"The Northeast is perhaps more aware of the advantages of modular construction due to the large number of modular providers in the region."

> Tom Hardiman, executive director

**Voice of the Industry**

Virginia-based Modular Building Institute aims to promote the benefits of modular buildings, which are ‘delivered fast, built to last.’ By Kelly McCabe

> With its members serving a variety of sectors — including education, retail, industrial and healthcare — the Modular Building Institute (MBI) is spreading its message across the Northeast and is finding that people are listening. Modular construction is a process in which a building is built in 3-D sections—modules—in a factory.

While the modules are being assembled in the factory, site work is simultaneously being completed for the building. Because both processes are being completed at the same time, construction can be completed much quicker than traditional building. In fact, MBI’s tagline is “Delivered fast, built to last.”

Founded in 1983, MBI is the only international, nonprofit trade association dedicated to promoting the modular construction industry. “It is MBI’s mission to grow the industry and its capabilities by encouraging innovation, quality and professionalism through communication, education and recognition,” MBI says.

The Institute’s members include manufacturers and dealers of commercial modular structures, and its associate members include companies that supply business components, services and financing.

In a recent interview with Building & Construction Northeast, MBI Executive Director Tom Hardiman discussed how the organization is changing with the construction industry, and what is in store for its future.

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Modular Building Institute

www.modular.org

Headquarters: Charlottesville, Va.

Members: 300 companies in 15 countries

Mission: To promote professionalism and enhance the modular building industry
Building & Construction Northeast:
How do you view the Northeast construction market today?
Tom Hardiman: Obviously, the entire construction industry has suffered over the last year. We feel that actually creates an opportunity for modular construction as owners and developers begin to search for more efficient ways to build their projects. The Northeast is perhaps more aware of the advantages of modular construction due to the large number modular providers in the region.

BCNE: How has it changed since you entered the business?
TH: The Northeast has always been a strong market for the modular industry. Some of the best modular construction projects in the last decade have been in the Northeast. One of the things we are seeing is companies that were historically residential in nature are now entering the commercial construction markets, making projects a bit more competitive.

BCNE: What major issues does a firm such as yours face in the Northeast?
TH: One of the biggest challenges for any modular construction company is the ability to transport the units (or modules) from the plant to the site. This challenge is even greater in the Northeast, where we cross many state lines and have to comply with varying transportation regulations. Streamlining or harmonizing regulations would further open up the Northeast to new business development opportunities.

BCNE: Which sectors appear to have the brightest future?
TH: MBI primarily represents the commercial sector, which has not suffered quite as dramatically as the residential sector. I think in the short term, the commercial sector will rebound more quickly.

BCNE: Tell us about a recent initiative that you think best demonstrates MBI’s vision.
TH: The modular construction industry is proud of the fact that our construction process is more resource efficient and inherently greener than the site-build process. By constructing the project in a controlled setting, our manufacturers are able to reduce the amount of construction material waste that ends up in landfills.

Also, there is much less vehicular traffic and disturbance at the site, creating a cleaner and safer working environment.

The ability to deliver code-compliant buildings in a fraction of the time as site-built is a primary reason the industry is getting so much attention regarding the rebuilding efforts in Haiti. Our association, in cooperation with Associated Builders & Contractors, is developing a longer-term rebuilding initiative that will help the people of Haiti get back on their feet.

We believe that the modular industry, perhaps more so than any other industry, is best suited to provide high-quality facilities in a short amount of time. Our goal is to work with nonprofit groups already on the ground in Haiti, find out what facility types are most needed and supply those facilities through these conduits. The rebuilding effort will take years in Haiti, but we believe the modular industry can provide some much-needed, shorter-term facilities - such as medical space and classrooms - to help make life a little better for them.

BCNE: How does this work reflect the organization’s goals?
TH: We are seeing member companies that are very competitive on private projects working together for the good of the industry and for Haiti. I think everyone realizes what a tremendous challenge rebuilding this country will be and how critical it will be to rebuild it better than it was before.

BCNE: Where do you see the Institute in five or 10 years?
TH: I believe that the modular construction industry, long saddled with the label "the future of construction," will find a significant market willing to utilize more resource-efficient and inherently greener construction practices. Currently, modular is only about 1 percent of the overall construction market, but within 10 years, that number will rise to 10 percent or more.