Customer Appreciation events put a “face” on the New Millennium brand

The September 14th Customer Appreciation event was a day for having fun. It was also a day for strengthening business relationships.

Held simultaneously at three of the company’s plants, the events have generated many thanks from fabricators who attended. As one project manager recently observed in an email, “It was fun and very educational. We were impressed. It was also nice to meet all of the New Millennium Team and to finally put a face with a name.”

Attendees who had heretofore communicated via phone, fax and email discovered that the event involved much more than a friendly plant tour, a golf outing and good food. For many, the event completed their picture of a company that is deliver-ing on a promise of being Flexible to the Finish.

Customers during and after the event related their better understanding of the company’s production capabilities and advancements in such areas as special profile joist configuration and on-the-line innovation. Some fabricators came away with new ideas on how to organize and perhaps modernize their own operations. Upon seeing New Millennium’s specially de-signed welding helmet system, one fabricator now reports that he is intent on bringing this innovative solution to his facility.

However, most attendees mainly expressed their appreciation for doing business with people who understood their needs.

“One of my highlights was meeting all the people that I work with everyday,” emailed another fabricator. His closing statement, along with color highlighting, summed up what other customers had to say about the day’s activities and the meaning behind it:

“Remain FLEXIBLE TO THE FINISH!!”

Service guide reflects the will of customers

Getting “on the same page” has taken literal meaning at New Millennium with the development of the company’s first ever Customer Service Guide. A direct outcome of research among customers and prospective customers, the guide is intended to clarify customer expectations and how various job titles across the company can more effectively work together to meet these expectations.

As Richard Poinsatte, GM at Lake City noted, the purpose of the guide is to bring more clarity and detail to what is expected of everyone. “By putting
customer expectations down in writing, we can become better aligned on our common goal,” Richard noted. In this spirit, the guide is not a fixed set of rules, but sets the framework company-wide for providing consistently “proactive” services to customers. This is the first version and is expected to be updated periodically.

The guide specifically addresses certain recurring issues that have been expressed by fabricators. The following are among the top concerns:

**Estimating:**
Fabricators want to respond in a timely way to GCs. This means getting the bid in early and not at the last hour or even the last day. An earlier bid helps clarify work and oversights.

**Engineering & Detailing:**
Fabricators require error-free engineering and detailing, because if a job is fabricated with wrong or improper data, the problems will “snow ball” in the field.

---

**Service Flexibility:**
Fabricators say adapting to changes is vital to them, because that’s the kind of market we both are in. For example, a fabricator whose job becomes extended may require joist and deck shipments in stages. Or a fabricator whose job is based on emergency construction (as in a natural disaster), may require immediate shipment.

Other concerns expressed by fabricators are generally related to how proactive New Millennium can be in their times of need, as opposed to our being restricted by rigid manufacturing procedures. As one of the guidelines within the new guide relates: “At New Millennium, we do not impose rules on customers, because this is just a way of defl ecting their problems. Instead, we proactively seek potential customer problems. We manufacture high quality joists and decks, but we are at our very best when we are proactively producing answers to problems.”

---

**Engineering company growth:**

Engineering managers discuss ways to improve detailing, designing and quality control to build stronger customer relationships.

**What is your role at New Millennium?**

**Chad Bickford:** We oversee the day-to-day engineering process within our specific divisions. We coordinate with our internal engineering personnel to ensure projects are staying on schedule. We provide engineering insight on projects at the beginning of the quote stage up to the erection process. We help to promote customer service within the department.

**Michael Winarta:** We also perform many customer service functions in engineering. We have a well-rounded knowledge of the products, their advantages and limitations; and knowing the manufacturing process helps a customer out. We try to provide a good bridge between sales, traffic and production to make sure all the needs of the shop and the customers are taken care of.

**Tony McCrumb:** It may involve coaching, managing the schedule, communicating with the shop on special work and a number of different things because it varies day to day. Overall our goal is to make sure that we’re customer friendly. I have a lot of interaction with customers to help them solve problems, including helping to get their jobs done more cost effectively and more quickly if needed.

“You have to prioritize and use time management... I have things that pop up out of the ordinary, specific customer needs, and I have to make changes immediately to accommodate their schedule.”

Chad Bickford, Engineering Manager
Lake City, Florida
Carl Pugh: We oversee shop drawings, designs, and shop details to make sure they comply with the Steel Joist Institute specifications and contract documents. We get involved with fabrication and manufacturing to make sure quality control standards are adhered to. We also get involved in any issues in the field with clients, contractors, engineers, and architects.

How do you keep everything and everyone in engineering focused on the customer’s needs?

TM: The key is to have the right people working with you to help you supervise. The detailing supervisor, for example, is expected to take care of the detailing group and to look to me for help and guidance. The same thing with quality control supervisors, the supervisor is expected to be in there coaching the inspectors, looking for quality problems and to come to me when they need help.

CP: You need to be able to multitask, address different needs for different people. A sales person might ask what should be done to quote a job and it’s an estimated answer. Then once you get the job, you have to be more specific before we can actually manufacture it. You’ve got to be able to address any problems that may arise in the field and respond to a customer. The biggest thing is looking at the situation and applying the appropriate assistance.

MW: You do need to learn how to multitask. As a manager, you don’t try to micromanage. Let people learn how to do things and let them be independent, but be in the background to make sure things are flowing right.

CB: We have a strong engineering team, which helps the process tremendously. You have to prioritize and use time management, but you can’t set a schedule for yourself with this type of business. I have things that pop up out of the ordinary, specific customer needs, and I have to make changes immediately to accommodate their schedule. At the start of a day, I have a good idea of the itinerary. Then the phone rings and emails come in and you alter it. You don’t leave until it’s all taken care of.

How does your role interact with the roles of others to benefit customers?

TM: I tend to see my role in three ways. No. 1 is my communication with others to make sure we get a quality product out the door. No. 2 is to make sure our product is consistently being made the same and to a higher standard. No. 3 is making sure I coach our people that when you talk to a customer, you must ask the right questions to get down to what the customer really wants. This is important, because you can ask a question five different ways and get five different answers just by asking differently.

CP: Communication is the key. Customers expect a certain level of service and of course, we’re going to supply the level they expect. But we can do more. When any one of us has a better idea as to what we’re doing, every time that person shares it, we can separate ourselves from our competitors.

“Communicating with each other is a tool that we can all benefit from. It enables us to constantly improve.”

Tony McCrumb, Engineering Manager
Florence, South Carolina

“FLEXIBLE to the FINISH”

“We need to let our customers know we are here to service specialty jobs as well as more standard jobs.”

Florence, South Carolina
How do you stay current on the latest laws and codes?

MW: Typically, we stay actively involved in the Steel Joist Institute and Steel Deck Institute. By staying close to them we know the different changes in the product designs that we manufacture. In addition, as professional engineers, we are required to take continuing education credit hours each year.

CP: I’m on the Steel Joist Institute’s Engineering Practice Committee. You’ve got to stay up on all the building codes and what the changes are and how that will affect the steel joist specifications. Plus, you have to have continuing education. I’m licensed in ten states, six of which require continuing education hours every year.

CB: There are always new things out there. You have to do independent research to keep yourself in the loop. At New Millennium, the engineering personnel always talk about new trends of the design world. As a member of the American Institute of Steel Construction and the American Society of Civil Engineers, I review material from these organizations. I am also a member of the Steel Deck Institute’s Educational committee.

How do you maintain a balance between what you need to do to prevent errors in a design and yet meet accelerated timelines to serve the customer?

TM: It’s a fine line. Sometimes you have to pick priorities. Sometimes the shop schedule needs to change, because the needs of the customer can change at any point in the day. You may start something at 8 a.m. and switch jobs at 9. That’s the way the business is.

CB: Quality comes first. We stress this in all areas of our business, and engineering is no exception. Our engineering department has internal checks and balances, and we have a great group of people that genuinely care about the quality of their work. We are human and when mistakes occur we learn from them and move on.

CP: Good information, good tools, good people. You need all three to make it work. Getting the information can be the toughest challenge and it’s something we constantly work on.

MW: Our structural steel products must carry roof or floor loads. We have developed a check and balance method in practically all the different departments. We always stress the importance of doing things right the first time. In addition, a checker is checking that the quality of the product is as intended. When we need to follow an accelerated schedule, we still enforce all of these checks and balances.

How can an engineer be more proactive?

CB: The sooner the engineer gets involved in a project the better. This allows a longer time frame for errors and delays to be prevented. One thing we do is have engineers look over RFI’s before they are sent to the customers, because some-times the engineers can answer the RFI, which helps our customers by cutting down on coordination efforts and leg work to get a project approved.

TM: A proactive engineer is reviewing the job, sees questions and knows they have to be asked. If possible, they go ahead and make that call before the detailer gets it. They already know what the detailer is going to ask, so they are helping the detailer get ahead of the game. Being proactive is having enough foresight to ask questions early to prevent problems down the road. A reactive person waits until the problems hit them. Then all they are doing is solving problems that maybe could have been fixed ahead of time.

CP: Getting involved and staying on top of the project. We have our engineers review the job before we start it to make sure we ask for the correct information. If we see something that can be a problem we address it.

MW: I think being proactive means that you are always looking forward to make sure something is done as effectively as
possible. Asking the right question the minute a discrepancy is found means you get the answer sooner and the project will be completed sooner. As an engineer, you need to have this type of mindset, because the problem will still be there regardless, and my experience has always shown that getting it taken care of sooner always yields better results.

A year from now, what achievements would you like to look back on?

CB: The biggest thing is making detailing time as minimal as possible. We want to continue decreasing drawing times, and gain an edge over our competitors. We want to maintain and increase internal efficiencies while providing outstanding customer service. It is important to have our customers rank us as the top steel joist and steel deck engineering department in their area.

TM: I want to have engineers go out and visit customers and discuss specialty jobs. I want them assisting our service capabilities that way. Get our engineers in front of our customers. We need to let our customers know we are here to service specialty jobs as well as more standard jobs.

CP: I see us increasing productivity after we get through our construction phase. I want to increase our output and still provide the quality and service our customers expect. We want to be the leading joist and deck supplier in our territory. We want to sell more joists and deck than anybody.

MW: The biggest thing will be looking back and seeing a remarkable, efficient, and self-sufficient department. As the engineering department matures, with more experience and responsibility under everyone’s wings, I’m sure we will get there.

Proactive service helps Fab-Weld keep a promise

When Fab-Weld Steel project manager, Tommy Jackson, found himself in a bind, he knew who to call first.

Tommy Jackson had originally ordered through another joist supplier, but when the drawings came back from approval, there were problems. The joist supplier was not able to deliver in three weeks as originally promised. The supplier wanted six weeks for fabrication because they were busier than anticipated and were coming up on their July shutdown.

“When the supplier could not live up to the delivery date they had previously committed to,” Tommy explains. “At that moment I didn’t know what to do. Our customer was very upset that we were not going to be able to meet the schedule that was agreed upon. So I called New Millennium just to see if by chance there was anything they could do to help, as we didn’t want to lose a good customer.” “Our customer wasn’t able to live with the joist supplier taking that much time,” Tommy said. “And

“When any one of us has a better idea as to what we’re doing, every time that person shares it, we can separate ourselves from our competitors.”

Carl Pugh, Engineering Manager
Salem, Virginia
the joist supplier wouldn’t live up to the original agreement. They weren’t willing to budge even an inch.”

Jackson needed 130 tons of steel joists to help build a new Stein Lumber in Natchez, Mississippi so he turned to New Millennium sales manager, Rich Madden, in Lake City, Florida. Rich was sent the other joist supplier’s drawings that had been approved and New Millennium was able to get the job completed in about two weeks.

“We were very pleased,” Jackson said. “It got us off the hot seat with our customer. At one point they probably would have not considered working with us again.”

Looking back on the experience, Tommy now observes, “We could have lost a good customer. We try to live up to what we say we can do. We try to do whatever it takes to make things happen and through experience we know that New Millennium does the same. Without New Millennium, we could have lost the job and a good customer.”

“As we were told by our customer, dates mean something. And they mean something to us. That’s why we called New Millennium.”

– Tommy Jackson, Project Manager Fab-Weld Steel, Inc.

Tommy added this final assessment: “I speak not only for myself but also the other PM’s in our office when I say that we really appreciate all the hard working people at New Millennium and their efforts to take care of customers to the best of their abilities. Thanks, for helping make this a successful project.”

This is the first of a two-part story on the subject of leadership, to be continued in the next issue of New Millennium Times

On Leadership: Bert Hollman, president of New Millennium, and Brent Bacon, line supervisor at Butler, share their views on leadership, changes in the company and producing opportunities internally as well as solutions for customers.

Why is leadership important to New Millennium?
Bert: It’s essential, because you’ve never seen an all-state player come off a losing team. You may be a great manager, but if you can’t produce a winning team, then something is missing by way of leadership. You’ve got to have a winning team. It’s important to everyone in the company. No all-state basketball player will come off a losing team. It just doesn’t happen and there are several reasons for that.

How is leadership achieved, versus managing to get things done?
Bert: It’s a coaching thing. It’s a lot of things. You teach, you encourage and you provide the resources necessary. You knock obstacles down. You get out of the way. But there’s no one magic bullet. It’s what every good coach does. It’s encouraging people, training them, helping them win and then getting out of the way and giving them the credit they deserve.

What is the impact of such leadership?
Bert: People come in each day with increased energy. Production goes up dramatically. We are seeing this happen. We expect to see it happen across the company. Leadership brings positive change and a different atmosphere
on the job. You can start to feel it. More people are starting to believe in themselves and they are acting like winners, because they are winners.

**How does leadership leverage new plant capabilities and new ways of doing things?**

**Bert:** You have to reach out and learn and try to learn other things around you. You’ve got to care about the people around you. You’ve got to get along well with people. You have to just build your talents and make the job very important. You’ve got to become one of those people surprised when the day ends, not the one that’s looking for the day to end.

**Leadership then, is not about the leader?**

**Bert:** If you are a leader, then you must take yourself out of the picture. When you start putting how you feel and your image in the mix on how you manage, then you fail as a leader. You just fail. I’m not talking about whether you brush your teeth or not. I’m talking about if you filter everything into how you’re going to be perceived, then you are focusing on yourself and not on your people and your problems.

**One of the outcomes of leadership is more leaders?**

**Bert:** Not everybody can run the company. Not everybody can be a supervisor. But to people that get there, we want it to be them earning it and having an opportunity and not putting barriers up in front of them. We’re a growth company. Leadership means we provide opportunities for people.

**What makes someone an effective leader?**

**Brent:** You’ve got to have respect for the guys that come in. Once you get that established, they have a better understanding of what you need and how to accomplish the task at hand. I have a tremendous love for the game. They respond to that. It’s like playing quarterback. You have to be fired up, because that just picks everyone else up.

**How does a leader get results?**

**Brent:** I come in ready to go. I take care of myself outside of work. I tell my guys, I don’t care what you do outside of work, but be prepared the next day. It’s great to have the caliber of guys I have. I do a lot of bragging about them. I’m 45 years old. So when I break in a 20-year-old on any job, I do their job for them. They know they have to produce or I’ll step in and do it for them. They always say, “I don’t want Daddy to embarrass me.” Daddy is what they call me. They know I’m a fun and games kind of guy, as long as they’re doing their jobs. And if they’re not, I let them know.

**What steps have you taken to keep people pumped?**

**Brent:** The key is cross training, so if one person is out sick or on vacation, I’ve got 3 or 4 other people to pick from to take his spot. When I make my walk out to the shop, on their very first day, I let them know I have a stack of applications taller than they are trying to get in here. I tell them, “You’ve become one of the chosen ones.” There aren’t many that make this much an hour. It’s due to the hard work. They must earn it. If they’ve got a heart I’ll push them to the max. I tell them, “I’m not going to quit on you, if you don’t quit on me.” A month or two on the line and they make it, they look back and say that guy never quit on me.

**How is it that so many of your people have been promoted?**

**Brent:** I’ve had nine guys in seven years promoted to supervisor. I’m with them all day long. I lead by example. I find strong points and put people where they need to be to make it a team. I tell them no job is tougher than any of the others. It’s all hard work. And if you don’t let anybody slack off, then you won’t have any problems.

**Everyone has the chance to advance?**

**Brent:** I don’t pick any favorites. Everybody’s expected to perform, so we are all even. I tell them we’re all even every Thursday, which is payday, and then we start over. I tell them, we’re paying you for 40 hours, so don’t try to steal 15 minutes from me because I’m not going to steal 15 minutes from my company. I’m going all-out for you as long as you do that for me. Complaining isn’t tolerated. Insubordination can happen in many ways. Stick with the company rulebook and don’t stray from it.

**What is it like to be on a winning team?**

**Brent:** There isn’t a person on my line who wants to be the last one done. Everybody else will be all over him if they are. Everyone is so cranked up, they don’t want to be last one done, because they’ll tease him. That will last for about 10 seconds until you’re not the last one done and it’s on to somebody else. It just motivates people on the line.

**So is everyone a team player?**

**Brent:** They are, or they don’t stay on the team. Everybody is different, but we all have the same goal. It’s about setting up the goal post. You might change the way you get there, but you don’t move that goal post. And you don’t lower it. If anything you raise it, then you absolutely must follow the rules on safety and producing a quality product. After that, go for it.