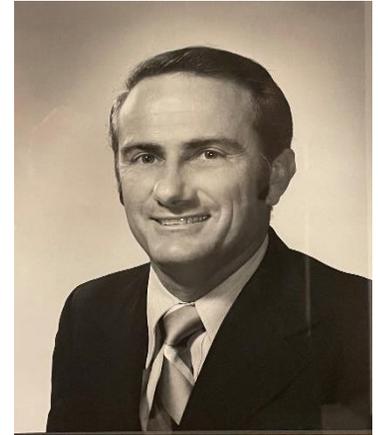


March 1971 – Legislative Briefing at the Austin AGC and Creation of a Statewide Lobbying Office

The date was March 2, 1971 and Austin AGC Chair Tommy Lawless called the monthly Board meeting to order at 4:00pm in our recently built office building on South Lamar. He introduced guest speaker and veteran lobbyist, Mr. Wayne Hall, to talk about some of the over 1,000 legislative bills that had been introduced in the State Legislature that year, many of which could impact commercial construction. Mr. Hall noted he had been attending sessions of the Texas legislature for 20 years and was employed by the Houston AGC since 1967 to serve as their representative at the State Capitol. Immediately after his comments to the Austin AGC Board, Wayne departed for the old Mueller Municipal Airport to catch a plane for Dallas where he was scheduled to provide a similar report to contractors there later that evening. By the end of that Austin AGC Board meeting, members in attendance agreed to contribute funds annually to the Houston Chapter in exchange for legislative information provided by Mr. Hall.



Mr. Tommy Lawless, 1971 Chair of the Austin AGC

In those early 1970s, only two of the eleven AGC Chapters around Texas for building contractors employed a lobbyist to engage on issues at the state level. However, all were beginning to recognize the need for strong, unified representation of their collective legislative interests at the State Capitol. With that in mind, leaders of all the building chapters began meeting frequently to discuss establishment of a formal, statewide organization to coordinate their state governmental activities. By January 1974, the newly formed [AGC Texas Building Branch](#) (TBB) was incorporated and Wayne Hall named as Executive Director.



Contractors from Across Texas Hear from TBB President Corbin Van Arsdale in Preparation for Meetings with State Legislators at the Capitol Building in 2019.

higher education owners, supporting funding for statewide higher education and commercial building projects, and establishing a “right to repair” any defects in public building projects. It has also played defense against many bills that would have negatively impacted the industry. (Additional legislative victories available [here](#).)

While always busy during the biannual legislative session, the TBB also works year-round with state officials on regulatory issues. A recent example of this effort is the 2013 clarification of the “costs of goods sold” in construction. The TBB worked tirelessly to convince the Texas Comptroller that a proposed change in the meaning of this term would have unfairly altered well-established tax policy for construction and cost builders millions of dollars in unexpected expense. (Additional information available [here](#).) Further, the TBB Legal Affairs Committee tracks numerous legal battles ongoing in the Texas courts and weighs in as needed with the perspective of the contractor community.

Not only does the TBB work to educate elected officials in the Capitol about construction issues, but occasionally an AGC contractor decides to run for public office! In 2010 Paul Workman, founder of [Workman Commercial](#) and TBB Chair in 2008, was elected State Representative from western Travis County and served in that position from 2012-2018. Former

Austin AGC Chapter Chair, John Cyrier, who helped found [Sabre Commercial](#) in 2008, has served as the [State Representative from HD-17](#) since 2015. It's always nice to discuss construction legislation with elected officials who truly understand our industry issues!



Members of the Austin AGC Meet with former State Rep. and Past TBB Chair Paul Workman in 2017



Current State Rep. and past Austin AGC Chair John Cyrier Meets in 2019 with the Austin Construction Leadership Council (CLC) in the Texas Capitol.

Every summer the TBB hosts an [annual business convention](#) that provides industry education and networking opportunities for building contractors across Texas. This gathering is a great opportunity to hear directly from the AGC lobbying team and guests about ongoing legislative issues impacting Texas contractors. Additionally, the TBB presents Outstanding Construction Awards to winners of this annual competition and recognizes contractors with the strongest safety records for their commitment to worker protection.

As an Austin AGC member, part of your financial support to the Chapter goes, in turn, to support the TBB and protection of your industry from bad laws. Looking back over our Austin AGC history, we are grateful to TBB staff leaders like Wayne Hall who served as the Executive Director of the AGC Texas Building Branch from 1974 until his retirement in 1988, Jim Sewell who then took over as the Director and held that position until his retirement in 2007, and Mike Chatron who then led the TBB until 2018. Currently, we are well-served by former State Representative Corbin Van Arsdale who is the TBB President and General Counsel. Under his leadership the TBB team, along with representatives from all 10 of the AGC building chapters across Texas, continues the tradition of defending against bad bills while advancing those critical to the success of the commercial construction industry in Texas.



Wilbur Clark's Crest Hotel, now the Line Hotel. Located in downtown Austin.

As noted previously, the Austin AGC Chair during that initial meeting way back in 1971 about legislative representation for the Chapter was Tommy Lawless and his construction company at the time was Lawless and Alford. Among the more notable Austin buildings his firm completed over the years was Wilbur Clark's Crest Hotel on Town Lake that opened in January 1966, just a few months after the death of its [namesake](#) in 1965. (Legal wrangling after the death of Clark related to the financing of this project is detailed in a [court case here](#). He also developed the legendary [Desert Inn in Las Vegas](#).) Over the years this downtown landmark has also been known as the Austin Crest Hotel, Crest Motor Inn, Sheraton Crest, Radisson, and now the [Line Hotel](#) since undergoing a major renovation in 2018. Tommy's daughter Carey shared that she attended the grand opening that night in 1966 where a meeting room was set aside for a Beatles look-a-like band and dancing!

Another prominent building Mr. Lawless constructed is the [Southwest Tower](#) building located at [211 E. 7th Street](#) in downtown, known as the first office condominium arrangement in Austin. He built the [Nike Missile Pad in Westlake](#) in the 1960s to defend Bergstrom Air Force Base against a feared Soviet attack. Westlake High School was another of his projects as well. In 1975 Mr. Lawless ran for Austin City Council but lost in a runoff election. In the 1980s, his new firm of Lawless and Snider completed a major renovation of the [Texas Governor's Mansion](#), for which an Austin AGC Outstanding Construction Award was given in 1982. As always, we here at the AGC are grateful for his contribution to Austin's built quality of life as well as his long-time support for the association!



Tommy Lawless meets with an appreciative Governor Clements and his wife, Rita, after completion of Governor's Mansion renovation in 1982.