

Message from the President

Human resources



Brian A. Lindamood, PE
AREMA President
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The railroad industry is often described as a “capital intensive” investment. The amount of money that must be invested in infrastructure – track, locomotives, rolling stock, signals, structures, etc. – is significant when compared to other industries. Much time and effort is spent in the design, construction and maintenance of these assets. We often work closely with our suppliers to develop new and better materials and machinery.

When we as a railroad make a large order of locomotives or freight cars, we frequently send representatives from the railroad to watch some of them being built to ensure that the railroad receives what it expects. The same is true for the fabrication of bridge girders, railroad ties and nearly every asset we have. However, when we want a new employee – an engineer or a new member on a gang – we simply tell human resources the specifications needed and receive a stack of applications several weeks later to sift through. Lots of paper...lots of words...but no real assurances behind what they all mean. I am fairly certain that if you were going to spend \$5 million on bridge girders that are expected to perform over the next 40 years, you would have someone in the fabrication plant working with the supplier to ensure the specifications are met and that they provide precisely what you expected. The fact is that if you manage to maintain that employee over their 40-year career, you will have invested more than \$5 million (today’s dollars, wages, benefits, taxes, training). Yet most of us simply do not make the same level of effort to engage with our universities, trade schools and institutions that provide our employment candidates because we have been conditioned to view our employees as resources and not the assets that they truly are.

AREMA has made a considerable effort over the past decade to develop and foster our relationship with universities and university students. While we frequently promote our scholarships, “Meet The Next Generation” events and our student chapters, AREMA’s efforts do not end there. AREMA’s Committee 24 has been working with the universities to develop college curricula to foster and promote railway engineering education in college programs throughout North America. In 2008, and, every other year since then, AREMA has hosted a Railway Engineering Education Symposium (REES) event where dozens of university professors are brought together to discuss and collaborate on the teaching of railway engineering topics, research, student development and industry relationships. Professors are not only provided with classroom teaching material, but are able to develop contacts throughout the country to support railway engineering development at their schools.

It was with great pleasure that I attended AREMA’s 2016 REES event held in conjunction with the annual NuRail meeting at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in July. In attendance were 24 professors, both new and returning, who had been attending this event for years. Many of the students attended some of the sessions, as well. I learned many things over a couple of days, but one thing was clear.

Tuition is expensive. Research facilities are expensive. Scholarships and direct donations to universities are important. Yet, just like your own children, simply throwing money at them is only a single solution that will not solve the problem. Just like your children, they need and they yearn for positive interaction. Just like the \$5 million bridge girders, we need to make the investment of time to foster

the development of the generation of railroaders that will follow us. This can be as simple as providing a speaker for a class or a student chapter event. It could include hosting a tour of a local railroad facility. By the time you read this article, my railroad will have hosted several university students for three days collecting data for a tie research project. If you have a situation that cannot be readily explained and you need a solution, an alternative approach to consultants might be the university research setting.

The success of AREMA’s student and university programs over the past decade has far exceeded all expectations. This success is as much a testament to the effort of those involved as it has been the need for stronger industry relations within the university setting. Moving forward, AREMA needs to further strengthen and expand our educational relationships not just through existing programs, but through further development of new programs and support. If you, or your company, wish to be more involved, but are unsure how, whether it be program development or simply be willing to be a guest classroom speaker, please do not hesitate to call headquarters and we can connect you with the most appropriate resource. Even if the interaction is on your own, it is just as important. It is important now and it will be even more important 40 years from now.