First Choice
By Brad Robeson

Metal building systems retain stronghold as leading choice in the low-rise business market

The growing popularity of metal building systems is evident with every drive through cities and suburbs across America. Car dealerships, retail stores, offices, restaurants, churches, schools—the list goes on. In fact, the members of the Metal Building Manufacturers Association (MBMA) represent more than $2 billion in annual steel shipments, and their custom structures account for more than 50 percent of the total nonresidential, low-rise construction market in the United States.

To help spur continued industry growth, MBMA has invested in some fascinating research. A case in point is the Flexible Research Platform (FRP) on the campus of Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Oak Ridge, Tenn. This full-scale metal building is computer controlled and continuously monitored with sophisticated sensors and equipment to give us unique research data on the performance of the building. We have the ability to change out wall types, roof types, windows, light-transmitting panels and other aspects of the structure to discover the most effective combinations to save energy for metal building owners.

Expanding Our Reach
We’re also helping the industry grow by enhancing communication with architects, engineers and builders. Metal building case studies are being developed that will demonstrate various building configurations that meet energy codes using the U.S. Department of Energy COMcheck software. We’ve also upgraded MBMA’s Insurance Bulletins and Insurance Facts book. Understanding insurance and how metal building insurance rates compare to other types of construction is very important not only for owners, but for architects and builders as well. Next year, we will establish a contractor focus group to review these resources and help us increase the value of the materials. Then we’ll engage the focus group members in helping us reach out and further penetrate our huge potential market of business owners and developers. If you would like to be a part of the focus group, contact Dan Walker at (216) 241-7333.

Another valued communication tool is the ongoing Fire Protection Webinars program. Now in its third year, this series of online informational sessions has been attended by owners, architects, planners, engineers, contractors and metal building manufacturers. By educating the marketplace about the availability of fire ratings for metal building systems we are opening up new markets as well as boosting the integrity and image of the industry. We are planning to broaden the audience next year by converting the webinars into a series of free YouTube segments and MBMA web postings.

On a similar topic, we are working to maintain and update existing MBMA Fire Ratings, such as the Head of Wall rating. We will investigate roof insulation options, such as filled cavity and liner systems, to produce fire protection options that also enhance energy efficiency.

Sustainable Solutions
MBMA’s research and communication initiatives are also helping to position metal buildings as a premier green construction alternative. We created the environmental data and tools to help our industry navigate the ever-changing sustainability landscape. With the completed Life Cycle Assessment report, the third-party verified Life Cycle Inventory data, and the forthcoming Environmental Product Declarations, the industry will have a complete set of tools to use for educating potential building owners as well as design professionals.

Throughout 2015, MBMA will also be conducting distance-learning webinars about sustainability issues to explain why metal buildings are a first-choice building solution from a sustainable construction perspective.

New Design Guides in the Works
A “Metal Building Systems Inspection Handbook” is being finalized and should be completed in early 2015. The work is being accomplished through a volunteer task committee with the assistance of MBMA staff. This new publication will be extremely helpful for building officials, engineers of record, contractors, erectors, owners, MBMA members and the insurance industry. It will give them clear direction when inspecting a metal building project. Topics will include inspection recommendations for foundations, primary frames, bracing, secondary structural systems and cladding. It will also cover special inspections and special issues, such as drainage, insulation and crane systems.

We are also sponsoring the development of a design guide for metal building system foundations. Metal building foundations have some unique design challenges and this publication should help fill a real need for engineers who work with our industry.

As we prepare for a very bright future, we hope you will consider MBMA as your primary technical resource for metal building system research. We exist to enhance the future of the industry by helping the low-rise market see the significant advantages of building with metal. We welcome the involvement of the entire industry in our efforts. Associate membership provides an industry forum for networking and supplier input to and from the manufacturers. This two-way exchange on products and programs helps stimulate positive industry actions and changes. Associate members are fully involved in MBMA committee projects and actions. Information about becoming an associate member is available at www.mbma.com. Help us continue the momentum to keep the metal building market share to grow and to retain its position as the first choice in the low-rise business market.