index cards.

Following the silent idea generation period, participants were asked, round-robin, to present their responses to the group. This continued until all responses were voiced. Responses were recorded on flip charts as they were presented. Once all responses were presented, the group was led through an exercise to clarify and summarize responses. Participants were then asked to silently rank the responses based on importance and potential impact to their business or industry. Finally, results were tallied and priority was assigned to each response.

By presenting the topic in the form of a question related to their individual businesses/industries, participants were perhaps more apt to think of real issues affecting their operations as opposed to limiting their thoughts to what they might consider "researchable topics". Moreover, the exhaustive round-robin approach assured that all participants' responses were voiced and the final rankings helped to place priority on specific focus areas.

The following list includes issues cited multiple times through two rounds of the NGT process. The list is ordered according to priority and/or anticipated degree of impact over the next five years.

1. Closer, more effective ties to suppliers and customers through effective flow of information and technology are needed;
2. Changing/evolving customer specifications for raw material (lumber);

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# Timber Bridge Contest

Over the past few years Virginia Tech's Forest Products Club has been very competitive in the The National Timber Bridge Design Competition. Last year with the help of Snavely Forest Products they designed, built and tested a bridge that was able to take fourth of fourteen bridges in the best support structure category of the competition.

The National Timber Bridge Design Competition is open to student chapters of American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and Forest Products Society (FPS) in the United States and Canada. Joint or cooperative entries (ASCE and FPS working together) are eligible and even encouraged. A chapter may also submit multiple entries.

The Competition has 3 major objectives:

- To promote interest in the use of wood as a competitive bridge construction material;
- To generate innovative and cost-effective timber bridge design techniques; and
- To develop an appreciation of the engineering capabilities of wood.

This competition is being coordinated by Southwest Mississippi Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), Inc., a rural development program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture administered through the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Partial funding is being provided by the U.S. Forest Service through its Wood in Transportation Initiative. Additional funding is provided by the Southern Forest Products Association. Corporate sponsors are Unit Structures LLC and Weyerhaeuser Co. The competition is also endorsed by ASCE's Structural Engineering Institute.

The competition provides a chance for students to showcase their design and build abilities, while competing against as many as twenty different Universities. With donations from many of the Center for Forest Products Marketing and Managements member companies, the students have a chance to work directly with industry.

For more information on the Timber Bridge Competition you can visit their web site at: [www.msacd.org/bridge](http://www.msacd.org/bridge).

## Center Focus

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# Getting the Word Out



Mark Vollinger of W. M. Cramer Lumber CO. and Tyler Riggs of CFPMM in front of W. M. Cramers new curtain side trailer.

Some leaders in the industry are taking steps to promote their company as well as the industry as a whole. W. M. Cramer Lumber is one of those companies. They have recently purchased a new curtain side trailer, which has dual purposes. They are moving their product as well as promoting a good industry message. Other groups and companies have used several tactics. They have spread their message across mud flaps, trucks, bill boards, and like W. M. Cramer, their trailers.

and telling them that the forest is an essential part of every ones lives and the fact that it needs to be managed and harvested is important to the health of the industry. Few people realize how much they rely on forest products in their day to day activities.

This advertising is important for the health of the industry. Getting the right information in front of the general public,

## Steering Committee cont.....

3. Better understanding of the value stream, as well as segmentation/integration of the value stream;
4. Shortened and quicker distribution channels are needed;
5. Improved employee screening and recruiting to “make the right fit” between the employee and organization;
6. A larger export presence is needed in the lumber industry;
7. Manufacturing, distribution and sales must work in a coordinated way to meet customer demands;
8. Specific customer needs must be anticipated and targeted;
9. Enhanced employee training is needed in all areas;
10. Changes in competition from a global marketplace;
11. Adapting processes and products to lower quality raw material; and
12. Aligning product lines with customer needs and competing imported products.

In summary, the issues listed above can be broadly segmented into five different categories:

- 1) system level improvements;
- 2) improved supplier/customer relations;
- 3) employee recruiting, training and human resource development;
- 4) issues related to global competition, imports and exports; and
- 5) wood raw material utilization.

As such, look for these topics to play an increasingly prominent role in Center research and research related publications.

## *Wood Bits*

- The Average single family home (2,000 square feet) can contain 16,900 board feet of lumber and up to 10,000 square feet of panel products.
- On average, everyone uses the equivalent of a tree, 18 inches in diameter- 100 feet tall, every year. That's 80 cubic feet.

Source: Southern Building Material Association

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# *Calendar of Events*

## **Department of Wood Science and Forest Products**

### **Virginia Tech**

<http://vtwood.forprod.vt.edu>

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- September 23-24, 2004      **Advanced Sales Training in the Forest Products Industry, Short Course**  
Forest products sales people and managers who want to improve their ability to relate to customers will benefit from this course. The course is designed for those who are currently selling forest products and want to understand the importance of improving their communication, time management, and negotiation skills.
- October 7-8, 2004            **3<sup>rd</sup> Drying Lumber with a Solar Dry Kiln**  
This two-day program will be held in Blacksburg, VA. This intensive workshop introduces all the principles of drying hardwood and softwood lumber in a solar kiln. The course also contains information on the design and operation of solar kilns. Emphasis will be placed on the new solar kiln design at Virginia Tech. Whether you are considering building a solar kiln or are currently operating one, this short course will provide you information that will improve your lumber drying skills.
- October 20-22                **3<sup>rd</sup> Wood Industry Management Series Workshop: Lean Manufacturing**  
The Center for Forest Products Marketing and Management offers the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wood Industry Management Series Workshop in Lean Manufacturing. This workshop will help managers in wood products businesses identify target opportunity areas in their company for lean manufacturing, provide a step-by-step guide for implementation of "lean systems" and, show how these steps will lead to significantly reduced manufacturing costs and increased competitiveness. The course concludes with a tour of a world class, lean manufacturing facility.
- March 30, 2005              **Annual Meeting**  
The Center for Forest Products Marketing and Management will be holding its 13<sup>th</sup> annual meeting and awards reception on March 30, 2005. Mark Barford of Appalachian Hardwood Manufacturers Inc will be the guest speaker this year. The meeting will take place in Blacksburg.