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**Fifteen ITS Graduates Head Towards a Career in the Hardwood Industry**

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE – Commencement exercises for the 179th class of the NHHLA Inspector Training School were held on Thursday, March 24, 2016 with fifteen students completing the program. Larry Lines, of Gutchess Lumber Co., Inc. and graduate of the 122<sup>nd</sup> Class of the Inspector Training School, delivered the graduation address. As keynote speaker, Lines spoke about the importance of the School to him personally and to the Gutchess family.

“As you all know, the terms and applications of the rules in the NHHLA rulebook are not to be taken lightly...The study habits and dedication it took to graduate this class has followed me throughout my career, stated Lines.”

Lines went on to explain life after School. “After Graduation, as I was not committed to a company, I applied for a temporary position at Gutchess Lumber in Cortland, NY,” he explained. “Tom Caldwell (a NHHLA ITS graduate) interviewed me. He put me to work in the plant and I was under the assumption that I would be gaining valuable training and a steady check...I did not realize that Tom Caldwell and other NHHLA grads (Jeff Carlson who helped teach here) would be lifelong mentors to me for the next 20 years.”

“The NHHLA certificate you are getting today is a great tool you will be putting in your ‘toolbox’ that you will use throughout your future in the lumber industry. In fact, Matt Gutchess (5<sup>th</sup> generation owner) has followed in his grandfather’s and father’s footsteps doing weekly audits with staff to insure that not only are we following the NHHLA Standards we learned here but are upholding the commitment to quality that the team demands. Our customers demand that we do it right, at Gutchess Lumber we have seven NHHLA graduates in some leadership role or another...again showing that the step you have taken today will lead to a bright future whether it be in operations or management if you follow a few simple rules of thumb:

In conclusion, Mr. Lines outlined the key rules for success: be approachable, lead by example and be willing to coach and accept coaching when necessary. “If an Inspector does it right, he sets his company up for success.”

Graduates were:

- Kurt Abramson of Caspian, Michigan - Connor Sports
- Levi R. Deglau of Everett, Ontario - Peter Thomson & Sons, Inc.
- Mitchell Malcolm Gendron of Acton, Ontario - Cherry Forest Products
- Wei Guo of Dongguan, China - Cheng JI Wood Co., LTD
- Weijie Guo of Dongguan, China - Cheng JI Wood Co., LTD
- Jeffrey A. Hunter of Guelph, Ontario - Cherry Forest Products
- Jonathan Lee Leonard of Nashville, Tennessee - Stanfill Hardwood Lumber Co., Inc.
- William G. McKenney of Groton, New York - Gutchess Lumber Co., Inc.
- Caleb Daniel Myers of Cookeville, Tennessee - Hermitage Hardwood Lumber Sales, Inc.
- Mark W. Reynolds, Sr. of Brownstown, Indiana - Brickyard Lumber, LLC
- Darrell Russell of West, Mississippi - PC Sawmill, LLC
- Alex Steenholdt of Alliston, Ontario - Peter Thomson & Sons, Inc.

- Randal Wall of Iron River, Michigan - Connor Sports
- Thomas James Walsh of Millers Creek, North Carolina - Church & Church Lumber Co., LLC
- Robert Zellar III of New Berry, Michigan - Banks Hardwoods, Inc.

Outstanding individual awards recipients were as follows:

- Jeffrey A. Hunter – John Thomson Award for Highest Overall Average
- Levi R. Deglau – Howard Hanlon Award for Second Highest Overall Average
- William G. McKenney – Westside Hardwood Club Award for Highest Board Run Average
- Jonathan Lee Leonard – J.P. Hamer Award for Most Improved Student
- Thomas James Walsh – South Central Lumbermen’s Award for Best Attitude/Citizenship
- Mark W. Reynolds, Sr. – Lumbermen’s Club of Memphis Leadership Award

The NHLA Inspector Training School has a proud and rich 68 year history; graduating more than 7,200 students since its conception. The Program teaches the rules and applications of the NHLA grading system and prepares students for a career in the hardwood industry. This unique program has earned worldwide respect, consequently attracting students from throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Africa, South America and Asia.

Enrollment is now open for the 180<sup>th</sup> class, which begins on May 16, 2016 in Antigo, Wisconsin. To enroll or learn more about the program please visit **[www.inspectortrainingschool.com](http://www.inspectortrainingschool.com)**.

The world’s largest and oldest hardwood industry association, NHLA represents 1,100 companies and individuals that produce, use and sell North American hardwood lumber, or provide equipment, supplies or services to the hardwood industry. It was founded in 1898 to establish a uniform system of grading rules for the measurement and inspection of hardwood lumber. Since 1979, its headquarters have been in Memphis. To learn more about NHLA, please visit **[www.nhla.com](http://www.nhla.com)**.

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