



AMERICA'S FRONT PORCH

Travels to SXSW and the Skill-Up Festival

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This is Part 2 in a series, “America’s Front Porch.” Please see the January/February 2019 issue of *Texas Builder Magazine* for Part 1.

America’s Front Porch made its second stop on a 50-state tour at SXSW on March 10 – 11. (South by Southwest is an annual conference held in Austin, Texas that draws up to 200,000 people from around the world over a two-week period.) After its introduction in Watford, North Dakota in October 2018, the Texas Association of Builders (TAB) and the Texas Builders Foundation were honored to be asked to continue to bring the message of the front porch to Austin and SXSW attendees from around the world.

America’s Front Porch invites people from all walks of life to sit together – to talk and listen to one another as neighbors. As part of The Promiseland Project, whose mission is to end the current destructive and divisive culture in America and in its place create and build a purpose-driven, inclusive culture of “us” as in USA, the porch symbolizes community.

One of the primary principles of The Promiseland Project is to bring dignity to all types of work, and we can do this by metaphorically walking in each other’s shoes to better understand and appreciate each other by sharing our stories. The project also aims to inspire conversations on how we can build a powerful, evolving and skilled workforce that will lead our country into the future. To demonstrate this concept, The Promiseland Project presented a two-day Skill-Up Festival featuring America’s Front Porch at SXSW.



The Promiseland Project partnered with Austin Community College (ACC) to create the Skill-Up Festival that showcased and celebrated the skilled careers and workforce that are necessary to fuel our economy. The event was free and open to the public and included live demonstrations from a wide range of career opportunities and areas of study available at career and technical training institutions and community colleges across the state of Texas. ACC's Building Construction Technology program was a part of the festival and offers this training.

America's Front Porch had been stored in the San Angelo, Texas area. HBA of San Angelo members Michael Biggerstaff (Biggerstaff Custom Homes, Inc. and NuHome Constructors LLC) and Adrian Balderas (A.B. Builders LLC), and Chris Clements (Lowe's) drove the trailer to Austin on Saturday, March 9. They were met by HBA of Greater Austin members Kirby Walls and his team (Kirby Walls Custom Builders), Adam Mosier (Austin Modern Properties), and Felicia Foster (Barron Custom Design). Additionally, eight students from Texas

State University's Construction Student Association drove from San Marcos to Austin to help assemble the porch. Texas Association of Builders staff J.D. Hale and I and HBA of Greater Austin staff Holly Davis and David Glenn were also on hand to assist with the build.

This was a great opportunity for the Texas State University students to learn from and work alongside seasoned builders. This is what the Skill-Up Festival was about – encouraging individuals to consider a professional career path that doesn't require a four-year college degree, but instead requires earning a certificate or license in the construction trades.

Our partnership with The Promiseland Project gives TAB another forum from which to tell our story: that the residential construction industry is a professional and well-paying career choice. It is estimated that only 40 percent of all college students complete their four-year degree plans. That leaves 60 percent of high school graduates without a clear career path – one that could have led them to vocational and



technical education after high school and into a well-paying job in two years or less.

Hands-on training makes an impact in the classroom. In 2017, The Texas Administrators of Continuing Education (TACE) reported that 81 percent of dropouts say relevant, real-world learning opportunities would have kept them in high school. Students in career and technical training programs are more engaged, perform better and graduate at higher rates, because they can pursue their individual interests and secure a meaningful high school diploma, an industry certification or license and even an associate degree in a short period of time and with little to no student debt.

TAB members and local home builders associations are at work across the state to provide assistance to their school districts to ensure the future of the building industry workforce, and TAB supports the goal of students statewide having the opportunity to choose the

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the porch and to ensure that it was properly loaded into its trailer. Heart of Texas BA member Steve Sorrells (Sorrells & Company) brought his team – Jake Brunton, Zap Apperson and Robert Anderson – from Waco to assist in taking down the porch. Once it was loaded, the trailer was driven to its new, secure home at GSD&M advertising agency where it will live until the next Promiseland Project adventure in Farmersville, Louisiana (date to be determined).

If you are interested in being a part of the next chapter in America's Front Porch, please contact me at (512) 476-6346 or lorraine@texasbuilders.org. ■

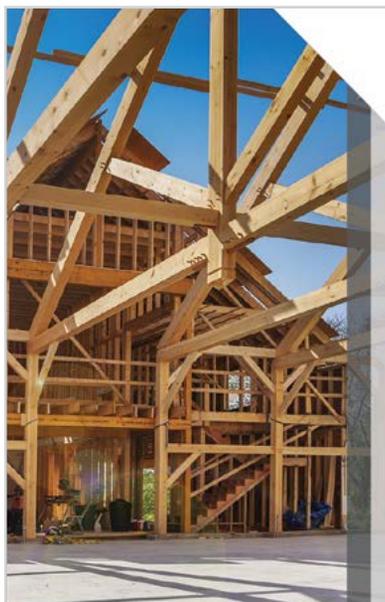
business and industry endorsement in high school, allowing them access to training in the construction field.

On the first day of the Skill-Up Festival, Roy Spence, founder of The Promiseland Project, ACC President Dr. Richard Rhodes, Austin Mayor Steve Adler and State Representative Donna Howard addressed the crowd from the porch and had the opportunity to visit the various booths that showcased what Austin Community College has to offer with regard to career and technical training. In his remarks, Spence highlighted the need for skilled construction workers, and recognized the Texas Association of Builders and the Texas Builders Foundation for their commitment to The Promiseland Project and for lending America's Front Porch to the project.

Over 1,400 people attended the Skill-Up Festival and visited America's Front Porch over the two-day event, including Texas Workforce Commission Chair Ruth Hughs. Several bands consisting of ACC students provided music, using the porch as their stage. The festival wrapped up with remarks from Roy's daughter, Courtney Spence, who reiterated a tenet of The Promisedland Project that all careers –

not just those that require a four-year college degree – are important, worthy of respect, and that anyone who works hard in their chosen profession can succeed. Do what you love, and success will follow.

After the festival, HBA of San Angelo members Mike Biggerstaff and Chad Decker (Decker Custom Homes and NuHome Constructors LLC) came to Austin to oversee the disassembly of



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