

Belfast 2010 IFD International Roofing Competition

When I first heard of the International Roofing Competition, sponsored by the IFD (International Federation of Roofers), my thoughts went back to my grandfather and business namesake George Milligan who carved butter stamps for 60 years and tragically never passed on any of his job skills. Because of my grandfather's lost legacy, I have developed a passion for passing on the many skills that I have learned over the years. This led me to join the Preservation Trade Networks and teach my first workshop in Mobile Alabama in 2004. When I heard that the Belfast, Northern Ireland Congress was coming up and was hosting an International Roofing Competition for Young Roofers under age 26, I was intensely interested in being a delegate and observing this competition so I could help train a US team to compete in upcoming IFD competitions.

When we got to Belfast, the IFD delegates and officials were overjoyed that we were there and welcomed us with open arms. No US team has ever competed in the 23 years that this competition has been going on (There were 24 teams from 17 countries this year in Belfast). This competition involves three different roofing disciplines: pitched roofs, which include slating and tiling combined; flat roofs, rubber and bituminous; and metal roofing.

The problems of training teams here in the US started to become clear when I learned that many of the competing countries have training facilities for roofers and start training students as young as 11 years old. Also many roofing supply companies have training facilities themselves. This training then leads into comprehensive apprenticeship programs. Another hurdle we would have to clear would be the differences in how other countries install slate, and the fact that roof tile skills are included in this competition. For instance, they use 1"x2" battens to attach the slate, and for this competition they used tiles for hip and ridge that are embedded and pointed in mortar. Another difference is that flashing is mostly lead or sometimes stainless steel. Thirdly, their terminology is sometimes different: skylights are called roof windows, step flashing and closed valley flashing are called soakers, metal valleys are called valley gutters, starter courses are called under eave courses and cant strips are tilting fillets. I'm sure there are other terms that I didn't even notice. All these factors would make the prospect of putting a team together a challenge.

To meet this challenge, I believe our first step as an organization would be to train some young roofers and have them compete here in the States in a run-off, and then gradually work towards entering a team into the IFD competition. Providing aspiring teens with workshops and classes is one good step towards this goal. Another step, which I'm going to work on in my business, would be to offer teen apprenticeships on our crews.

It was a powerful experience to go to Belfast and be surrounded by other roofers who share my passion for passing on our trade to young people, and to actually see these young people competing. It will be a very exciting day for me to see our first USA team compete in the International Federation of Roofers Competition. I invite SRCA members to share their ideas about how we can make this dream come true.

Submitted by:

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