



PRESS RELEASE

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Iron & Steel Preservation Conference at LCC to Draw Experts from U.S. and Canada

LANSING, MI – Several dozen prominent engineers, construction contractors, historians, preservationists and state and federal transportation officials will take part in a unique, three-day conference (March 7-9) at Lansing Community College to discuss what can be done to escalate efforts to preserve and restore historic metals like those used in the nation’s iron and steel truss bridges – some more than 160 years old – that link us to our past and the westward migration that helped shape the nation.

The experts from Ohio, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Vermont, West Virginia and Canada have chosen to attend because of LCC’s long-recognized leadership in industrial arts training and its more recent emergence as a national leader in historic preservation with a focus on metal structures.

One session will include a discussion about suspension bridges, featuring the engineering marvel that is Michigan’s iconic Mackinac Bridge, led by Michigan State University professor Frank Hatfield. Another session will look at the use of hot riveting techniques used in the monumental undertaking of erecting the Empire State Building, which when completed in 1931 was the world’s tallest structure. In addition, a nationally noted expert and retired professor from West Virginia, Emory Kemp, will talk about the use of wrought iron in 19th Century engineering.

Of particular concern to conference attendees is the alarming trend of wrought iron and steel truss bridges – those fabricated between 1850 and 1950 –being needlessly replaced with new concrete and steel bridges. That’s primarily due to a lack of knowledge about the restoration of historic metals.

Some people look at an aging bridge and immediately want to tear it down and build anew. But Vern Mesler, the conference host and LCC adjunct professor of welding technology, sees only possibilities to embrace and celebrate our past.

“Every part of these historic bridges are a craftsman’s record and they tell you things about history, steel manufacturing and bridge building technologies,” said Mesler, who at age 72 has lost none of his passion for the topic. “They’re like textbooks and allowing them to disappear is like taking priceless books from a library and just throwing them out.”

Monday’s keynote luncheon speakers are two men who are working on a television project titled “Top of the World” – about the construction of the Empire State building. The structure stretches 1,250 feet into the sky and has always fascinated Hollywood filmmakers – think King Kong climbing the exterior of the building and the movies “An Affair to Remember” and “Sleepless in Seattle.” Director/writer Russell Pflueger and producer/actor Jeff Pucillo from New York will regale the audience with the story behind the project. As an aside, Mesler and LCC hosted the pair and other actors last summer for an intensive training day devoted to teaching the skills of riveting – and giving the project a more authoritative feel.

The conference will offer hands-on experience in a blend of modern technology such as electric arc welding along with historic methods like hot riveting.

“We have to teach young engineers and preservationists that they don’t have to be part of the community that destroys these historic bridges but can instead exercise the option of being part of a community that restores bridges,” said Mesler. “They supply an invaluable historical record and deserve better than just being scrapped out. Preservation also saves us money in the long run.”

Mesler said Monday’s full-day session should hold particular appeal to history buffs. Those interested can still register for opening day for \$195 or pay \$370 to attend the entire three-day conference. Reservations can be made by calling 483-9853.

The conference is being held at West Campus, 5708 Cornerstone Drive in Lansing. It’s funded through a generous \$10,000 donation from Nucor, the nation’s largest steel manufacturing company, and support from the Historic Bridge Foundation.

About Lansing Community College

Lansing Community College is Michigan’s third largest community college with more than 30,000 students attending each year. LCC offers courses in general education for those interested in transferring to a four-year institution, career and workforce development, developmental education and personal enrichment. To meet the professional development and training needs of regional employees, the college offers customized programs for credit, non-credit and continuing education. The University Center at LCC offers students the opportunity to earn bachelors and master’s degrees from six partner universities on the downtown LCC campus. For more information, visit lcc.edu.