

BX Scholarship Program Celebrates Six Decades of Impacting the Industry's Future

BX of Central Ohio Celebrates 125th Anniversary

As the Builders Exchange celebrates its 125th anniversary this year, the organization is looking back at programs launched over its long history. Arguably, none have had more impact on the local construction industry than the BX Scholarship Program.

When the Exchange board of directors decided to offer a scholarship to a deserving student at The Ohio State University in 1958, members could not have envisioned that this effort – “to encourage greater activity in the engineering field” – would distribute nearly \$1.3 million to more than 1,000 students over the next 60 years.

The scholarship concept was suggested in early 1958 by BX board president O.H. Seeger, who was general manager of Harry Wellnitz Co. Because Seeger was a 1925 civil engineering graduate of OSU, it seemed natural to approach the College of Engineering for ideas.

Two board members were assigned to coordinate a plan with the university, Camden Swart (Columbus Builders Supply) and C.O. “Monty” Montgomery (Truscon Steel). They proposed a two-year scholarship of \$750 per year, with recipients recommended by OSU and approved by the Builders Exchange board.

Eligible students were “in the Ohio State College of Engineering... majoring in Architecture or Civil, Electrical, Industrial or Mechanical Engineering.” They must have completed six quarters of college and have been a resident of Franklin County for two years prior to entry at OSU. The winners’ \$750 scholarships could be renewed for a second year if they remained in the upper third of their class in their college.



The first BX scholarship recipient, Thomas Lee Workman (center), visited the BX for a tour with two board members who launched the program: C.O. Montgomery (left) and O.H. Seeger, board president.

The Builders Exchange Scholarship was a significant honor, given the fact that OSU archives show the annual cost of engineering tuition and fees as \$318 in 1958 – and a university bulletin in 1957-58 estimated a “safe price” for room and board was \$795 a year.

The board presented its first award in the fall of 1958 to Thomas Lee Workman, an electrical engineering major and 1955 graduate of Columbus West High School. As many recipients would do in years to come, Workman wrote a thank you letter to the Exchange, noting, “The amount of the scholarship seems to be sufficient to pay for my expenses, thereby relieving the pressure of outside work.”

Workman's scholarship was renewed the next year, and an additional award was made to Robert J. Erdman – starting a pattern that lasted more than a decade, in which two students would receive BX scholarships each year.

The Builders Exchange Scholarship Fund was maintained at OSU, with the BX-university joint selection process continuing through the 1970s. Along with increasing the number of undergraduate recipients to four annually in the '70s, from 1972 to 1978 the BX added a \$5,000 fellowship. One of these was awarded each year to a graduate student in a construction-related field.

BX assumes program management, expands to other universities, majors

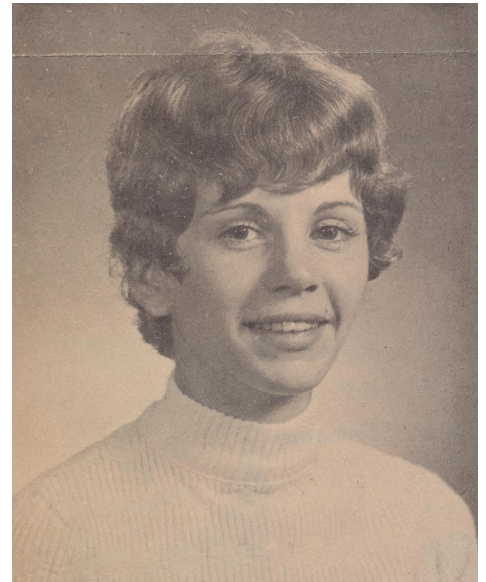
In 1979, a major change was made to the program: the scholarship funds were moved to the Builders Exchange and a committee of BX volunteers was formed to select recipients. And while Ohio State students continued to be eligible, the program was opened to those at other colleges and technical schools.

By the following year, recipients were from the University of Cincinnati, Clark Technical College and Columbus Technical Institute (now Columbus State Community College) as well as Ohio State. Several of them were not architecture or engineering students, but majoring in the expanding field of construction management.

Whether it was the increased BX member involvement, the addition of schools and colleges included or dramatically rising costs of higher education, the scholarship program exploded with growth in 1980s. While in its first "version" – from 1958 through 1978 – the program granted a total of \$65,120 in 56 awards, in the second 21 years – from 1979 through 1999 – those numbers jumped to a total of \$282,650 given in 272 awards.



Flanking the 1981 BX scholarship winners were BX board members Ron Jezerinac (Korda & Associates), left, and President Don Champney (The Gardner Co.), right. Among the student recipients that year was a future BX board president and Cornerstone Award winner: Dan Lorenz, standing next to Champney.



The first woman to receive a BX scholarship was Kathleen Curl Ferris in 1972. One of three undergraduate students to receive awards that year, Ferris was an architecture major at The Ohio State University.

Not all BX scholarship recipients stayed in central Ohio after graduation, but many did go to work for BX member firms or started their own businesses. By the late 1990s, the construction community had a number of leaders who had received financial aid from the Exchange – including the late Jeff Beitel (1980 recipient), who was vice president and operations manager for Turner Construction Co. and Christian Robertson (1988 recipient), president of Robertson Construction Services, Inc.

Two other past recipients had gone on to serve on the board of the Builders Exchange: Randy Sleeper (1973, '74 and '75 winner), CEO of Bruner Corp. and Dan Lorenz (1980, '81 and '82 winner), president of Joe Knows Energy.

These leaders and others were committed to and concerned about encouraging the next generation of talent for the industry. Discussions began on how to generate more funding for construction workforce development initiatives, including the BX scholarship program. In 1999, the Builders Exchange created a 501(c)3, non-profit foundation for that purpose.

To launch the BX Foundation, an inaugural fundraising campaign began that was chaired by six respected, visible construction leaders. Among them were Sleeper and Lorenz, who made the first major gifts to the Foundation's endowment.

Foundation became a vehicle for individual donations

Again, the BX Scholarship Fund was re-located – this time, to be administered by the new Foundation. And again, the scholarship program saw dramatic growth. During the Foundation's multi-year inaugural campaign, many donors expressed their appreciation for this unique initiative that had made such an impact on the local industry.

Most Foundation gifts were unrestricted – that is, not directed to any specific project – and the proven success of the BX Scholarship Program undoubtedly encouraged

giving. The program had a track record: if the Builders Exchange distributed nearly \$350,000 through that effort from 1959 to 1999, what could the organization do with a larger pool of funds?

Dozens of BX member firms stepped up to build the BX Foundation endowment and the Foundation offered a new benefit: individuals could make contributions that were tax-deductible to this non-profit, charitable entity.

The power of personal giving was illustrated in 2001, when a BX member lost his young son in a bicycle accident. Mark Ludwig, who worked for Continental Building Systems, was the father of Tyler Ludwig. The pre-teen's death was devastating to all the employees of Continental, as well as their many business associates. Like everyone in the wake of a tragedy, most were asking, "What can I do to help the Ludwigs or honor Tyler?"



One of the first Named Scholarships created at the Builders Exchange Foundation was The Lincoln Construction Scholarship for Central Ohio Students in Construction Management. Lincoln's president, Greg Schmitt (left) and vice president, Andrea Schmitt (right) are shown with 2016 recipients Shane Warner and Lori Meenach.



In 2011, Turner Construction Co. endowed a scholarship to honor retiring vice president and operations manager, Rick Lombardi (second from left) for his 40-year career with the company. Joining him at the 2016 BX scholarship reception were Brian Mooney (left) and Kyle Rooney (right) both with Turner Construction Co. and the 2016 recipient Austin Tebbe.

Continental had an answer. The company created The Tyler Ludwig Leadership Award through the Builders Exchange Foundation, matching dozens of contributions from friends, colleagues and family. It was the first perpetual, “Named Scholarship” at the Foundation and remains one of the largest funds managed by the organization.

The concept of Named Scholarships grew steadily at the Builders Exchange. These funds were not just “in memoriam” tributes. BX members and companies endowed Named Scholarships to mark anniversaries like The Igel Anniversary

Scholarship, for 100 years in business and The Sam Shuman Scholarship, established by Speer Mechanical to salute Shuman’s 50th year with the company.

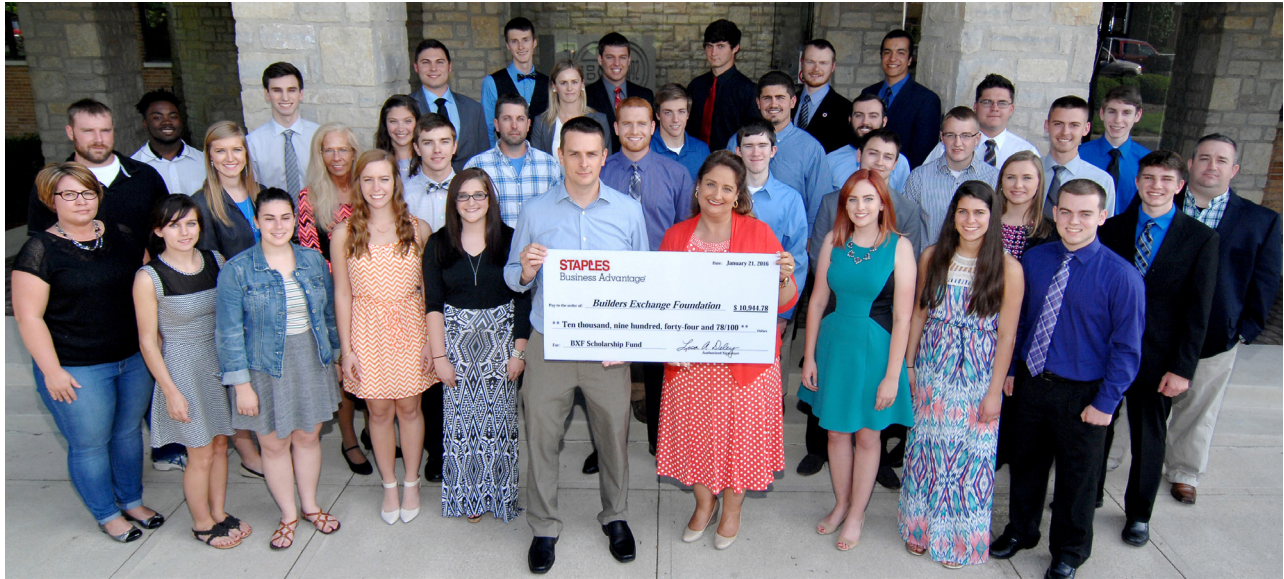
They celebrate careers, like The Richard T. Lombardi Scholarship by Turner Construction and the Thomas C. Fitzpatrick Award for Community Service and Leadership by Elford, Inc. They thank company founders, like the Ben W. Kramer Scholarship by his son, Ben M. and The Donald W. and David M. Righter Scholarship for Civil Engineering and Construction Management by The Righter Co., Inc. president, Brad Nadolson. They salute behind-the-scene supporters, like The Roger Allen Carper, Sr. Scholarship by Boss Excavating & Grading, Inc. and the SME – William L. Muter Scholarship by Settle-Muter Electric, Ltd.

Named Scholarships, ultimately, have become a meaningful way to “give back” to the industry. One Named Scholarship was the result of a phone call in 2011 to the Builders Exchange from a long-ago winner, Gerald Daily. Now living in the state of Washington, the retired Boeing engineer had received an inheritance and had never forgotten the help he received from the BX in the early 1960s. He called the Exchange to see how he could support deserving students, and quickly committed to creating The Gerald L. Daily Scholarship for Civil Engineering at The Ohio State University.



Gerald Daily (second from left) received his scholarship check from the 1960 BX board president, Ralph Atkinson (G.W. Atkinson & Son, Inc.) as fellow recipient Robert Erdman looks on with BX and OSU officials. In 2011, Daily and his wife, Janet, contacted the BX about creating a scholarship in gratitude for the support he received.

All 20 of the current BX Named Scholarships have wonderful stories. Since 2000, the BX Foundation has given \$936,300 in scholarships through 744 awards. The impact of the board's action back in 1958 totals nearly \$1.3 million given to the industry's future, all by BX members. The Foundation's growing endowment has tremendously increased the number of scholarships and dollar amounts awarded in recent years. Consider this: later this month, the BX Foundation will give \$80,000 to 37 scholarship winners – more than the BX Scholarship Program distributed in its first 22 years!



Celebrating with the 2016 scholarship winners at a reception last year were representatives from Staples Business Advantage, a long-time membership services partner of the Builders Exchange. Since 2006, "Staples Soul" – their corporate responsibility program – has made an annual donation to the BX Scholarship Program. With its \$11,718 gift this year, the company has given an astonishing \$86,319 for BX scholarships.