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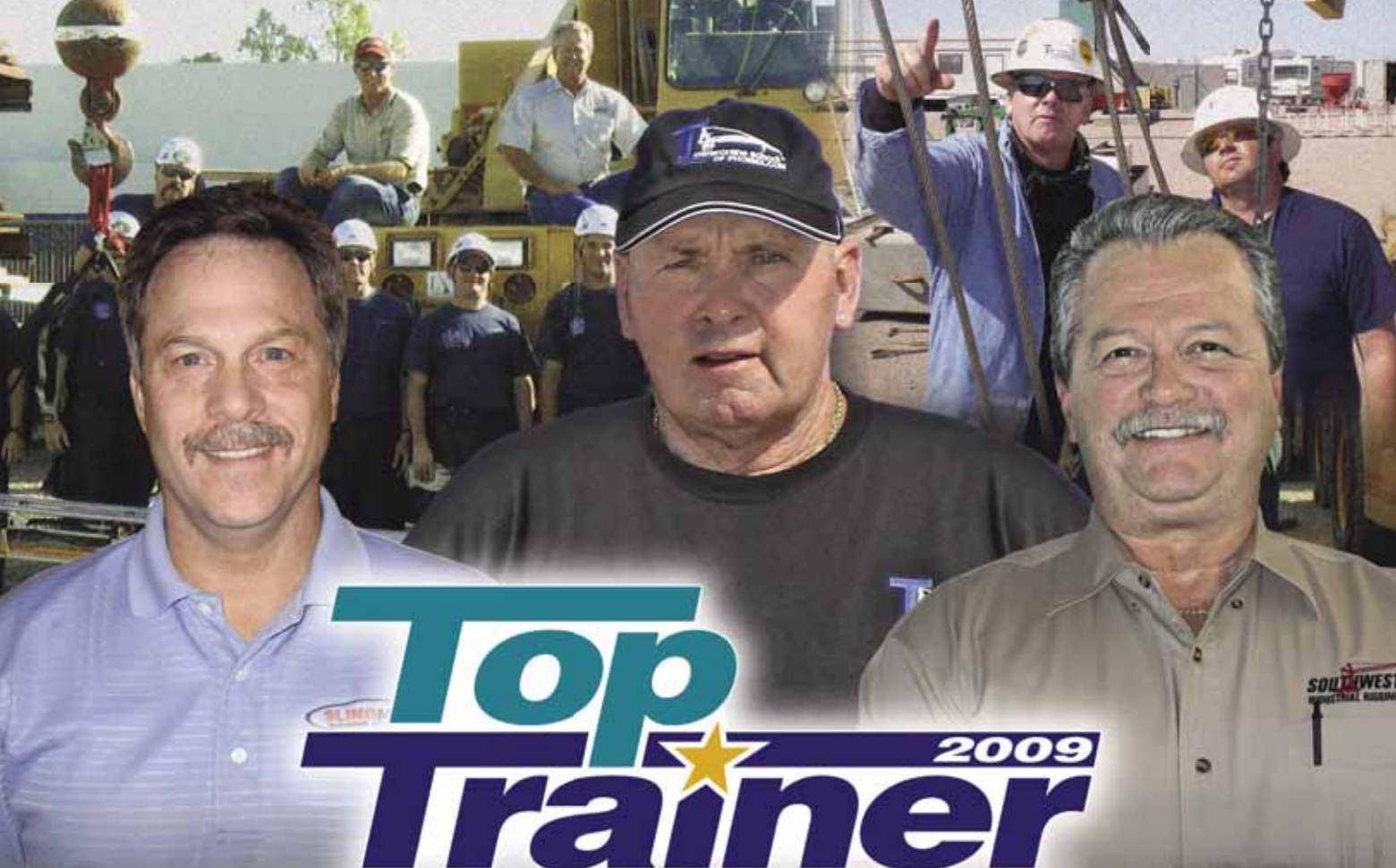
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HOT LINE®



Top Trainer 2009

Finalists Named for Award



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Recognizing the Industry's Top Trainers

Finalists named for 2009 award

Good trainers are more than instructors. Among the dozens of nominations *Crane Hot Line* received for the 2009 Top Trainer award, these individuals were described as valuable assets to their organizations for their commitment to students, their real-world experience, and their ability to communicate technical subjects effectively. They were also called passionate, inspirational, dedicated, and caring.

The number of highly qualified nominations received this year made the selection

difficult for the *Crane Hot Line* staff. Nominees were evaluated for their use of innovative or hands-on instruction; whether they encouraged peer or corporate accountability on the job; if their training demonstrated evidence of success; and for their overall positive impact on the industry.

While the majority of nominees teach general crane and rigging courses, there were several that are specialists in tower cranes, rigging gear, signaling, or indicating devices, for example. Trainers are recog-

nized in two categories. Corporate trainers are those who work for crane rental companies, manufacturers, or contractors. Professional trainers are employed by full-time training organizations.

This year, a tie in the Corporate category required recognition of two people—Mike Riggs of I&I Sling/Slingmax and Mike Patten of Southwest Industrial Rigging. Earning top honors in the Professional category is Ronald Gray, a familiar name; he was recognized as an “Honorable Mention” in 2008. On behalf of our sponsors, these three Top Trainers will each receive a \$1,250 scholarship, which can be used by the winner to further their own knowledge or may be awarded in their name to a student of their choice. For a list of Top Trainer sponsors, see page 20.

TOP TRAINER – CORPORATE

Mike Riggs, manager of Knoxville, Tenn., branch I&I Sling Inc./Slingmax Rigging Solutions, Aston, Pa.

Nominated by: Scott Woodward, manager of Canton, Mass., branch

Mike Riggs is one of those generous individuals who freely shares his expertise to the benefit of others outside his company. Employed by I&I Sling/Slingmax since 1996, Riggs was instrumental in establishing the company’s “Prevention of Rigger Mortis” training program and most of the materials it uses today. He is also a skilled instructor, teaching courses for his employer as well as speaking at industry association meetings.

“Mike’s overall approach to training seems to be a simple one where he wants to instruct and educate first and foremost,” says Scott Woodward, who nominated Riggs. “He does not use the opportunity to sell the users rigging, but instead informs them of the how, what, where, and why of rigging. Often the training is a

Judge’s Comments:
Mike’s down-to-earth style of instruction allows him to talk with people on every level, which is critical when training a diverse range of people.

free service given to users to help better the industry as a whole,” explains Woodward.

The Prevention of Rigger Mortis course was once an 80-minute introductory video designed for riggers, safety personnel, engineers, and their supervisors. Now

it is a more advanced 16-module course that can be tailored to a company’s specific needs. Subsequently, Riggs developed the “Did You Know?” series of instructional videos, an extension of his own



teaching style, which are periodically emailed to Slingmax customers. The videos visually demonstrate key safety tips and reminders.

While the work Riggs has done for his employer is not to be discounted, his reach extends far beyond the walls of the training center in Knoxville, Tenn. He is currently president of the Association of Crane and Rigging Professionals, has written numerous articles for trade publications, including *Crane Hot Line*, and he recently published *The Complete Rigger’s Reference Handbook*.

In the acknowledgements of this book, Riggs’s own words provide insight into the man as a trainer. He says: “I would be negligent if I did not acknowledge the quality Ironworkers of Local 14 where I first began this journey, and the crane operator’s of Local 280, who willingly helped educate me about what is happening above the hook.” Likewise, he thanks Dennis St. Germain, CEO of I&I Sling, “whose brilliant mind and upbeat attitude has taught me to think practically, while still remaining outside the box, when resolving rigging problems that tend to hinder the everyday rigger.”

TOP TRAINER – CORPORATE

Mike Patten, assistant safety manager

Southwest Industrial Rigging, Phoenix, Ariz.

Nominated by: Howard Kaplan, safety and training director

Since 2004, when Southwest Industrial Rigging (SWIR) first established a full-time safety and training program, the company's safety record improved by 90 percent. "One of the key elements of this success has been Mike Patten," says Howard Kaplan, who made the nomination. "In the two years Mike has been with the company, he has assisted in changing the company's culture to include safety and education in every task."

After reading the book *Safety 24/7* by Gregory Anderson and Robert Lorber, Kaplan wanted to apply this approach at SWIR. It turns out Patten was already familiar with the concept and had previously applied the techniques at The Mosaic Company. "He explained the culture to me far better than the book did. Together we moved forward to try to change the way our people look at safety," says Kaplan.

Judge's Comments:
Mike is teaching strategies that are potentially saving lives.

That same attitude and attention to detail has begun to impact the community at large. In late 2008, he developed a crane and rigging safety class for the Mesa Fire Department Technical Rescue Team in Mesa, Ariz. "We came to Mike with a vision for this training class, and he turned it into a reality," says Fire Captain Paul Finley, who says that nothing like this had ever been conducted in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

According to Patten, the Rescue Team had identified several areas where its own training was incomplete. An increased



awareness of cranes due to their growing population in the area and media attention on accidents caused the team to ask how they could safely approach a crane that is down. Instruction included how to deactivate the electronics and hydraulics on the crane, then evolved into how to signal a crane for a rescue, and using proper rigging. "Any time I talk about cranes, I have to also talk about rigging," says Patten.

"It was a good thing I was sitting down during the module on rigging because the concept Mike presented almost dropped me to the floor," says Finley. "We had been making a very serious mistake with rope system anchors that eventually would have resulted in a serious accident—an accident that may have resulted in firefighter fatalities."

The scenario involved rope systems that were sidelading eyebolts in mountain rescue situations. "Since the completion of Mike's class, we have made changes to switch all of our anchors over to the swivel-style eyebolt to eliminate the chance of side loading," he says.

TOP TRAINER – PROFESSIONAL

Ronald Gray, president

Tower Crane School of Phoenix, Phoenix, Ariz.

Nominated by: More than a dozen former students and employers of operators

Ronald "Ronnie" Gray garnered honorable mention in the 2008 Top Trainer recognition. The sheer volume of nominations he received both this year and last speaks to the kind of rapport he has with students. He and his business partner Patrick Stafford own the Tower Crane School of Phoenix. Gray has more than 30 years experience operating, rigging, and supervising heavy lifts.

Gray utilizes a combination of classroom lecture, simulators, and hands-on instruction—the practical aspect of which was mentioned repeatedly in nomination letters. "Students are required to use equipment, tools, and techniques that they will actually find on a job. They have to plan a job, set up the crane and the jobsite, and interact with the customer," explained one.

Judge's Comments:
Wow! What a chorus of praise.

On the surface, Gray's teaching style seems contradictory—appealing to both green and seasoned operators, often at the same time during the same course. "He was able to help all of our operators excel in the operator seat no matter what stage of experience



they had," says Jason Krueger, job coordinator for Pro Crane, Norfolk, Neb. "There is no doubt that he will be the one we call when we do any more crane operator training."

Nominators repeatedly shared their belief that Gray sets high expectations for his students. "He has a keen eye and can identify those students that simply don't get it. He handles them professionally and is not afraid to cut them from class if they just can't do it. He cares more about sending out safe operators who are ready to become *qualified* operators, not simply *certified* operators," says Don Corriea, general manager for Atlas Crane & Rigging, Williams, Calif.

Former student Hans Michael Moore of Anchorage, Alaska echoes this statement. "This is definitely not one of those

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'everyone passes' classes." With 20 years experience operating small hydraulic cranes, Moore thought there was little left to be learned. "I only *thought* I knew how to maneuver through obstacles. Ronnie worked with me and showed me how to properly operate a crane," he says.

Less experienced operators speak just as highly of Gray. "While the school is set up for novice crane operators, Ronnie challenged each student to his or her own skill level," says repeat former student Jay Duke.

"Ronnie is a dedicated and talented man who gives 100 percent to teaching a greenhorn like me. I had trouble with load charts and he invited me to his home to work on this, helping me understand the 'why' of things," says former student Beth Martin.

Finally, Gray is able to bring all these skill levels together, teaching students the importance of communication and teamwork. Explains one student: "He has often said, 'An operator is only as good as his flagman,' and any operator who has had to land loads

completely in the blind can attest to the validity of that statement."

Other descriptions of Ronnie Gray include his true grit attitude, real-world style, and organization and competence. A few quotes from nomination letters follow:

"He leaves no questions unanswered."

"He instills confidence in his students."

"His knowledge of cranes is outstanding; his ability to operate cranes unsurpassed."

"He encourages students to work as a team."

"Not one to sugar coat anything, he prepares his students for the worst."

"He helps students network and contact the right people to get their foot in the door."

"The world is a safer place with Ronnie in it."

**Top
Trainer** 2009

HONORABLE MENTION – CORPORATE

Community Activist

While he specializes in tower crane operation instruction, **Mike Hundley**, safety director and operator coordinator for Heede Southeast in Pineville, N.C., also teaches proper rigging and flagging methods. People from a variety of backgrounds wrote letters of support for Hundley's capabilities as a trainer, speaking to the breadth of his impact in this niche but ever-more-scrutinized aspect of crane operation. And he shares his knowledge with community leaders in order to improve their understanding of tower cranes in conjunction with public safety.

"Tower cranes are a large part of growing cities like Charlotte," says Edward Sidenstricker, who heads North American sales and marketing efforts for Linden Comansa America, and who nominated Hundley. "He has held several training classes for the local police and fire departments in order to help educate the people who make our own communities safe." Likewise, he speaks at industry and community events.

"Mike Hundley is one of those guys that is always looking out for



the safety of the operators as well as the employees on the ground and pedestrians alike," says Chip Murray, vice president and senior risk control consultant for Wells Fargo Insurance Services.



Gold Standard

Last year's Top Trainer in the Corporate Category, **Ray Feidt**, made the list again in 2009 for his ongoing exemplary service to the industry. According to Dennis Heller, president and CEO of Stephenson Equipment Inc., Harrisburg, Pa., 93 percent of those taking Feidt's training classes pass NCCCO written exams. In April 2009, Feidt was appointed to the Pennsylvania State Board of Crane Operators, which requires NCCCO certification. Among the issues the Board is working on is an appropriate grandfather clause. In all, Feidt trained more than 340 crane operators in 2009.



Smart Newcomer

Realizing an industry need for technical training on load moment indicators (LMIs), Hirschmann Automation and Control, Chambersburg, Pa., developed a program to meet those needs. In 2009, the program was initiated by Service Manager Bill Mowen and spearheaded by Field Technician **Mike Johnson**, whom Mowen nominated for the award. Johnson coordinated locations, reviewed presentation materials, built system simulators, and became the course instructor. Having



spent 10 years in Hirschmann's service department, he has acquired a vast technical expertise.

"Johnson structured the courses to give mechanics and operators the latest technical information to help them maximize the efficiency and productivity of their crane operations. The courses feature classroom training along with hands-on experience through the use of system simulators. The courses include system theory, sensor calibration, wiring, and trouble shooting," says Mowen.

