

The Evolution of Today's Ohio Construction Conference

BX of Central Ohio Celebrates 125th Anniversary

If you've been a Builders Exchange member for a decade or more, you probably know that today's Ohio Construction Conference "evolved" in 2007 from a different predecessor: the Ohio Design & Construction Expo.

Making the shift from the state's largest construction trade show to the state's largest construction conference, in essence, meant fewer exhibits and more education sessions. After 22 years, that change happened the way most changes do in member organizations. The 1985 signature event grew, ran its course and the BX developed a more relevant replacement.

Ironically, the Expo had been the spinoff of an Exchange innovation called, "The Construction Conference," an annual day-long program held from 1961 through 1984. And that original Construction Conference was launched as an alternative to an earlier BX program losing its luster: an exhibition called the Annual Home Show, started in 1926.

Are you following the family tree of today's Construction Conference? The lineage goes, "Expo, Conference, Expo, Conference." The lesson learned? One reason the Builders Exchange of Central Ohio is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, is because its members invent and evolve programs to meet the industry's ever-changing needs.

Home Show Launched in the Roaring Twenties

It was a simple request made at a Builders' and Traders' Exchange meeting in April 1926. The Columbus Dispatch was launching a home show – an exhibition for local residents to see the latest in housing materials and technologies, as well as to meet potential builders. Many Central Ohioans were enjoying the thriving "Roaring Twenties," entire neighborhoods seemed to spring up overnight!

The newspaper knew it could gain exhibitors – and credibility – by attaching the name of The Builders' and Traders' Exchange to its five-day "Columbus Building Exposition." Most Exchange members were building both residential and commercial structures 90 years ago, and being a member of the area's best-known construction association seemed to reflect their quality and stability.

With the show marketed "under the auspices of the Builders Exchange," the association gained publicity – not to mention \$236.54 in event proceeds! It was the start of a BX tradition that lasted nearly 50 years.

"This Home Will Endure and Satisfy"

THIS home will endure for years and years. It will wholly and completely satisfy the family that is going to build it and live in it.

In this home will be invested a substantial sum of money which has been saved during a long period of time... ever since this family first realized that home-ownership was a good thing and that living in a home built to suit that particular family's requirements was the best possible way to live.

For months every worthy bit of home-building information has been studied and digested before the plans are drawn this Spring and the home built this Summer.

Every member of this family will make it a point to attend the Fourth Annual Columbus Building Exposition. For the family about to build a home it offers too many valuable home-building suggestions to go unnoticed.

Next week, attend this "convention" of substantial citizens who will soon further increase Columbus' distinction as a city of good homes.

Fourth Annual Columbus BUILDING EXPOSITION
Memorial Hall
MARCH
26-27-28
29-30

Special Features

On Memorial Hall Stage an elaborate landscape FLOWER GARDEN

A LITTLE SHOW By the Union Store featuring Summer and Sports Frocks

Auspices of the BUILDERS EXCHANGE
Fostered by
The Columbus Dispatch
Ohio's Greatest Home Daily

When this ad appeared in the Columbus Dispatch in 1929, it was the fourth year the newspaper and the Builders' and Traders' Exchange had collaborated on the Home Show.



Dispatch cartoonist Milt Caniff, who later became nationally known for his comic strips such as Steve Canyon, stopped at the Home Show in 1931 for this “report.”

The original Building Expositions were held in Franklin County Memorial Hall, 280 E. Broad St. Completed in 1906, the landmark facility was dedicated to veterans of the Civil War and the Spanish-American War. When built, its gigantic auditorium seated 5,000 making Memorial Hall second only to Madison Square Garden in capacity.

The home show’s fortunes rose and fell with those of the country. For six years – even after the collapse of the stock market – it continued as a crowd pleaser, with activities such as a fashion show by The Union department store. But by 1932, the Great Depression removed any reference to the home show in BX files for years. In fact, the association cancelled all but essential meetings as it struggled to survive.

When the worst economic times were behind them and participation was on the upswing, the Exchange relaunched the home show in March 1941. Columbus & Southern Ohio Electric Co. brought the General Electric “House of Magic” exhibit from the recent New York World’s Fair to Memorial Hall and all 64 booths

were purchased six weeks in advance. The show was widely promoted by WBNS radio and the Columbus Dispatch, earning the Exchange \$2,305.13 for its sponsorship.

Just as it seemed that Central Ohio could return to its housing boom, World War II hit and the construction market and the home shows froze again. By the end of 1945, the industry was feeling great optimism with the war over. Membership was at an all-time high of 314. Board President George J. Igel announced that the Exchange had reserved Memorial Hall for a building exposition in 1946. That display, which ran from May 12-17, netted the Exchange \$4,000.



The sold-out exhibit floor at Memorial Hall for the 1947 home show, which attracted 21,708 attendees in its six-day run.

Post-War Building Boom Expanded BX, Show

Because Columbus was exploding with post-war development, interest in the home show (both by exhibitors and visitors) grew incredibly fast. The 1949 event moved to the state fairgrounds and sold out its space at the Columbus Building – expanding the next year to the Horticulture and Agriculture Building. That year, BX membership hit 560 and the association was building its own new home at 1175 Dublin Road.

Although the National Association of Home Builders had started a Columbus chapter in 1943, the Builders Exchange had branded the home show as its own. With the increasing success of the BX event (1955 Home Show attendance was reported as 102,600), the home builders instead focused on their “Parade of Homes” starting in 1953.



The 1959 Home Show planning committee included (from left) Tom C. Fitzpatrick, second vice president; Tony Drabek, executive director; Paul Cary Winters, president; John Kight, show general manager; Ralph Atkinson, first vice president and Jim Humphreys, publicity chairman. The seven-day show had a record 119,725 attendees.

During its quarter century at the fairgrounds, the BX home show moved to various facilities, finishing its long run at the Lausche Building in 1972. From the mid-1950s on, the exposition boasted a fully-built model home as well as hundreds of displays. The 1966 Exchange annual report noted that the week-long show, featuring a vacation house sponsored by Hide-A-Way Hills, attracted a crowd of 123,788.

A significant revenue source for the Exchange, the home show remained viable well into the 1960s. By that time, however, most BX members were concentrating on commercial construction and the management issues that came with the profession. To address those demands, in 1961 the Builders Exchange created a new approach to business education: an all-day, Annual Construction Conference.

Construction Conference Offered High-Level Education

Just as it does today, in 1961 the Construction Conference offered a high-level look at emerging industry trends. At the inaugural event at the Athletic Club of Columbus, the national president of the young Construction Specifications Institute discussed legal aspects of specifications and the chief of product development at Battelle Memorial Institute spoke on future building materials for the '60s: "Steel has produced new high strength steel, concrete has just broken the surface of pre-stressing, plastics have horizons unlimited and new adhesives will be used instead of bolts, welding, nails or screws."

Mayor Ralston Westlake – who earlier had proclaimed the week of February 23, 1961, "Construction Week in Columbus" – was a luncheon speaker. The dinner keynote was given by Harry A. Stuhldreher of U.S. Steel, a former All-American quarterback at



Mayor Ralston Westlake proclaims "Construction Week" in honor of the first Construction Conference, 1961, with (from left) Tom Fitzpatrick, Tony Drabek and Jack Brown.

the University of Notre Dame and member of the famous "Four Horsemen" backfield of the 1924 team.

Hot topics, VIP speakers and an audience that was "Who's Who" in the local industry combined to make the Construction Conference a leading BX program. Event brochures from the 1960s reflect the challenges and change felt by the construction community - a pace that would only grow faster in succeeding decades.



FEBRUARY 23, 1961
Sponsored by

**The Builders Exchange
of Columbus**
at the
ATHLETIC CLUB OF COLUMBUS

The first annual Construction Conference in 1961 was a radically different event for the Exchange – a high-level look at business practices and current industry trends in commercial construction. Held primarily at downtown venues like The Athletic Club, The Sheraton and The Neil House, the Conference ran for 24 consecutive years.

9:45 A.M. INTRODUCTION OF EXHIBITORS	1:40 P.M. DISCUSSION GROUPS CONVENE "RISKS IN CONSTRUCTION"																				
9:50 A.M. VIEW EXHIBITS — COFFEE BREAK	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Insurance Risks</td> <td>Bernie Nagel (Bernie Nagel & Assoc)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Contract Document Risks</td> <td>Mike McGee (McGee & Alberti)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Prime and Sub-Contractor Responsibilities</td> <td>Eugene C. Schramm (Eugene C. Schramm & Assoc.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>On Site Risks</td> <td>Earl W. Puckett (Sever-Williams Co.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Suppliers Risks</td> <td>Robert Chagoff (Chagoff & Schlegel)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Purch List & Final Acceptance</td> <td>C. Curtis Incho (C. Curtis Incho & Assoc.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Safety Programs</td> <td>Robert W. Satterlin (R. W. Satterlin & Sons Co.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Labor Relations</td> <td>Robert M. Gardner (R. M. Gardner Co.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Public Relations</td> <td>Robert D. Dawson (Columbus Heating & Ventilating Co.)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mechanical & Electrical Contractor Risks</td> <td>James Ford (Orake & Ford)</td> </tr> </table>	Insurance Risks	Bernie Nagel (Bernie Nagel & Assoc)	Contract Document Risks	Mike McGee (McGee & Alberti)	Prime and Sub-Contractor Responsibilities	Eugene C. Schramm (Eugene C. Schramm & Assoc.)	On Site Risks	Earl W. Puckett (Sever-Williams Co.)	Suppliers Risks	Robert Chagoff (Chagoff & Schlegel)	Purch List & Final Acceptance	C. Curtis Incho (C. Curtis Incho & Assoc.)	Safety Programs	Robert W. Satterlin (R. W. Satterlin & Sons Co.)	Labor Relations	Robert M. Gardner (R. M. Gardner Co.)	Public Relations	Robert D. Dawson (Columbus Heating & Ventilating Co.)	Mechanical & Electrical Contractor Risks	James Ford (Orake & Ford)
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10:20 A.M. "PROBLEMS IN CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT"	2:35 P.M. DISCUSSION GROUPS ADJOURN																				
 <p>The discussion on this matter will provide the professional's approach to sound realistic management.</p> <p>Speaker: JAMES R. HYDE President, J. R. Hyde & Associates, Inc., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania</p>	2:40 P.M. "EDUCATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY"																				
11:25 A.M. "GERMAN VILLAGE; Its Secrets of Success"	 <p>A new approach will be presented in this discussion on the subject of projecting both interest and education in the Construction Industry.</p> <p>Speaker: EDWARD R. TOWERS Director of the Industrial Arts Curriculum Project, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio</p>																				
 <p>Community planning has become a most vital ingredient in the successful development of an attractive business, industry and residential area — all compatible with one another. This presentation will provide a small example of aggressive development in our area.</p> <p>Speaker: CHARLES A. NITSCHKE Architect, C. Nitschke & Associates, Columbus, Ohio</p>	3:20 P.M. REPORT OF THE DISCUSSION GROUPS																				
Noon LUNCHEON	3:50 P.M. VIEW EXHIBITS — COKE BREAK																				
INTRODUCTION OF OFFICIALS																					
75th Anniversary Anthony S. Drabek																					
1:30 P.M. ASSIGNMENT OF DISCUSSION GROUPS																					

At the 1967 Construction Conference, young architect Chuck Nitschke spoke on community planning, using the German Village resurgence as a case study.

Conference costs were supplemented for years by about a dozen tabletop exhibitors, who gained great networking opportunities at the meeting breaks. As the quantity and quality of Conference attendees grew, this face-to-face exposure was in demand. When extra room at the Neil House in 1980 permitted more tabletops to be sold, 60 were quickly snatched up. And in the next few years, a conversation began regarding the BX creating a bigger "trade show."

Mid-Ohio Construction Expo Switched Focus to Networking

After a 24-year run, the BX Construction Conference was succeeded by an innovation that combined industry education and trade show networking. The Mid-Ohio Construction Expo was launched in 1985 as a joint venture of the Builders Exchange and the Columbus Chapter of the Construction Specifications Institute. In its first year, the day-long event featured 148 construction exhibits, 22 displays by local design firms and 22 "mini seminars" free, half-hour sessions on topics ranging from Owner Financing Options, to Marketing Construction Services to Energy-Efficient Wall Systems.



Contractor's liability insurance, a frequent conference focus, first appeared in 1962 – and "Electronic Devices in the Construction Industry" debuted in 1963 with a speaker from NCR in Dayton. A 1967 seminar promised, "There is a Computer in Your Future But How and Why?" And late '60s topics addressed "Affirmative Action - Equal Employment Opportunities," using case studies from around the country.

The 1970s Construction Conferences tackled sensitive subjects such as organized labor versus open shop employees, hosting national union presidents and trade association leaders as speakers. The first session on safety and health came in 1972, the year after the Occupational Safety and Health Administration was founded.

Along with the latest business strategies, nearly every Construction Conference offered an upcoming market forecast. The first industry projections given by F.W. Dodge Corp. – still an event sponsor and presenter today – came at the 1962 Conference!

"THE THREE D'S OF CONSTRUCTION"			12:00 NOON LUNCH	
9:10 A.M. DECISION PANEL			"ENERGY SITUATION"	
 <p>FRED SCHAAL Vice Pres., Nationwide Insurance</p>	 <p>WARREN CEREHAM Exec. Director, Construction Center Commission</p>	 <p>HOWARD SMITH President, Kellom & Foley, Architects</p>	 <p>Luncheon Speaker: RICHARD J. ANDERSON Associate Director, Energy Programs Battelle Memorial Institute</p>	
10:30 A.M. VIEW EXHIBITS — COFFEE BREAK			1:45 P.M. DESIGN PANEL	
 <p>JOHN ISABEL, JR. Vice Pres., Isabel, Inc.</p>	 <p>H. D. CONANT V.P. and Gen. Manager, Tomer Construction Co.</p>	 <p>H. JAMES HOLBRODY, FAIA Principal, Holroyd & Myers</p>	 <p>RUSSELL S. FLING President, R.S. Fling & Partners, Inc.</p>	
<p>The ability or inability to define and understand the Owner's needs and requirements and to make viable decisions concerning these, determines the success or failure of the project. Where does this process breakdown? (Concluded with question/answer period)</p>			 <p>LAVAN R. DETWILER Assistant to Pres., Kawitron Construction Co.</p>	 <p>LEWIS R. SMOOT, SR. Vice President, The Sherman R. Smoot Co.</p>
11:00 A.M. "WORK SMARTER — NOT HARDER"			<p>The translation of decisions to substance is communicated through the Design process. This involves the analysis of planning concepts and building systems, together with comparative cost analysis. The constraints existing within the available sources for data analysis and common costing, together with non-uniform legislation and labor policy practices disrupt the orderly flow of the Design process. Where are the problem areas? (Concluded with question/answer period)</p>	
 <p>Speakers: BX Scholarship sponsored OSU Graduate Student WILLIAM J. REPASKY Field Construction Engineer, Fluor Engineers & Constructors</p> <p>A job-site study of working practices and methods through the use of time lapse photography. Many economies can be experienced and realized.</p>				

A panelist at the 1974 Construction Conference was Lewis Smoot, Sr., a second-generation family member involved in The Sherman R. Smoot Co.



From the mid-90s through the mid-00s, the Central Ohio Construction Expo averaged more than 4,000 attendees annually.

It was fresh, it was relevant and it was a hit. The first year, 1,000 people attended the Expo, held May 8 at Veterans Memorial. The Expo's final event of the day was the same one that concluded the former Construction Conferences: the BX Craftsmanship Awards Banquet.

The large number of new attendees at the Expo inspired the BX to invite other industry associations to become sponsors. By 1989, the local chapters of

the American Subcontractors Association, the Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc., the Associated General Contractors of America and the Building Owners and Managers Association had joined the Exchange in promoting and holding events at the re-named Central Ohio Construction Expo.

For 10 years, the Expo gained steadily in exhibitors and attendees. In the mid-1990s, attendance was averaging more than 4,000 visitors a year – visiting 270 displays. At the end of the decade, 24 industry organizations were involved as sponsors or supporters, and the show had outgrown its home at Veterans Memorial.



The new millennium meant a move to the Greater Columbus Convention Center, which had more room for exhibits, seminars and people. Booth sales hit an all-time high in 2000, with 314 sold. Two years later, attendance peaked at nearly 4,500. The Exchange – which by 2006 had 37 other participating partner organizations – worked harder than ever to sustain the Expo. That year, its two days featured an incredible 80 seminars, meetings and demonstrations!



But despite the planning effort, booth sales had dropped. Attendance was lagging. It was time to reinvent this flagship program again. A BX member task force spent months reviewing options: keeping the professional development, the industry-wide networking, the high-level look at trends, market projections and technology.

The result? The Ohio Construction Conference was introduced in 2007 with more seminars and fewer exhibits. Now in its 11th year, the Conference is known for its forward-thinking programs, cutting-edge presentations and nationally-known speakers. It's an important, relevant service for construction professionals today. And BX history shows when that is no longer the case, our industry will regroup, retool and relaunch the next-generation version for future members.

