



The Newsletter of the National Capital Chapter Building Commissioning Association



## Letter from the President

By Gretchen Coleman

Hi Mid-Atlantic Region National Capital Chapter Members! Whew, that's a mouthful. I want to start off with a little update on where we are from the last newsletter.

As promised, the Board members are holding Meet and Greets around the territory. In this newsletter are highlights of the Harrisburg, PA meeting held in May and the Roanoke, VA event in July. Both these events were fun and informative. Our next event will be held on the campus of George Mason University. GMU is interested in commissioning, wants to know more about it, so have volunteered a facility to host an event. This is coming up October 26th so keep an eye out for the announcement as we get a little closer.

The Tidewater area of Virginia has expressed interest in an event in their area. If that interest still holds, please contact a board member and we will get you on the calendar.

Next I would like to pique your interest in the BCA Expo, being held October 5-7 in Hauppauge, NY (Long Island). The Expo is focused on commissioning providers. The NCBC conference is the industry's opportunity to tell owners, A/Es, and contractors about commissioning, and sometimes there is not as much material for the seasoned commissioning provider. Enter the Expo. The Expo is all about providing interesting sessions for providers. Additionally, there will be an Exhibit Hall where vendors with fancy new products will be more than happy to give you a demonstration.

I urge you to attend this event. It is close to home, it will be a great networking opportunity, and it will show your support of the Building Commissioning Association. Registration is now open online at <http://www.bcx.org/events/expo2008/registration.htm> just click the button at the bottom.

You get out of it what you put into it – I hope to see you there!

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**A rapt audience at the July 23<sup>rd</sup>  
Roanoke Meet & Greet**

### **WHY COMMISSIONING HAS BECOME AN INDUSTRY**

Offered for use by the BCA and Revised Saturday, July 12, 2008.

Randy R. Niece, P.E.

Commissioning Manager

Hensel Phelps Construction Co.

Those of us who have been in the construction industry for more than 20 years can probably remember the days when commissioning (to put into service) was something they did to ships or officers in the military. What has happened in the last 20 years to cause this shift from what was a relatively simple equipment start up to a fully developed industry providing specialized services?

One facility manager asked me a rather pointed question as to why he had to buy commissioning services at all. "Wasn't this included in the original contract to construct," he asked? The commissioning providers may cringe to see my response, but from a contractor's point of view, the answer is "yes, it should be." So why isn't it?

The shift may well have begun when engineers and architects had to bid to owners for their services based on fee. A concept that worked well for owners looking for the low bid to build their project, but looking back, maybe not such a great idea for design services. The quality of these design services gradually began to erode as these professionals looked for ways to remain competitive.

Quick to go were on site inspection services that were once provided by the design engineers. Weekly jobsite inspections were the norm and they would often catch mistakes well before they became problems. With their disappearance from the job, this task fell to the contractors or lower priced inspection services specialized in the basics such as concrete, steel and masonry. Mechanical and electrical system inspections were left wanting. Another service to go was the peer review of the design. Once used to flush out mistakes before the design went out for bidding or construction, owners began to find themselves faced with mounting costs for change orders related to errors and omissions. Many will outsource services they once performed in house and the coordination between the designs does not seem to be happening. Remember the TV ads for an oil change that warned "pay me now or pay me later." Seems this philosophy applies to the construction industry as well.

The increased demand for energy management may have also led to some of the demand for commissioning services. As control systems have been asked to do much more each year, the level of complexity has increased the difficulty of verifying the engineer's intent. The equipment specified may not be up to the tasks being asked of it by the control system. Proper specification of the equipment to work as a system is vital.

## WHY COMMISSIONING HAS BECOME AN INDUSTRY (continued)

Value engineering or cost considerations may have come into play in the decision on equipment selection. Where the controls design may have anticipated a certain ability of the equipment to perform, a key feature may have been eliminated during the submittal phase.

The construction teams can shoulder some of the responsibility as well. The hard bid mechanical and electrical subcontractors need to stay competitive. Where they once may have been able and willing to overcome small mistakes in the design, they would now install per plans and specs regardless of whether they thought the system would ever work. Owners would then be left in the middle having to sort out who was responsible for the system failing to work as they had expected.

The craft play into this analysis as well. Unions, which were once a source of highly qualified and well trained mechanics, have seen a steady decrease in their ranks due again to the competitive marketplace which often allows a low price now to trump quality later. Losing market share to non-union contractors, the level of training in the industry as a whole has steadily declined to the point where the skills needed to assemble these complicated systems is limited to a handful of individuals. And growing smaller.

Feel free to disagree, as the above are personal observations as to the possible reasons as seen from a General Contractors point of view. None responsible by itself, but taken as a whole, may be why our industry has come about.

So what really should be my answer to the owner questioning me as to why he needs to buy commissioning services? After the above considerations, it is "Yes, Mr. Building Owner, you need the special skills of the commissioning providers because the industry has changed." Commissioning should be viewed as the thread that pulls all the parties together. The commissioning provider should and can act as the facilitator in all phases of the project.

This new industry, with BCA in the lead, has thousands of success stories which not only prove the value added by the commissioning specialist, but can act as a database from which to share and learn. Owners and contractors alike should take full advantage of the experience available from the Commissioning Providers.

### ***2008 BCA Convention & Exposition***

<http://www.bcxa.org/events/expo2008/>

will be held on

**October 5-7, 2008**, in

**Hauppauge (Long Island), NY**

at the

[Hyatt Regency Long Island at Wind Watch Golf Club](#)

## ***2008 BCA Convention & Exposition Sponsors:***



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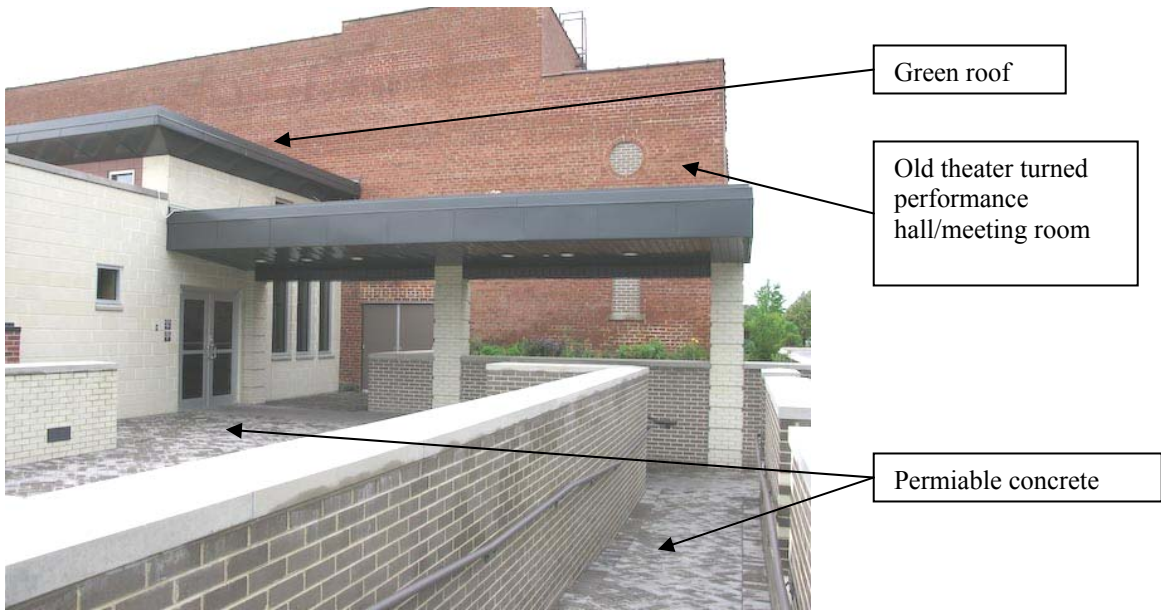
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**For More Information**

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**Roanoke Meet and Greet at the Claude Moore Educational Center**

As described in the first chapter newsletter, the board is holding Meet and Greet events around the territory. The purpose is to increase exposure throughout the Mid-Atlantic Region, to evaluate interest in more chapters throughout the Region and to garner volunteers for the various chapter committees and events.

On Wednesday July 23<sup>rd</sup> we gathered in Roanoke at the Claude Moore Educational Center (CMEC). The CMEC is a LEED project and was commissioned by the event sponsor, Engineering Economics, Inc. The program included conversation over good food, a lively presentation on the foibles encountered during commissioning, and a fun history of the building and an overview of the green features. We would like to thank Mr. Dan McConnell of EEI and Mr. Gregg Lewis of SmithLewis Architects for their presentations and building tour.



Dan McConnell, EEI



Gregg Lewis,  
SmithLewis  
Architects