

For 125 Years, BX Annual Meetings Combine Tradition with Change

BX of Central Ohio Celebrates 125th Anniversary

Part 2 of 2: 1950 through Today - Post-war growth made hosting two key events difficult

In Columbus, the post-war decade was a time of exciting growth in the city, the construction industry and the Builders Exchange.

By November 1950, although the Exchange had completed its expansive new headquarters on Dublin Road, membership was too large to host the BX Thanksgiving Party on site. In addition, the Exchange Annual Meeting – still held in January at that time – also attracted a sizeable crowd that made it impossible to accommodate voting machines, social hour and dinner for several hundred guests.

For the two programs that eventually merged into the Annual Meeting, the BX utilized the Southern Hotel through much of the 1950s. Other traditions continued, including the fried chicken dinner at the Annual Meeting and the turkey with trimmings at the Thanksgiving Party.

And both events kept offering memorable performances for attendees. In January 1951, Annual Meeting minutes noted “everyone reassembled in the ballroom to enjoy a most unusual and unique form of entertainment by Vic Perry, known as the International Pickpocket.”

As always, the polls in January 1954 opened at 11 a.m. for members to cast their ballots for the Exchange board of directors. Polls remained open all day and the minutes reported “campaigning of all candidates became very active about 4 p.m. and increased in intensity until shortly before dinner was served. Pre-dinner entertainment was by 12 ladies from the Correale Agency of the New York Modeling School who were quite active on behalf of their respective candidates.” In addition to making the case for their board contenders, the models later were part of the entertainment, also featuring “a Hillbilly Band from The Ohio Fuel Gas Company.”



Candidates for the Builders Exchange board made a memorable entrance at the 1954 Annual Meeting, when each of them was escorted by a model from the Correale Agency of the New York Modeling School. In addition to campaigning for the board contenders prior to dinner, the models later were part of the entertainment, also featuring “a Hillbilly Band from The Ohio Fuel Gas Company.”

Even today's strongest proponents of business networking would have been exhausted by the frequency and length of Builders Exchange gatherings in the 1950s. Not only was the BX operating a lunchroom every weekday, the organization held monthly meetings and seasonal parties as well as its largest attractions: the BX Annual Meeting and the Thanksgiving Party.

In 1959, a wise (or tired) board of directors decided to combine those two signature events at a convenient location, the beautiful Grandview Inn, a few doors down Dublin Road where a Tim Horton's restaurant stands today.

Board campaigns remained as meeting entertainment

With the evolving business culture of the 1960s, the BX Annual Meeting no longer featured live music, fashion models, boxing matches or comedy routines. The meeting maintained, however, a ritual held since the turn of the century: a lively, competitive election of Exchange board members.

The earliest surviving minutes in BX files, from the annual meeting of Jan. 7, 1918, show board candidates on the Red Ticket versus the Blue Ticket, with the "Blue" presidential contender, Lambert R. Moor, winning by a landslide, 58 to 31. The Red-Blue ticket approach to board selection carried on for another 30 years, through 1948, after which prospects competed individually for board seats, with the board then electing its officers.



Board members for 1962 – both newly elected and incumbent – at the 1961 Exchange Annual Meeting were (front, from left) Bart Barthelmes (retired), Paul Offenberg (Evergreens, Inc.), T.E. Weiser (Coulson Glass Co.), David Cheses (The City Window Cleaning Co.), W. Sam Russell (Huffman-Wolfe Co.) and J. Paul Batterson (Cunard-Lang Co.); in back, from left, Marv Ott (Alvan Tallmadge Co.), Charles Cloud (Architect), Robert W. Setterlin, Jr. (Robert W. Setterlin and Sons Co.), J.T. Edwards, Jr. (The J.T. Edwards Co.), Jack Brown (Columbia Cement Corp.), Art Hess (Garwick & Ross, Inc.), Tom C. Fitzpatrick (Elford, Inc.) and Tony Drabek, BX secretary-treasurer

Even without the momentum of a "ticket," board hopefuls from the 1950s through the 1980s mounted ambitious and often humorous campaigns. Each aspiring director named a campaign chair and committee – all BX members – to contact fellow members before the Annual Meeting on their behalf. Guests at the Annual Meeting were greeted by handmade posters before navigating a gauntlet of candidates and managers (often in theme costumes or crazy hats), making last-minute pitches before they arrived at the voting booth.

The process was entertaining for members and fun for the winners. A competitive board election, in which there were more candidates than open board spots, was stipulated by the Builders Exchange constitution. But by the late 1980s, the size of the association made "campaigning" incredibly time-consuming for members whose businesses were equally demanding.

With nearly 1,200 member firms and thousands of individuals participating in BX events, the fiscal and management responsibility of the board had grown significantly. Financial oversight of initiatives like the health insurance program and workers' compensation group plan made board service a serious commitment.

It was no longer realistic to require industry leaders to call hundreds of Exchange companies soliciting support for a board position. In 1989, a membership vote revised the constitution, allowing a BX board nominating committee to recruit, review and offer a slate of qualified directors for members to approve.

That same year, the Annual Meeting moved to a location that was

well suited for its still-increasing attendance: the cavernous Aladdin Shrine, where it remained for 26 years. After hopping among various locations in the 1970s and 1980s – including the Sheraton Columbus, Neil House, Scot's Inn, Carrousel Inn, Sanese Party House, Scioto Downs and the Hyatt Regency – the Exchange found the Shrine to be an ideal venue. Its easy highway access, enormous parking lot, giant stage and multi-tiered ballroom suited the event.



Candidates for the Exchange board of directors lined up to greet guests at the 1982 Annual Meeting. From left, they were Paul Jaros (Van Buren & Firestone Architects, Inc.), Jerry Maddox (Knodt/Maddox, Inc.), Bob Carroll (Dollar Savings Association), Dick Cummins (F.W. Slotter Concrete, Inc.), Ed Rainaldi (Reacon Structures, Inc.), Kurt Schmitt (Lincoln Construction, Inc.), Jack Graf, Jr. (Graf & Sons, Inc.), Bob Dawson (Star Industries, Inc.) and Ted McDonnell (McDonnell Sales & Service).



Three years before its centennial in 1992, BX leaders used the 1989 Annual Meeting at the Aladdin Shrine to announce that the association would make a special gift to the city of Columbus to mark the anniversary: a children's fountain and park at the intersection of Gay Street and Marconi Boulevard. The official fundraising effort was launched that night by campaign co-chairs Ralph Setterlin (Setterlin Construction Co.), left, and Andy Anderson (Anderson Concrete Corp.), accompanied on stage by children of BX members.

Annual Meeting becomes a living annual report

By the 1990s, the exploding membership led to more and more programming... and more and more events with admission prices. In 1997, another wise board decided that, rather than offering a yearly Cornerstone Award dinner-dance, a Craftsmanship Awards banquet, a Safety Awards luncheon, a new member reception, etc., members might prefer wrapping all these activities into one event.

That year – and every year since – the BX Annual Meeting has been a “Celebration of Excellence” in all aspects of central Ohio construction. Not only are the above mentioned winners honored for outstanding leadership, craftsmanship and safety, the event introduces attendees to the latest graduates of the Rising Leaders Institute, the BX Executive Leadership Experience and the BX Field Leadership Excellence Series.



Sporting tuxedos at the 100th anniversary Annual Meeting in 1992, the BX board welcomed newly-elected director Jim Rost (Turner SPD), center left. Board members were (from left) Roger Alban (Alban Equipment Co.), Gabe Reitter (Reitter Wall Systems, Inc.), Jeff Copeland (Elford, Inc.), Chris Southwick (Colors, Inc.), Rick Geers (Jezerinac Geers & Associates, Inc.), Paul Jaros (Firestone Jaros Mullin, Inc.), Rost, Randy Sleeper (Bruner Corp.), Chuck Wilson (Wilson Floors, Inc.), Don Leach (Buckingham, Doolittle & Burroughs, LPA), Dave Edwards, Jr. (Edwards Steel), Ted McDonnell (McDonnell Sales & Service, Inc.), Rob Setterlin (Robert W. Setterlin & Sons Co.) and Mark Shy (Re-Construction, Inc.).

The Annual Meeting includes a private welcome reception for new members and an “after party” reunion for past board members. The meeting’s fast-paced, multi-media show - which is the central part of the evening - highlights unique BX initiatives of the past 12 months. With attendance regularly exceeding 800 in recent years, the Annual Meeting remains a “who’s who” function for construction leaders.

That’s quite an accomplishment, to sustain a 125-year-old gathering for a local industry. Perhaps its success is due to the fact that, no matter what or who the Annual Meeting is celebrating, no matter where it is, its most vital purpose has never changed in more than a century. That purpose is to connect the community of construction in central Ohio – and on Thursday, in its new home at the Greater Columbus Convention Center, the Builders Exchange Annual Meeting will do it again.



At the 2016 Annual Meeting, the new BX logo is revealed by BX Executive Director, Mary Tebeau, and Board President, Josh Corna (Corna Kokosing Construction Co.).