



National Air Barrier Association Receives Recognition

From left to right: Frank Ernst, President of Durwest Construction and Chair of NABA, Ryan Dalglish, Director of NECA, Professor Herbert Enns, Design Architect of C.A.S.T. building and Professor Andrew Vernooy, Department of Architecture, University of Manitoba.

The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with Economic Development Winnipeg, and the Winnipeg Foundation, is pleased to announce that the National Air Barrier Association (NABA) is the recipient of this month's Business-Education Partnership Award of Excellence.

"This is terrific news," said Frank Ernst, co-founder and current chair of NABA. "After all our years of hard work, this recognition is very encouraging."

An air barrier is the membrane put on the exterior of a wall, before rigid insulation is installed, to eliminate air and vapour passage. In 1995, no training was available on commercial air barrier installation anywhere in North America. It was not included in any of the apprentice trades across Canada and was not recognized as a separate trade.

NABA was created to rectify that situation, and approached the National Energy Conservation Association (NECA) to develop a certificate challenge program to upgrade and certify the skills of existing workers. Three contractors started the industry with assistance from various design professionals, utilities and government agencies that provided in-kind contributions in the form of time and ideas.

"NABA donated the materials and labour for the air barrier construction in the Centre for Architectural Structures and Technology (C.A.S.T.) building at the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Architecture," explained Faculty Professor Mark West. "Their participation, like that of our other corporate contributors, was crucial to the success of this ambitious project. What was unusual about NABA's, however, was how they dovetailed their support for University research and education with their own technical training program. They were the only industry involved in this project to use their donation of construction as a technical training program for their own membership."

"Their initiative in this regard has carried through to their recent use of the building as a venue for a half-day teaching seminar on air barrier technology, allowing full scale mock-ups of wall sections to be exhibited, and carrying an obvious benefit to our students and faculty. The participation of industrial organizations like NABA is crucial to the success of C.A.S.T. and to its mission of interdisciplinary education and research," concluded West.

NABA has gone from training about 15 people a year to providing new entrant training programs and continuing education sessions for almost 300 people a year. It provides training to design professionals, including architects, engineers, building officials and consultants. The University of Manitoba provides the faculty and administration support, while NABA, through NECA, provides the technical training, which is open to students at the University in the Faculty of Architecture at no cost.

"This partnership has provided an example of how a service industry in Manitoba can become an international competitor and success through a commitment to education and training," said Ryan Dalglish, who sits on the NECA Board of Directors.

"Having a NABA certification makes you more valuable to the industry," said Ernst. "It's great for the young installers and it's great for the industry because it can hire qualified professionals from right here in Manitoba."

A working group made up of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Winnipeg and Winnipeg's post-secondary institutions will consider nominations for The Business-Education Partnership Award of Excellence each month for one year. The award will be presented to companies that have established unique and innovative partnerships with post-secondary institutions for developing specific skills critical to their business and industry.

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