

50 Years of Member-Driven Programs Built BX Reputation for Industry Education

BX of Central Ohio Celebrates 125th Anniversary

Builders Exchange members who completed the 2016 course, “Estimating & Bid Prep” signed on for a four-night program taught by BX members with years of experience in this specialty. Neither the instructors nor the students in that class realized they were part of a 51-year-old tradition at the Builders Exchange.

The first estimating course launched in October 1966 with 30 students and 13 volunteer teachers, starting a precedent that remains a hallmark of the organization. This course is among more than a dozen that are offered on a regular basis, known as the association’s “core curriculum.”

As the Builders Exchange of Central Ohio marks its 125th anniversary during 2017, it is reviewing the history of its most valued services, including its unique education programs. Not only are many BX courses crafted and taught by member experts – they were, and continue to be, attended by competitors across the industry.



The first education program developed and taught by a team of BX members in 1966 – a 13-week estimating course – has been a regular part of Exchange offerings for more than 50 years.

A half-century ago, the BX estimating instructors were well-respected leaders in their specialties and a committed team of members. After developing the extensive curriculum, they taught the course – which consisted of 13 weeks of concentrated study, every Tuesday and Thursday evening from 7 to 9:30 p.m. Cost for the entire 26-session program? \$15 per person.

While many of the inaugural instructors and their companies are not familiar industry names today, in the 1960s they were a “Who’s Who” in central Ohio construction – as much an attraction for students as the program itself.

Their estimating course quickly sold out with a 30-student limit, and another was immediately scheduled. The popularity of this innovative program led to development of another member-driven course that remains a BX staple, “Field Supervision and Management.” This course debuted in 1967 with Sam Shuman (Julian Speer Co.) serving as course administrator.

Instructors for the first BX Estimating class were:

Arthur Hess (Garwick & Ross, Inc.), Allen Sweeney (Huffman-Wolfe Co.), Carl Erlenbusch (Burroughs Electric Co., Inc.), Harold Bickel (Bexley Decorating Co.), J.T. Edwards, Jr. (J.T. Edwards Co.), Fritz Kayser (Earl E. Bright, Inc.), H.L. Brehem (Buel-Gatterdam Co., Inc.), Richard Ziska (The Myron Cornish Co. of Columbus), William Bretz (B&T Carpet and Linoleum Co.), Pete Mirolo (Ardit Mosaic Tile & Marble Co.), John Williamson (Smith Bros. Hardware Co.), Mick Heath (Columbus Plate & Window Glass Co.) and John Kuempel (The Kuempel Co.)

This process created a formula that the Builders Exchange has used for decades:

- Bring together professionals who can develop a practical, straightforward approach to a topic.
- Build courses that are affordable and applicable – with information students can put to use on the job the next day.

Through the generosity of its members' time and talent, the Exchange became a resource for continuing professional education before it became a business trend.



Each session of the “Overview of Cost Estimating” course in 1982 was team-taught. During one evening, former co-workers, then competitors and always friends Larry Mirgon (South Texas & Lone Star Drywall, Inc.), left, and J.D. Flaherty (Construction Systems, Inc.) divided the class in two and coached them as both groups competed for a sub bid for the same project.

After building core courses, BX tests new topics

By the early 1970s, annual offerings also included surveying and construction drawings courses, as well as a “Credit and Collection” workshop. A new hot topic was covered in 1971 with the four-week course, “Construction Sales.”

In 1972, the BX education calendar addressed the recently-instituted Occupational Safety and Health Administration with two OSHA 10-hour courses and six First Aid courses held that year. First Aid has been on the roster of Exchange programs ever since, and the OSHA courses were revived when the BX launched its safety department in 1992.



The Builders Exchange occasionally turned to comedy in promoting its courses – this 1992 newsletter photo captured “bid day excitement!” The picture promoted “A Layman’s Look at Construction,” a course developed in the mid-1980s that is still offered for members’ staff who don’t have a technical construction background. This team from Elford, Inc. included Jeff Copeland, seated, and from left, Jodi Walters, Missy Casto, John Chiado, Ed Ervin and Sophie Reidy.



This 1996 Education Task Force explored the idea of creating a clearinghouse for industry education information. Task Force members were, from left, Kim Ashley (Edwards Steel), Grant Douglass (Hanlin-Rainaldi Construction Corp.), Joe Lorenz (Pro-Terra Environmental Contracting Co.), Parr Peterson (The Paul Peterson Co.), Chris Bendinelli (Maddox NBD, Inc.), Bob Fry (Robert L. Fry & Associates, Inc.), Bob Tullet (EXXCEL Contract Management, Inc.) and Jeff Donohew (James & Donohew Development Services, Inc.).

Along with the industry-focused topics that were becoming BX signature programs, the Exchange tested a few other interesting classes in the mid-70s: photography and speed reading, with the latter having a successful multi-year run.

The 70s also introduced an education format that continues – short management luncheons, with topics and speakers covering a range of subjects. When held at the BX in 1977, these informal gatherings featured VIP speakers including Gov. James Rhodes, sharing his thoughts about the future of the construction industry and Marvin White, president of Columbia Gas of Ohio, on the future of construction “with or without resources such as gas.”

The diverse BX education offerings had one common thread: their topics came from members’ needs and ideas.

Business, industry growth means expanded education

The 1980s were a time of enormous growth for Columbus, the construction industry and the Builders Exchange. At the 1989 BX board retreat, it was reported that active membership had more than doubled in the previous decade, from 506 firms in 1978 to 1,132 in 1988. In the same period, students in BX education programs grew more than 400%, with 614 participants in 1988.

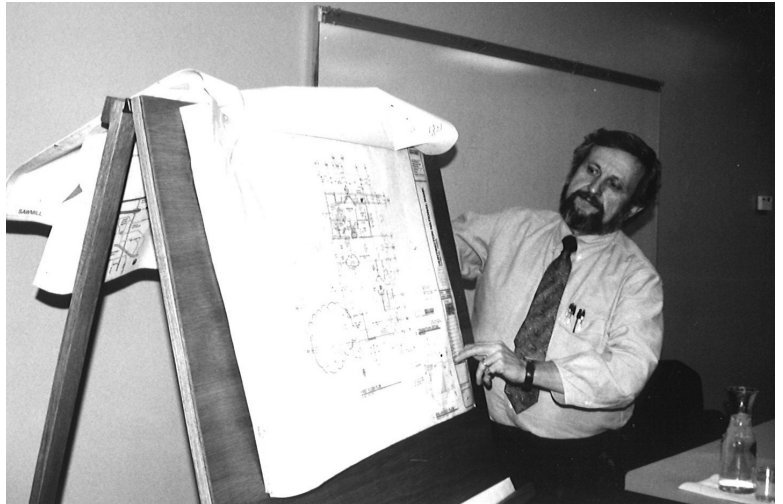
Business was changing quickly and BX seminar topics reflected that. In 1980, the Exchange offered a day-long seminar, “A Comprehensive Review of Computers and Their Use in the Industry.” Touching on the services “rendered by a computer,” the class introduced BX members to accounting systems, design applications, inventory uses, word processing and construction applications like critical path, PERT and estimating. It was the first of many education programs about technology!



The “Construction Layout & Basic Surveying Skills” course works in the BX backyard circa 1990. The first surveying class was launched in 1967 and is another half-century BX education staple.

Year after year, the solid BX “core courses” of estimating, construction drawings, surveying and field supervision continued and member instructors regularly updated the materials and developed follow-up programs. One popular spinoff in the 1980s was a series of “mini courses” in quantity takeoff: one or two-night workshops on concrete, masonry, structural steel, drywall systems, flooring, excavation, painting, mechanical, roofing, electrical and acoustical/specialty ceilings.

The mid-80s saw the addition of another educational approach, the annual “industry roundtable,” which attracted more than 100 attendees to hear CEO panelists discuss scenarios centered around ethics and communication. One event was held in Columbus city council chambers and another in the auditorium of the new Columbia Gas building downtown. With a cocktail hour following the presentation, the roundtables combined education with networking – making them a double value for participants.



Architect Paul Jaros (Firestone, Jaros, Mullin, Inc.), 1993 BX board president, taught the Reading Construction Drawings courses for years at the Exchange.

Safety training brings new students, opportunity

The 1991 education calendar promoted the traditional list of core offerings and their next-level versions: Reading Construction Drawings I and II, Construction Layout & Basic Surveying Skills, Advanced Construction Layout & Basic Surveying Skills, Field Supervision & Jobsite Management and Advanced Field Supervision & Jobsite Management which are still taught by member volunteers and attracting students after 25 years.

But it also featured a first: the five-day, “Basic Instructor Course in Occupational Safety & Health Standards for the Construction Industry.” The program was a joint effort of the OSHA Training Institute, the Builders Exchange and the Associated Builders & Contractors, Inc., Central Ohio chapter. It was offered at a time when the BX board and members were discussing the growing need for more education in the area of safety.

After long debates about the services the Exchange might offer in this technical arena, in 1992 BX leaders unveiled a new safety department and staff with a focus on what the association did best: planning and executing education programs for members and employees.

Because these course topics – such as “The Team Approach: Managing Safety Liability” and “Focused Inspection Policies and Hazards” – were targeted to a new audience of safety professionals, student participation increased dramatically during the decade. In 1999, the Exchange conducted 111 education or safety training programs, with 3,971 attendees.

Another long-lived education format was created in the 90s: the “Idea Exchange” groups. Made up of 12 to 15 members with different industry specialties, I-X groups met monthly at various members’ offices to discuss business issues and new trends. Groups were re-mixed and expanded annually, with about 120 members participating at the peak of this program’s nearly 20-year span.

Shrinking market drives new direction



Along with its annual “core courses,” over the decades the Exchange has offered programs that educate members on emerging industry trends and technology, from construction management, to partnering, to BIM, to lean construction. In 2010, the BX began hosting a monthly LEED breakfast seminar for members interested in green building.

The economic recession of the mid- 2000s impacted participation in all BX programs, but nowhere so severely as in its always-reliable “core curriculum.” When members were asked why they were not sending students, the answer was simple: “We have no new employees - all our entry-level staff have taken your classes.”

Exchange members who were instructors or course planners gathered to explore new topics. At one meeting, it was suggested that they poll the “regular customers” of education to ask if there was an employee type that BX programs were not serving. That answer, too, was simple: “Yes, absolutely. You offer nothing for our middle managers.”

This employee demographic, for the most part, included college-educated professionals in industry specialties. They were architects, engineers and construction managers who didn’t need BX introductory or overview courses. BX education planners decided to find out what they did need. In 2006, after a year of convening middle managers and their bosses, the Exchange announced an innovative addition to its offerings: The Rising Leaders Institute.

Everything about the Rising Leaders model was different. It was a huge investment of time and money – 12 half-days over a period of nine months, with the first program’s tuition set at \$3,500. Instructors were not construction-based; they were MBA-level faculty from The Ohio State University Fisher College of Business.

Topics were built around “soft skills” needed by young managers: coaching your team, communicating effectively, negotiating difficult situations. It was different from the traditional “BX formula” and was an instant success. The inaugural Class of 2007 sold out quickly, and it continues to be in high demand.



The inaugural class of the Rising Leaders Institute in 2007.

The Rising Leaders Institute did not replace traditional BX education courses. Its unique model was applied in developing other new leadership programs: the BX Executive Leadership Experience (BXLX) in 2012 and the BX Field Leadership Excellence Series (BXFlex) in 2015. In addition to these, a number of shorter management seminars continue to address company leaders' needs.

All are going strong – as are the “core courses” that laid the foundation for the Builders Exchange standing as a leading source for professional development in the industry. This reputation, in part, is what has sustained the BX for the past century and what will continue to drive the association into the next 100 years.



For 50 years, BX members have shared their time and talent to teach industry skills to other members – often, competitors of the instructors. Some of these volunteers are natural educators, like Adam Drexel (Ruscilli Construction Co., Inc.), left, and Chris Bendinelli (PRIME AE Group, Inc.), both of whom have received the BX President's Award for their volunteer service: Bendinelli in 2000 and Drexel in 2014.