

SPECIAL REPORT:

AGMA *Objectives*

If you're already a member of the AGMA, then you need to know about what the association is doing for you.

If you haven't yet joined, here's why you should.

Interviews by Russ Willcutt

During the Fall Technical Meeting held in Orlando last October, members of the AGMA's board of directors took time out from their primary concerns to discuss the association's activities and goals in the coming year. Those attending included Stan Blenke, chairman of the association's board of directors and executive vice president of Schafer Gear, Inc., Dennis Gimpert, AGMA treasurer and president of Koepfer America, LLC, and Joe T. Franklin, Jr., who is president of the AGMA. Rick Fullington—the association's vice chairman and president of the Milwaukee Gear Company—was interviewed at a later date. Four of the association's main thrusts were discussed during these conversations, including: 1) new member recruitment, and existing member retention; 2) the development of a "future leaders" committee; 2) workforce education and training programs, including online services, and; 3) ongoing efforts toward AGMA/ISO standards alignment. Due to their interconnected themes, the first two points will be grouped together in this article. We are pleased to have the opportunity to share some of their thoughts on these matters with you in the following special feature.

Recruiting Industry Leaders

Blenke: We always have a lot going on, of course, but when I became chairman we set four goals to really concentrate on, and the first of those involves recruiting new members, in addition to retaining existing members. Obviously it's critical for the AGMA to continue growing through membership, and one way we're going about doing that is working hard to find out what their needs are—just what it is that members expect from their association. Along those same lines, the second goal was to forge ahead with a "future leaders" committee. As I'm sure you know, the demographics in the industry are such that there are a lot of company owners who are reaching retirement age, so we see a tremendous change in the next five to 10 years in terms of owners and senior management retiring from their businesses. Because of this we felt that it was extremely important to start reaching out to new leaders, developing the younger talent within the organizations who can fill officer spots and sit on various committees, including the board of directors. At the same time these younger people get the professional development experience they can use to help their own companies internally. We've met three times now, and we're developing a format and an agenda on how to take this concept to the next stage. So it's really moving along—we had more than 40 individuals attending the last meeting, in fact.

Gimpert: We're hoping that the participants in this committee will eventually establish an appropriate name for themselves, as they continue developing the mission statement.

Blenke: And while our goal is to mentor this group initially, we'll eventually step back as people emerge who will take the lead, and that's already starting to occur.

Franklin: One thing to point out is that we're only using "future



leaders" as a working title, and we certainly don't mean to imply that they're not leaders already, because they are. Each one of the people who've participated so far are already in significant roles in their own companies. They've already proven themselves in the gear industry, it's just that they haven't yet been actively involved with the AGMA. They may have participated on some things, but they haven't taken a leadership role, and we know from the numbers that we'll be needing leaders in committee positions, to help run our councils and committees, to sit on our foundation board, and to sit on the AGMA board. So we decided to actively recruit these new members, and at the same time to offer them insights into the history of the AGMA, as well as its rules and practices.

Gimpert: This is really about formalizing an informal process, I'd say. We want to provide new leaders with training, exposing them to the processes of the AGMA. We want to give them a broader understanding of all of the association's facets, so that when they attend their first board or committee meeting they'll have a basic under-



FROM LEFT: STAN BLENKE, JOE FRANKLIN, AND DENNIS GIMPERT DURING THE AGMA 2006 FALL TECHNICAL MEETING IN ORLANDO.

standing of how things should proceed.

Franklin: It's important to keep in mind that the AGMA is typically driven by 300-400 volunteers who make the work of the association happen. And it has always been true that the best recruiting tool for a volunteer organization

is simply to ask. That really is the best way to get people involved. At the same time, we want to help them get up to speed quickly in terms of their grasp of how the association works. We're a very collegial group, but very business-oriented as well. And in learning these procedures, they're gaining a certain amount of professional expertise. In fact, when I've asked the people who've attended our meetings why they were here, their response has always been "because I'm learning things that I can apply to my work."

Fullington: And that really is what it boils down to. While we hope the future leaders initiative will provide an avenue in recruiting new members for involvement on our committees, at the same time we're helping them to grow professionally, which will benefit their companies. When you look at this from our member's point of view, their basic question is "What is the value of my AGMA membership? What do I get for joining and belonging?" So what we need to do is make sure they're aware of everything that's available for them to participate in, and what they



RICK FULLINGTON

get out of that participation, with professional development opportunities as just one example.

Blenke: We also look forward to these people bringing fresh ideas to the association. We're always looking at what we should be doing more of, or what we could be doing differently, and I think this will be a great way for new voices to provide input into some of the decisions that are being made.

Education and Training

Blenke: While traveling with Joe to visit potential members, and existing members as well, one thing I've found interesting is that the number-one concern they have is workforce training and education. We were successful in recruiting a couple of new members, and I feel that was because of what we're now offering for workforce training. When we went to meet with potential members, in many cases the first question was "what can the AGMA do for us?" And once we started elaborating on our training programs, they really took notice, and I believe that led to several decisions to join. We're doing several things, both in terms of introductory as well as advanced training. We now offer online training programs, and Dennis and his group were instrumental in developing these educational programs. We have three modules for online training in place, fundamentals of gearing, the inspection module, and a hobbing module, which we've just launched. This gives companies the opportunity to have their employees get online—either in their facilities or at home—to complete these courses, which usually takes about eight hours in total. This allows them to really get up to speed on the fundamentals, and it helps a lot of newer employees, as well as seasoned veterans. It's really a tremendous program, and those who complete the test at the end receive a certificate from the AGMA.

Gimpert: I have all my new people go through it. It's an easy, at your own pace introduction to what a gear is, if they haven't had that exposure previously.

Fullington: This is a huge issue for everybody. There just aren't enough experienced people out there for the jobs that are currently available, and that was really the genesis of the various training modules that the AGMA has developed. And the online aspect has been especially important, because in today's world, so many things are handled electronically. So it's a way for training to be accessed on a more flexible schedule to meet the needs of just about anybody, and it's also quite cost effective.

Franklin: Building these modules is a slow process, however. We use experts from the industry who volunteer to write the curriculum, and we have a professional who knows how to structure tests and the computer presentations. In developing the curriculum, we have anywhere from five to eight people who sit in a room—they generally meet for two full days—and it takes eight to 10 of these sessions to create a module. So we've just completed our third module, and we have visions

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of eventually offering eight or 10—if they continue to be accepted by the industry, and are deemed to be useful. But we have very capable, bright people who are putting this together, and they're volunteering their time. And we're not just cranking these out like you might some commodity, these are customized, handcrafted products, very closely driven by current practices and needs. So we're very appreciative of the companies that have allowed their employees to participate in this important activity, and who continue to do so.

Gimpert: One of the beauties of this process, even though it's quite lengthy, is that you get such a diverse view of the module you're writing. It really is all-encompassing, because there are different terms used in different industries, and different views of how certain things should be stated. So the final product is very clear and concise.

Franklin: Just as Dennis said, one of our major objectives is to clarify the nomenclature used in the industry. If you go to one company and talk to them about the terminology they use on the floor, it's going to be different than the terminology another company uses on their blueprints. They will call the same thing by different names. So if we are to help make companies better capable of competing globally, we all need to be speaking the same language, if you will. We need to call the same thing by the same name, and our hope is that, when people finish that course, they will understand the standard nomenclature being used in the industry.

Blenke: And the online courses are just one piece. Another one involves the gear school we offer at Richard J. Daley College in Chicago, which is both a classroom as well as a hands-on course. And then there are the advanced engineering courses that we're offering, which have been a real home run for us. This past year we've really accelerated that program, and we plan to proceed even further by offering more classes and increasing the frequency in which they're being held. Right now, every one of those classes are completely sold out, and there's a fairly extensive waiting list. So we see that there's been a real need for advanced engineering courses, and the attendance spells that out quite clearly. That class in particular has been very good for the association, and for individuals and the industry as a whole.

Gimpert: In addition, in-plant sessions can be arranged that are tailored to the company's specific needs.

Franklin: We work closely with The Gear Consulting Group, which is headed up by Geoffrey Ashcroft and Ron Green. They teach the AGMA curriculum in your plant, and they can customize the material specifically to what that company wants. And they're working on the company's equipment, so that adds a certain level of familiarity to those who are attending. Another thing they will do is put on a regional school, where they find a company that's willing to host the event, and companies from the surrounding area will send a certain number of their employees to attend. This has proven to be a very popular service, and I think that

they're probably conducting six to eight events annually right now. We're also exploring other ways to offer a broader range of education programs dealing with other machining processes, such as safety and maintenance.

Gimpert: I think another good thing about these programs is that they're all sanctioned by and associated with the AGMA, so it's guaranteed that they'll be following and presenting industry standards and norms.

Fullington: We held our first in-house training session not long ago, which was conducted by The Gear Consulting Group, and it really went well. We'd hired quite a few people, and we knew we needed to make a commitment to training them, so we thought this would be one approach—of many we're taking—toward achieving that goal. We held it on a weekend, we paid everyone to attend, and we had a good cross section not only of new employees, but also of engineers, quality control people, and experienced machine operators as well. One of our goals was to encourage commonality of language, as has been mentioned, and on talking to those who attended afterward I found that everyone really felt that they had come away with something valuable. I also think that it helped everyone realize that, regardless of what role they play in the operation, we're all working together to produce a high-quality end product.

Technical Standards

Blenke: Our fourth main goal this year involves the continued development of both AGMA and ISO standards. The trend, obviously, is to align AGMA with ISO standards, with the end result being having ISO standards as the uniform set used worldwide. We are the only gearing association that accepts members from around the world, and this work is the perfect example of how international companies can gain something from us, and we can benefit from their expertise as well. We have 23 standards committees working continuously, and that's a lot of participation.

Gimpert: And the AGMA works very hard in that area—harder than any other organization in the world—both in terms of making a leadership as well as a technical contribution. Proof

of our dedication to international cooperation is that all of the new AGMA standards are metric.

Franklin: First and foremost, we've had Bill Bradley. When he was named chairman of the international technical committee that produces ISO standards for the gearing industry in 1993, he wasn't appointed, it was a hand-raising election. I'd say that his personal integrity was the reason people said we want the AGMA to be secretariat—and especially Bill Bradley, if he'll do it. And he did, and that resulted in an enormous volume of standards being produced in the next eight or 10 years. The AGMA was elected to the position, and it has been reelected every three years since that time.

Fullington: And that's another way in which our members benefit from being part of the AGMA, in that they can play an active role in developing standards that will benefit the entire industry, including themselves. That's something that no single company can do, and it can't be conducted in a vacuum—you need people from a broad spectrum of experiences to come together to develop them. That's why we're working so hard to encourage both gear manufacturers and OEMs—as well as companies involved in bearings, lubricants, and heat treating—to join the AGMA.

Franklin: Just to provide one final example, a few years ago the AGMA worked with AWEA, the American Wind Energy Association, in putting together an international committee to develop what eventually became an ISO standard. It was fast-tracked by ISO because they recognized its value. There had been some catastrophic failures in that industry, and you were basically looking at the collapse of wind as an alternative energy if you couldn't improve on the technology. They needed better gearboxes, so we were dealing with a business issue through a technical mechanism. The resulting standard addressed a number of significant problems in the design of gearboxes for wind turbines, and that hard work helped to support the continued development of an important industry. So that's just one way that our work on technical standards has made a difference, and the support of our members—and their active involvement—will allow us to continue doing so. 🦾

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