

**NAWIC  
OBJECTIVE**

To unite for their mutual benefit women who are actively employed in the various phases of the construction industry;

To promote cooperation, fellowship and a better understanding among the members of the association;

To promote education and contribute to the betterment of the construction industry;

To encourage women to pursue and establish their careers in the construction industry

**CORE PURPOSE**

To enhance the success of women in the construction industry

**NAWIC PLEDGE**

As material for the construction of our building, I pledge the agility of my hands, the ability of my mind, and the integrity of my heart.

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# NAWIC

National Association of Women in Construction

# Plans & Specs

# Lansing



VOLUME 41 ISSUE 3

DECEMBER 2011

## MEMBERSHIP MEETING



**Wednesday, December 14, 2011**

### “Christmas Party”

**Ornament Exchange, Collecting Angel Tree Gifts and Christmas Cards for Solider's**

**Friends and Family are Welcome**

**Meeting Location: Jimmy's Pub**

**16804 Chandler Road, East Lansing, MI**

**Time: 5:30 pm Networking 6:00 pm Party and Dinner**

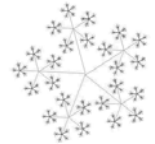
**Cost: Order off menu**

**Hostess: Karen Schulert & Heidi Hitz**

**Please RSVP by Friday December 9th to Heidi Hitz at**

**[hhitz@clarkcc.com](mailto:hhitz@clarkcc.com)**

See flyer on Page 6 and 9 for additional information



\*Note to non-members - We look forward to having guests at our chapter events. If you are not a NAWIC member and would like to ensure that you receive an invitation to a NAWIC event or you would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact President Traci Brower, [tbrower@clarkcc.com](mailto:tbrower@clarkcc.com) or contact the person(s) hostessing for the particular event you are interested in.

## Save the Dates (please see our year calendar on page 5 for additional events)

### November 30, 2011

November/December Board Meeting - Meeting's start at 5:30 pm - Held at Clark Construction Co.

### January 18, 2011

Board Meeting - Meeting's start at 5:30 pm - Held at Clark Construction Co.

### Next Membership Meeting:

### **Wednesday, January 11, 2011**

### “Home Depot Plumbing Class”

Time: 6:00 pm Meeting & Dinner, followed by class

Class is 1-1/2 hours

Location: Home Depot in Okemos

Hostess: Melanie Myers

## President's Message



**Traci Brower, LEED AP**  
Clark Construction Co.  
President of Lansing  
Chapter #177.

**"A leader leads by example, whether he [or she] intends to or not."  
- John Quincy Adams**

"There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." — Albert Einstein

On November 9<sup>th</sup> we had our general membership meeting at Olga's in Frandor. Anne Craft, President of UZoom Media presented many helpful ideas regarding 'Social Media for Businesses'. These ideas could prove to be very beneficial to our companies, chapter and members. Thank you to Barbara Strachan for organizing such a great meeting. Kudos to Heidi Hitz for organizing the Angel Gift Tags with Holiday Wishes for the children from St Vincent's Children's Home. She will be collecting the items at the December Christmas Party.

The Lansing Chapter of NAWIC held another suc-

cessful Annual Holiday Auction on November 13, 2011 at the Brookshire Inn and Golf in Williamston. Thanks to members, guests and donors, who put so much into this event to help make it so successful!! It would not be possible without the help of everyone involved. This was the first time we had more people show up the day of the event than had pre-purchased tickets. What a great 'problem' to have!!! We look forward to another successful event next year!!

I look forward to celebrating the upcoming Holidays with our members and guests at our Holiday Meeting on December 14 at Jimmy's Pub at 5:30 pm. We will have our spirited ornament exchange, so remember to bring yours (approximate \$10 value). For those of you participating, please remember to bring your Angle Gift tags and gifts for the St Vincent's Chil-

dren's Home. Heidi will also be collecting cards for Christmas Cards for Soldiers to send to soldiers, veterans and/or their families. You can contact Heidi @ [hhitz@clarkcc.com](mailto:hhitz@clarkcc.com) if you have any questions regarding any of these items.

***I hope all of you enjoy the holidays spent with family and friends and take the time to reflect on all the miracles in your life!!!***

Thank you,

*Traci Brower*

## NAWIC 101 - Reasons to be a NAWIC Member

### **Purpose -**

Members uniting together for one single purpose: To enhance the success of women in construction. This purpose is expressed through various outlets, in-

cluding community service projects and partnering with other industry organizations including hosting Construction Career Days and Block Kids competitions.



## Green Tip: Making Unique Eco-Friendly Gift Wrap

Make your unique gift wrap stand out this year and be eco-conscious at the same time.

There are plenty of ways to make your own eco-friendly wrapping paper, depending on how creative you want to get.

Buy wrapping paper made specifically from recycled content. Make your own gift wrap from butcher paper, reused brown paper bags, and newspaper clippings (especially the comics). Best of all, these can all be recycled or composted.

Buy a bundle of pretty gift bags and reuse them each year. Tie the handles together with a ribbon so the recipient has something to unwrap. If you saved any of last year's wrapping paper, you can re-use it if it's not torn or damaged. Gift bags can be re-used again and again.

Make lovely, reusable gift sacks from fabric you have lying around. Fold material in half

and sew up one bottom and the other side. Leave the top open, insert gift, and tie with a ribbon. These sacks can be as simple or extravagant as your talents allow. You can use old pillowcases, sheets, curtains and any other material to add more sentimental value to your gift.



Give gift certificates this year. Place the certificates in a nice envelope, add a bit of ribbon and dangle from the tree.

You can also make your own paper, using recycled materials of course. The comic pages are especially fun to use as wrapping paper. Eco-friendly gift wrapping can be as easy as using multiple

sheets taped together for larger items.

To make gift tags for your presents, look through your old Christmas cards and cut out pictures from the front. Tie them to the gift with some yarn or ribbons.

To reduce waste and garbage during the holidays, avoid crumpling up gift wrap and throwing them away after the frenzy of opening presents on Christmas morning. Recycle or take the time to fold wrapping paper to reuse. These useful pieces will continue to be a part of your Christmas celebrations.

*Courtesy of Green-Christmas.org*

**"Let Nature be  
your teacher."  
- William  
Wordsworth**

## Happy Birthday & Happy Anniversary

### Happy Birthday!

Heidi Hitz – 12/20

Karen Schulert - 12/22



### Happy Anniversary!

Connie Milbourne - 12/1985 26 Years!

Mary Ellen Brocklehurst - 12/2010 1 Year!

# Empowering Employees



*"Power can be taken, but not given. The process of the taking is empowerment in itself."*

*- Gloria Steinem*

To empower employees, Honeybaked EVP Maggie De-Can encourages team members to go with their gut, keep communication lines wide open and gives them confidence to make big decisions by letting them take the reins. "I try to allow my team to do their jobs in whatever manner they feel that they can best achieve the results," she says. So, why is it important to empower employees?

"Employees are happier, and contribute more value, when they truly and authentically feel empowered," Jennifer Prosek, CEO of CJP Communications and author of *Army of Entrepreneurs*, tells PINK.

"Women [often] have to juggle work and family life, making it essential to have employees they can lean on."

Houston's *Chron* reports that empowered employees help reduce costs, provide improved customer service and are more adept at embracing change. Motivated employees are often more productive, profitable and stay with the company longer. "These are all measurable, bottom line benefits," says Prosek.

Top tips for women looking to empower their employees? "Over-communicate, provide lots of professional development, say 'thank you' a lot" and amplify each team member's strengths and talents.

Before taking action, Leaders Direct suggests asking yourself if your work environment supports empowerment, what results you desire from the empowerment and when the best times are for these actions to be taken.

What to avoid? Prosek advises against "recruiting only when you need people, and resist the temptation to keep information close to the vest." Plus, "avoid bureaucracy like the plague."

**Bonus PINK Link:** Check out more tips for motivating employees <http://littlepinkbook.com/little-pink-book/career/individual-motivation>.

By Caroline Cox  
Courtesy of Pink Magazine

## Carleen E. Hallman Scholarship

The 2011-2012 Carleen E. Hallman Scholarship is available for students that are enrolled in a course of study related to the field of construction and is an undergraduate in the state of Michigan. Awards range from

\$500-\$1000, and can be awarded to multiple students. Since the Scholarship was founded, Lansing Chapter #177 has given out over \$40,000 to students pursuing a career in construction. Deadline for the scholarship is

February 28, 2012.

For more information on the scholarship you can visit [www.lansingnawic.org](http://www.lansingnawic.org) or contact Heidi Hitz, LEED AP at [hhitz@clarkcc.com](mailto:hhitz@clarkcc.com).

## NAWIC Members Give Back

At the November 9, 2011 membership meeting members selected from 20 Angel Tree Cards for St. Vincent's Children's Home in Lansing. The children asked for a range of gifts from Barbie dolls, puzzles, MP3 players, to clothes. The members will then bring the unwrapped gifts to the Christmas party where they will be collected and dropped off to St. Vincent's. This is a great way for the chapter to give back to the community and to feel the Christmas spirit.

The chapter will also be collecting Christmas Cards for Soldiers through the American Red Cross's program "Holiday Mail for Heroes".

## NAWIC - Lansing Chapter #177 Calendar of Events 2011 - 2012

OCTOBER						
T	M	T	W	TR	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

- Day Event**
- 1 New NAWIC Year
  - 7 \ 8 APC - Terra Haute, IN
  - 12 Membership Meeting
  - 19 Board Meeting
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline
  - 29 Breast Cancer Walk at Capital
  - 31 Halloween

NOVEMBER						
	M	T	W	TR	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

- Day Event**
- 9 Membership Meeting  
Hostess - Barb Strachan  
"Social Media For Business" - Anne Craft
  - 13 Holiday Auction
  - 16 Board Meeting
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline
  - 24 Thanksgiving

DECEMBER						
W	M	T	W	TR	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

- Day Event**
- 14 Christmas Party - Hostesses  
Karen Schulert & Heidi Hitz
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline
  - 25 Christmas

JANUARY						
T	M	T	W	TR	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

- Day Event**
- 1 New Year's Day
  - 11 Membership Meeting  
Hostess - Melanie Myers  
Plumbing Class - Home Depot
  - 18 Board Meeting
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline

FEBRUARY						
	M	T	W	TR	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29			

- Day Event**
- 8 Membership Meeting  
Hostess - Megan Jacobs
  - 14 Valentine's Day
  - 15 Board Meeting
  - 20 Lansing Chapter 41st Anniversary
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline

MARCH						
W	M	T	W	TR	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

- Day Event**
- 14 Membership Meeting  
Hostess - Traci Brower
  - 17 St. Patrick's Day
  - 21 Board Meeting
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline

APRIL						
T	M	T	W	TR	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

- Day Event**
- 8 Easter
  - 11 Membership Meeting  
Hostess - Mary Finch
  - 18 Board Meeting
  - 19-22 Forum - Toledo Chapter
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline
  - 22 Earth Day

MAY						
	M	T	W	TR	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

- Day Event**
- 9 Membership Meeting  
Hostess - Barb Strachan
  - 13 Mother's Day
  - 16 Board Meeting
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline
  - 28 Memorial Day

JUNE						
W	M	T	W	TR	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

- Day Event**
- 13 Membership Meeting / Election Nigh  
Hostess - Jane M Smith
  - 17 Father's Day
  - 20 Board Meeting
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline

JULY						
T	M	T	W	TR	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

- Day Event**
- 4 Independence Day
  - 11 Fun Night  
Hostess - Heidi Hitz
  - 18 Board Meeting
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline

AUGUST						
	M	T	W	TR	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

- Day Event**
- 8 Membership Meeting - Hostesses  
Karen Schulert & Becky Przedwojewski
  - 15 Board Meeting
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline
  - 29-1 Annual Convention - Denver, CO

SEPTEMBER						
W	M	T	W	TR	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	30
	31					

- Day Event**
- 3 Labor Day
  - 12 Membership Mtg/Installation Night
  - 19 Board Meeting
  - 20 Newsletter Deadline

\* Board meetings are held at Clark Construction Company

## 2011-2012 BOARD MEMBERS

### PRESIDENT

TRACI BROWER, LEED AP  
CLARK CONSTRUCTION  
TBROWER@CLARKCC.COM

### VICE PRESIDENT

HEIDI HITZ, LEED AP  
CLARK CONSTRUCTION  
HHITZ@CLARKCC.COM

### TREASURER

MEGAN JACOBS, PE  
SOILS & MATERAILS  
ENGINEERS INC.  
JACOBS@SME-USA.COM

### IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

MELANIE MYERS  
OAKLAND COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE  
MAMYERS@OAKLANDCC.EDU

### DIRECTORS

BARBARA STRACHAN,  
CIT  
AGC OF MICHIGAN  
BSTRACHAN@AGCMICHIGAN  
.ORG

BECKY  
PRZEDWOJEWSKI  
HAWORTH FURNITURE  
BECKY.PRZEDWOJEWSKI@HA  
WORTH.COM

## Soundoff: Social Media Speaker

The Way NAWIC Works; by Mary Finch, FHWA Civil Rights Specialist and NAWIC Lansing Chapter 177 Member

I wanted to share with everyone my experience of how NAWIC works. I attended the November monthly meeting on November 9, 2011. The guest speaker, Anne Craft, President, Strategist & Business Development from UZoom Media, spoke about making social media, Facebook, Twitter etc. work for your company. It was a great presentation and I learned a lot about how to optimize social media. The next day I

attended a Detroit Workforce Forum meeting for my work. The intent of these meetings is to help diversify the workforce on road projects. The unions were making their presentations and I asked them how many had Facebook pages. All but one had one. However, none of them used Facebook to recruit placements for their training. I asked the forum how many have Facebook pages. Is this sounding familiar? Like at our chapter meeting many hands went up. So, I explained the friends of friends concept that was shared with us by the expert. It was like a light bulb came on; many of them came up

and thanked me afterward. They said this is something we can do that is positive and costs us little or nothing extra. By the way when speaking I did attribute it to our Lansing NAWIC meeting! My point is YOU need to come to our chapter meetings everyone works hard to bring in speakers and information we can use. This is just one instance of where I was able to immediately use the knowledge I gained the night before at our Lansing Chapter meeting!

## Christmas Party & Ornament Exchange



The Annual Holiday Ornament Exchange has been a tradition of the Lansing NAWIC Chapter for many years.



Anyone that attends the Christmas party may bring a wrapped Christmas Ornament between the price range of \$5-10 for the exchange. Each person then draws a number and the number they receive is the order in which they get to choose an ornament. Simple right?

Not for this chapter, they like to change things up, by throwing in a twist. The person that is next to select an ornament can choose an unwrapped ornament or they can select from a previous opened ornament that someone has already opened and may treasurer. If they chose one that someone has already selected, then the person that had their ornament taken away from them can then choose another unopened ornament or they too can select someone else's. This goes on until the last person is up to select and ornament, which is a great spot to be in, because you get to choose

from everyone's open ornaments. I do have to warn you, this can get a little crazy with all the exchanges going on. You also have to be on the look out for some very interesting ornament's that resemble dog droppings!

We'll have some Christmas games this year to play, and we'll have some door prizes to give away as well.

If you would like to attend this fun event, please be sure to contact Karen or Heidi.



## NAWIC Holiday Auction Recap

The Lansing Chapter #177 held it's Annual Holiday Auction at the Brookshire Inn Restaurant & Golf Club, Williamston on Sunday, November 13, 2011. We had 67 people in attendance and 2 children. Preliminary figures show that we made about the same amount of money this year as we have the past several years. Thank you to all of our members, guests and donors who helped to make this such a successful event.

An auctioneer volunteered to auction off donated items. Some of the auction items included a MSU signed basketball by Coach Izzo, signed photograph from Suzy Merchant, a

football signed by Mark Dantonio, Golf Packages from local Golf Courses, 2012 Detroit Tigers tickets Row 24, Section 129 behind home plate, Harlem Globetrotters tickets, tools and homemade craft items. We had a 50/50 raffle which also included many opportunities to win several gift cards. We also sold tickets for a chance to win a couple 'spa' baskets and a basket with Lansing/Michigan based products. Everyone went home with something!!

Chapter members and guests brought non perishable food items that were donated to Good Will.

This is our largest fundraiser of

the year and helps the chapter raise the funds necessary to support some of the NAWIC programs including but not limited to Scholarships, Trades Women Apprenticeship Grants, Cad Design Drafting Competition, Block Kids Program, MAGIC Camp and other Committee Projects.

We hope everyone had fun. However, we are always looking for new ideas and suggestions. Please feel free to contact Traci Brower at [tbrower@clarkcc.com](mailto:tbrower@clarkcc.com) if you have questions, suggestions or comments. We look forward to seeing everyone next year!!!

Thanks again for your support!!

## Office Yoga: Better than Caffeine

Will a pinch really perk you up? A recent study finds certain acupressure points can improve alertness.

Long before Starbucks sprang up on every corner, traditional Chinese medicine used acupressure and acupuncture to recharge mental batteries. Now University of Michigan researchers have affirmed the practice, in the first study ever to find that acupressure can boost alertness.

Will a pinch really perk you up? A recent study finds cer-

tain acupressure points can improve alertness. On your lunch break, try giving yourself the invigorating acupressure treatment the researchers used in their study. It involves stimulating five points for three minutes each: the top of the head; the V where the thumb and forefinger connect; the spot below the center of the kneecap; the point beneath the ball of the foot; and the back of the neck at the base of the skull.

If 15 minutes of this might bother your boss, don't fret. "If you're only going to use one point, tap-

ping your head is best," says study author Richard Harris. "Or squeeze the point between your thumb and forefinger."

By Sierra Senyak

Courtesy of Yoga Journal

# 2011-2012 Committees

COMMITTEE	CHAIRPERSON(S)	EMAIL ADDRESS
Publicity/WIC Week	Jane Smith	jane@hagerfox.com
Recruitment/Mentorship	Jane Smith	jane@hagerfox.com
Officer Nominations	Megan Jacobs	jacobs@sme-usa.com
New & Foremost Nominations		
Roster/Cheers & Condolences/Hostess Schedule	Karen Schulert	kschulert@agcmichigan.org
Newsletter	Heidi Hitz	hhitz@clarkcc.com
Legislative Awareness Occupation Awareness & Promotion		
Professional Education	Ruth Essenburg	ressenberg@douglassteel.com
Audit/Budget	Jane Smith	jane@hagerfox.com
Scholarship/TAG	Heidi Hitz	hhitz@clarkcc.com
Ways & Means	Traci Brower	tbrower@clarkcc.com
Block Kids	Traci Brower	tbrower@clarkcc.com
CAD/Design/Drafting:	Megan Jacobs	jacobs@sme-usa.com
Michigan Construction Career Days	Melanie Myers	mamyers@oaklandcc.edu
Committee Service Projects	Jane Smith	therrold@clarkcc.com
Bylaws & Standing Rules	Karen Schulert	kschulert@agcmichigan.org
Industry Icon Award	Barb Strachan	bstrachan@agcmichigan.org
Historian/Scrapbook	Ruth Essenburg	ressenberg@douglassteel.com
Website	Heidi Hitz	hhitz@clarkcc.com

## Power In Silence

We know the importance of speaking up when it comes to owning our ideas and getting ahead at work. But sometimes, what we don't say can speak louder than what we do say. "There are ways that women unconsciously drop their own status at work, which makes them appear less promotable," Shann Nix, co-author of *As We Speak*, tells PINK.

"One of these ways is 'overtalking' – when you feel nervous and chatter to fill the silence." Silence lends strength and power to your words, says Nix. She adds that, when it

comes to high-stakes situations like asking for a raise, those who "use the silence," instead of trying to fill it, are more likely to have success.

Psychology Today says silence can positively affect your career (and your bank account) by making you a better listener. Approaching any situation with silence first shows you think before reacting and demonstrates self-control and wisdom – prized attributes in the workplace.

Experts say effectively using silence also involves finding your voice at work. Reflecting in silence, then responding with the

"newscaster's drill" of "who, what, where, when and why" shows coworkers and superiors you're focused.

Stressed out by silence during a job interview? Career Builder suggests researching beforehand to better anticipate question responses and paying attention to nonverbal cues so you can adjust answers accordingly.

By Brittani Banks  
Courtesy of Yoga Journal

**"Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech."**

**- Susan Sontag**



# Seasons Greetings

**NAWIC Lansing Chapter #177  
Christmas Party**

**Wednesday December 14, 2011**

**Christmas Party/Ornament Exchange &**

**Collecting Angle Gifts for**

**St. Vincent's Children's Home**

**Location: Jimmy's Pub**

**Time: 5:30 pm Networking & Cocktails**

**6:00 pm Dinner**

**Friends and Family are welcome!**

**Hostesses: Karen Schulert & Heidi Hitz**

[kshulert@agcmichigan.org](mailto:kshulert@agcmichigan.org) or [hhitz@clarkcc.com](mailto:hhitz@clarkcc.com)

**RSVP by December 9, 2011**

# Why a Christmas Tree?

*A look at the origins of "topping-out"*

by Scott L. Melnick



**W**hether the custom began in Scandinavia or with Native Americans, topping out parties are today an important custom in the steel construction industry.

How did the topping out ceremony originate? More than a dozen readers wrote responses to that question in *Modern Steel Construction's* August 1995 editorial.

One of the most detailed responses came from James A. Newman, fabrication division vice president with AISC-member Art Iron, Inc., who sent an article that appeared in *The Ironworker* (December 1984) and an excerpt from which follows:

"No one seems to know exactly when or how it started, but the tradition of 'Topping Out' has become a cherished custom of Ironworkers whenever the skeleton of a bridge or building is completed. Topping Out is a signal that the uppermost steel member is going into place, that the structure has reached its height. As that final beam is hoisted, an evergreen tree or a flag or both are attached to it as it ascends.

"The nice thing about Topping Out is that no two ceremonies are exactly alike. For some, the evergreen symbolizes that the job went up without a loss of life, while for others it's a good luck charm for the future

occupants. For some, the flag signals a structure built with federal funds, but for others it suggest patriotism or the American dream.

"We do know that as early as 621 B.C. the Romans celebrated the completion of the Pons Sublicus over the Tiber River by throwing human beings into the water as sacrifices to the gods. In ancient China, the ridgepole of a new structure was smeared with chicken blood, as substitute for human blood, in hopes of fooling the gods. It was widely believed that evil spirits may have occupied the structure, and that is why, through the Middle Ages, the local priest or rabbi had a special blessing for new homes, ships, churches and public buildings.

"By 700 A.D. in Scandinavia, the custom of hoisting an evergreen tree atop the ridgepole was a popular way of signaling the start of a completion party. The roots of this custom may also be mixed in with fertility symbols. Saplings, eggs, flowers and sheaves of corn are long-standing customs in European home building, presumably as a wish to the newlyweds for a productive and long life together. While the Teutonic tribes may have tried to appease the tree spirits for killing trees and using up that lumber, the Germans in the Black Forest seem to have invented the Christmas tree custom to celebrate the nativity of Jesus Christ, and

hardly a structure goes up in Germany without an evergreen to signal the birth of a new building. The Swiss, also, lay claim to the custom of a fir tree to signal Topping Out.

"As iron and steel replaced timber as primary building materials, ironworkers naturally would carry on the custom of Topping Out. Strangely enough, none of the early photoengravings of ironworkers show the evergreen in Topping Out ceremonies. Perhaps, due to the exceedingly high fatality rates, such a symbol would not be appropriate.

"When the last strands of cable were laid for the Brooklyn Bridge a hundred years ago, the wheel operated by the ironworkers was decorated with American flags. By 1920, ironworkers were again draping their work with American flags, this time while driving the first rivet on the Bank of Italy in San Francisco. By the end of the decade, the tradition of flags in Topping Out was fully established.

"Why an American flag? Probably because the so-called "American Plan" launched in 1919 did not include unions. In fact, the single largest potential employer of ironworkers, Elbert Cary, chairman of U.S. Steel, contended: "The existence and conduct of labor unions, in this country at least, are inimical to the

best interests of the employees, the employers and the general public.' The American Plan—promising the destruction of unions, starvation wages, deadly hours, hopeless safety conditions and the dreaded 'yellow-dog contract' swearing never to join a union—suggested that unions were somehow un-American during the post-war Red Scare. Thus, the American flag became a natural symbol to protest the American Plan and to demonstrate the ironworker's loyalty to flag and country.

"The two traditions of flag and evergreen converged only a couple of decades ago, perhaps to balance out the final beam."

Going back another decade, *The Ironworker* reported the following in December 1974 issue:

"The symbol is rooted in an old Scandinavian custom. The Norsemen venerated the evergreens—cedars, spruces and pines. The trees were plentiful throughout the frozen reaches of northern Europe and thus provided building materials and firewood for the inhabitants of those wintry regions. In addition, the evergreens retained their color throughout the years and provided welcome relief from the dull hues cast by snow and ice.

"Those hardy Vikings challenged the seas of Europe and the New World in long ships of seasoned spruce, with tall masts carved from towering pines and steering oars of cedar. Returning from a particularly successful raid on hapless southern neighbors, Viking chieftains often constructed huge homes-called mead halls. Upon completion, these chieftains hoisted an evergreen tree to the ridge-pole in celebration. So, when the topping out beam rises aloft with its customary symbols, the flag and the tree, it offers a link with history."

### Persian Origins on Bridges

Scott A. Bustrum, field operations manager with AISC-member Junior

Steel Co. provided information from his company records that he says originally came from Bethlehem Steel. In addition to talking about early Chinese and Roman customs, his data adds: "Bridges posed special problems and goaded the fears and superstitions of the ancients. Xerxes, the famed Persian military leader, blamed recalcitrant river gods for the collapse of a pontoon bridge over the Hellespont. To punish and shackle these gods, the water was given 300 lashes and a pair of manacles was thrown into the river."

Concerning the Scandinavian roots of the topping out ceremony, Junior Steel's information included that "In later times in these same Scandinavian countries, and also in the Black Forest, it was customary to fasten a sheaf of corn to the gable. The corn was believed to serve as food for Woden's [the chief Norse

god] horse and as a charm against lightning. In more recent times, garlands of flowers or sheaves of corn were duplicated in wood, stone or terra-cotta on Gothic buildings. Such agrarian decoration is perhaps a survival of the ancient custom."

Many others wrote in with similar answers. Curt Zeigler of Stewart-Amos Steel, Inc. and Ron Montes of Bay Drafting Service, both cited *Why Do Clocks Run Clockwise? And Other Imponderables*, a wonderful book by David Feldman, which contains essentially the same explanations presented in *The Ironworker*. Three readers, Adam S. Bangs, P.E., of Spars Engineering in Houston, Erol J. Aydar, P.E., of Hanover Engineers in Mechanicsville, VA, and Eric Bjorklund of Freese-Nichols in Fort Worth, TX, referenced Jack C. McCormac's "Structural Steel Design", which states:



"The ancient European tradition of tying a fir tree to the top of a newly completed roof lives on among American steelworkers. Either a small tree or a flag is tied to the completed frame when it reaches its top. At the Empire State, the first topping out ceremony was photographed when the main building frame was completed at the 86th floor."

Photo and caption from *Building the Empire State*, edited by Carol Willis, courtesy of The Skyscraper Museum, New York City, [www.skyscraper.org](http://www.skyscraper.org).

"The Christmas tree is an old North European custom used to ward off evil spirits. It is also used today to show that the steel frame was erected with no lost time accidents to personnel."

Thomas C. Schaeffer, P.E., of Structural Design Group in Nashville quoted from *Reader's Digest*, which, in turn, was quoting from the book *Ever Wonder Why?*

"In ancient times, people would attach plants thought to be inhabited by good spirits to the top of their new structures. Builders still observe this superstition in a custom called topping out of the new building."

Kim Stanfill-McMillan, P.E., with the USDA Forest Service, wrote: "The Christmas tree atop the last beam is an old timberframer's tradition (sorry). Here is a quote from Tedd Benson's book entitled *Building the Timber Frame House—The Revival of a Forgotten Craft*: 'To signify a safe and successful raising, to pay respect to the wood that has given life to the frame, a traditional pine bough is attached to the peak of the building. Some of the old-timers mark this occasion further by breaking a bottle of rum at the ridge and delivering a few lines of verse composed for the occasion.'

"Usually a dance is held on the floor after the frame is raised, a tradition that also continues to this day. Steel erectors and others have borrowed the tradition of a pine bough, but since the scale of these buildings is often larger, the pine bough has evolved into a Christmas tree, which is more readily seen."

### Renaissance Roots

A variation on the ancient theme was submitted by Sheila Shaw, former marketing director with Bread Loaf Construction, a design/build firm in Middlebury, VT. "The first known ceremony with the use of a tree wag in the Third Dynasty, about 2700 B.C., in Egypt. This first

appeared when the first stone building of Egypt, the Step Pyramid of King Zoer at Sakkara, was completed. The slaves placed a live plant on the top of the Pyramid for those slaves who had died during the construction so they too might have an eternal life.

"It later appeared in the early Renaissance Era, during the period of the Gothic Cathedrals. An evergreen tree was placed on the highest point to signify the completion of the building. A large festival, lasting sometimes for weeks, was held in the town for this honor. From the Italian Renaissance, it was carried through the countries of France England, and Spain, as they, too fell into the Renaissance Era."

Bread Loaf's account then adds information about Scandinavian and German traditions.

Cordon Wright, senior editor at Building Design & Construction magazine, sent along a copy of an article from Morse/Diesel's newsletter, which printed the history of topping out as presented by Scioto Erectors Inc. of Columbus, OH:

"Scandinavian mythology suggests that man originated from a tree and that the soul of man returned to the trees after death, giving each tree a spirit of its own. Man began constructing his shelter with wood. Before cutting a tree, he would formally address the forest, reminding it of the consideration he had always shown toward the trees and asking the forest to grant use of a tree for construction of his home. When the house was complete, the topmost leafy branch of the tree would be set atop the roof so that the tree spirit



Workers raise the topping out flag on the completed mooring mast of the Empire State Building (March 18, 1931).

Photo from *Building the Empire State*, edited by Carol Willis, courtesy of The Skyscraper Museum, New York City ([www.skyscraper.org](http://www.skyscraper.org)).

would not be rendered homeless. The gesture was supposed to convince the tree spirit of the sincere appreciation of those building the home.

"As time passed, the early conception of tree worship gradually changed. The individual tree spirits merged into a single forest god who could pass freely from tree to tree. Trees were no longer placed atop the home to appease the spirits, but rather to enlist the blessings of the forest god. The tree branches on top of the home insured fertility of the land and the home. Gradually, ribbon, colored paper, painted eggs and flowers were added to the tree as a symbol of life and fertility.

"The custom of placing a tree on a completed structure came with immigrants to the United States and became an integral part of American culture in barn raisings and house warmings."

### **Carpenter's Tradition**

A similar explanation was presented by Frank Lundy, P.E., of Lundy Construction in Williamsport, PA, who explained, "This tradition may spring from the Carpenter's tradition of nailing a free tree branch to the ridge (rafter) board to entice the "wood spirits" to bestow good fortune on a house. If you look in the attic of older houses, you may find such a feature." Blair Hanuschak of Walter P. Moore and Associates in Atlanta sent along a similar explanation from the program given out during the topping out ceremony of the Florida Aquarium. And Robert J. Susz, building science engineer with Healthy Homes in Caledonia, NY, gave much the same explanation but added, "I believe the flag was first used when steel framing became popular. It was in dedication to good old U.S. made steel beams. The signing of the last beam or girder by the laborers has similar traditional roots."

### **Native American Origins**

Some people offered different interpretations, however. Barry P. Chepren, of Frederic R. Harris in Carver, MA, wrote:

"At my first topping out party for a 10-story building in Tampa, FL, I asked the same question when a large pine tree was hoisted to the top of the building. The answer that I was given was that the tradition originated around the time when high-rise construction became necessary in most major cities. During this time, many of the contractors employed many American Indians on their construction crews. According to my source, American Indians believed that no man-made structure should be taller than a tree. This belief became enough of an issue at the time to prompt someone to place a tree at the top of a topped-out building. This practice caught on and is still performed today at most high-rise building projects.

"During the Vietnam War, many people perceived construction workers as unconditional supporters of U.S. government policies in Southeast Asia or "hawks" as they were called. This impression was made popular when the news media broadcast footage of clashes between war protesters and construction workers during a rally in New York City. Many construction workers as well as police officers began to wear the American flag on their hard hats and uniforms to show support for American soldiers in Vietnam. It is around this time I am told that American flags became popular at topping-out events.

Several other writers supported the Native American origins of the topping-out ceremony. The final word, however, may be a novel interpretation from Harvey C. Johnson at Bittner Engineering, Inc. in Escanaba, MI: "During World War II it was a custom for a submarine returning from a mission with all of its torpedoes used to tie a broom to the periscope to signify a "clean

sweep" or completion. How, or if, this ever translated to the tree/flag, I have no idea."

*This article has been reprinted from the October 1995 issue of Modern Steel Construction. We have updated titles of persons quoted in this article wherever possible.*

### NAWIC Team Helps Raise \$257,605 for the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk

On Saturday, October 29, 2011, the NAWIC Team met and walked in the 2011 Making Strides for Breast Cancer at the Capitol in Michigan. The NAWIC Team has supported and walked in the event for 12 years, and this year donated nearly \$1,300 to the American Cancer Society.

The Making Strides Against Breast Cancer is dedicated to honoring survivors and remembering lost loved ones. Though an anticipated 3,000 walkers became 2,886 due to the rain, the experience was truly awesome to witness and celebrate. The walkers, including 230 breast cancer survivors, participating in this year's event raised \$257,605 to help the society's fight against breast cancer.



Seventeen NAWICs, including family and friends, gathered at the Michigan Brewery Co for breakfast before the walk began. NAWIC Team organizer, Barbara Strachan, was deeply touched when she received a Breast Cancer Walk T-Shirt signed by team members, family, friends and co-workers. For breast cancer survivors like Kathy Jacobs and Barbara Strachan, walking for the cause has become very meaningful. Since 1993, nearly 7 million

walkers have raised more than \$400 million through the Making Strides Walk at the Capitol. Donations to the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer can help to beat this disease that has taken the life of so many women and men.



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For more information on becoming a member please visit the national office, or our local chapter website: [www.nawic.org](http://www.nawic.org) or [www.lansingnawic.com](http://www.lansingnawic.com).

