

Editorial | *The Summit Experience*

The Perspective of Young Engineers



The following article is a reflection of Brian Petruzzi's experience at the 2015 NCSEA Summit, with contributions provided by Jera Schlotthauer.

There has been an ongoing conversation within NCSEA over the last few years on the importance of Young Member Groups. Articles written in this publication have not only discussed the benefits of Young Member Groups but also stated the importance of Young Member Groups as a valuable investment for the next generation of structural engineers. As a founding board member and a past Chair of the Structural Engineers Association of Metropolitan Washington Young Member Group (SEAMW-YMG), I could not agree more with those articles. However, I'd like to take this opportunity to discuss the importance of encouraging young engineers to get involved in the structural engineering profession at the national level, particularly by attending structural engineering conferences such as the NCSEA Structural Engineering Summit.

As a first time attendee of the NCSEA Summit last year, I was impressed by the conference's intimate feel (as far as national conventions go) and NCSEA's commitment to cater programming to the practicing engineer. As one of the 'young engineers' in attendance, I was also fascinated by the noticeable effort to make young engineers feel welcome. National conventions can be a daunting scene for young engineers to navigate; however, between the Young Engineers Welcome Reception, the session designed to foster conversation about generational differences in the workplace, and special 'Young Member' ribbons on our name tags, it was clear to me that NCSEA is making a concerted effort to welcome young engineers to their conference. During a conversation with one of the "more seasoned" structural engineers, it was impossible not to sense the irresistible excitement in their voice – people were genuinely delighted we were there.

Arguments for attending conferences typically sound something like this: "Conferences provide an opportunity to expand your technical knowledge, improve your soft skills, and network with others in your field." Although these statements are true, perhaps the most impactful part of attending the NCSEA Summit for me was the overall sense of community I felt at the conclusion of the conference. To me, meeting other people in the structural engineering profession is like meeting your neighbors. Neighbors look out for each other and together share the responsibility to take care of the neighborhood. Leaving the NCSEA Summit, it was hard not to feel this sense of responsibility for the structural engineering community. The people I just met were the people taking care of our profession. If not for them, who would do it? Perhaps more relevant, if not for young engineers like myself, who will do it in the future?

A culture of personal accountability, where employees possess the confidence and the courage to take ownership over their success, is the most powerful characteristic of a successful work environment. Attending conferences such as the NCSEA Summit surrounds young engineers with people who are taking accountability for their careers by stepping outside of their workplace to strengthen

themselves and their profession. Environments like this are contagious and allow young engineers to develop into future leaders that will take accountability for both their personal success back at the office and the structural engineering community as a whole.

It is impossible for an office environment to recreate the energy generated at a conference. Young engineers directly out of school often have a lot of energy and enthusiasm. They are starting a new chapter in their lives and are eager to learn and establish themselves amongst their peers. After a successful transition to the workplace, many young structural engineers are driven to obtain their P.E. (or S.E.). However, after a few years, sitting in the same chair within the same cubicle, talking to the same people, can keep them from maintaining this energy. Attending conferences such as the NCSEA Summit allows young engineers to break out of their comfort zone and be exposed to like-minded people who are willing to take time away from the office and are enthusiastic to learn something new. This renewed energy is one of the many tangible benefits that young engineers can bring back to the office.

Beyond what I shared in this editorial, there are countless reasons why young engineers should be involved with their profession outside of their office walls. For whatever reason one decides to attend the NCSEA Summit this fall, I'm confident that, as each young engineer returns home, he or she too will feel the support and sense of community that I experienced and will be empowered to care for and ensure the success of the structural engineering profession in the future.

This year's NCSEA Summit is in Orlando, the *magical* home of Disney, a place that embraces the creativity and successes of the people that built it, and that has been inspiring future generations for over 40 years. What better combination – the NCSEA Summit and Disney – to bring everyone in our profession together? Regardless of age, we hope that you will join us – and your neighbors – in Orlando for the 2016 NCSEA Structural Engineering Summit. ■



Brian Petruzzi is a Project Engineer for Thornton Tomasetti and Founding Member and Past-Chair of the Structural Engineers Association of Metropolitan Washington Young Member Group. Brian may be contacted at BPetruzzi@ThorntonTomasetti.com.

Jera Schlotthauer is a Structural Engineer, EIT II for Martin Martin Wyoming and the current Chair of the NCSEA Young Member Group Support Committee. Jera may be contacted at Jschlotthauer@mmwyo.com.

For more information on the NCSEA YMGSC, please visit www.ncsea.com/members/younggroups.