

# The End of an Era — Joe Franklin's Valedictory

Jack McGuinn, Senior Editor

**AGMA President Joe Franklin is stepping down after some 24 years on the job. He graciously took the time to answer some questions from *Gear Technology* Senior Editor Jack McGuinn regarding his tenure.**

**G**ear Technology: Was the position one that you aspired to 24 years ago?

Joe Franklin: "I was excited to receive a call from Stewart Ward, in the summer of 1991, and pleased that after being vetted by the Executive Committee and Board, I was offered the job. Before AGMA, I worked twelve years for the National Machine Tool Builders Association, now known as AMT—The Association for Manufacturing Technology. AGMA's members are very similar, and several companies were members of each group."

**H**ow does AGMA look today compared to when you stepped in 24 years ago?

"In many ways, AGMA is quite similar to the organization of 1991; in a few others, I am pleased to say, we have been able to build on the foundation in place when I was hired. The overall mission and objectives of the association have not changed. In fact, you can look at our Articles of Incorporation and see that the reasons for existence have not changed in 100 years.

"Today, we have fewer staff positions and more specialization in each position. In 1991 most of the employees were generalists who learned to wear multiple hats. Our office space was in a converted Coke bottling plant with a leaky roof and dark offices. Today, we are in a relatively new space full of glass and light, designed to encourage interaction among the staff and visiting members.

"Membership has grown and become more diverse—more in the supply chain and more internationally. We



were financially stable then and, I would say today, our finances are such that the organization is guaranteed a future as long as the members want an AGMA.

"Our standards development activities, with the supporting array of technical committees, continue to be one of AGMA's most important programs. Today we are more heavily involved internationally with ISO and the several national gearing standards developing organizations.

"The education programs of 1991 were less frequent and tended to be produced to respond to an issue or problem of the time. Today we have eight established, advanced education courses, webinars and video delivery, as well as the FTM (Fall Technical Meeting) and short courses at Gear Expo.

"Gear Expo was just beginning in the early '90s, and today is a well-established, "must-attend" event for our industry. Of course, it is larger today in size and number of exhibitors and attendees.

"Most importantly, today as then, the Board, members and staff continue to look for ways to keep the organization fresh and in step with the industry."

**W**hat would you like to see the association accomplish going forward? Is there any unfinished business you just ran out of time to address adequately?

"The most important new item of business in front of AGMA today is the successful transition to its new president, Matt Croson. The Board and I will be working with him over the next several months to make sure

he has the support and information he needs to be successful. Matt is an experienced association executive who will bring new ideas and new enthusiasm to AGMA.

“AGMA does not have a “to do” list that no one has worked on. What we do have is a responsible Board of Directors and committed staff who are actively looking forward.

The Board recently changed how it approaches meetings; the Board now focuses more of each meeting on discussion of strategic issues and less on oversight and management. I think this is very wise and has promise of really driving the organization forward.

“Face it—it is a lot easier to come together for a couple days every four or five years and create THE Strategic Plan than it is to grapple with the strategic elements of building a relevant program to help educate the industry or to challenge yourself to add more value to all of our members, domestic and international. AGMA no longer has that “dusty binder” on the shelf; we do have a very impressive way for 22 representatives of the industry (our Board) to work with staff to continuously improve AGMA and to look beyond the daily activities for what’s next for AGMA and the industry.”

### **I**t seems there will always be a Fall Technical Meeting, but what about Gear Expo?

“The Fall Technical Meeting and Gear Expo trade show just keep getting better. I am pleased that with the excellent international conferences and congresses, the FTM is held in high regard everywhere. We always have a good array of international technologists and industry experts who offer papers for consideration. Remember, we always receive two or three times as many abstracts as we are able to accept for the conference. AGMA’s Technical Division Executive Committee (TDEC) evaluates the abstracts and selects the papers.

“Gear Expo is the industry networking event—an opportunity to see the most current technology for manufacturing gears and gearboxes. And this past show was a good place for OEMs to come to find sources for their power transmission needs.

“As long as the industry supports the events and tells the Board and staff, they will be supported by AGMA.”

### **H**ow does AGMA stay relevant as an association in which highly skilled and talented people, as well as major corporations, will care to participate?

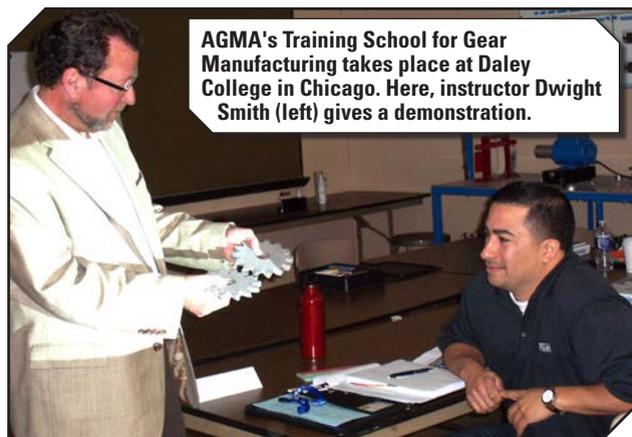
“I have long said the reason companies join and remain as members can be summarized in three words—access, credibility and voice.

“Let me explain.

“Access is what companies get when they join—networking with their peers, suppliers and customers. Networking is one way of expanding what we know about this business. It is an excellent way of vetting suppliers and processes—not so many of our members directly compete, so there are few barriers to talking.

“Credibility is what manufacturers get by publicly stating they are part of the gearing and mechanical power transmission industry. Your customers will know you have access to the best and most current technical information. One quite large member told me his company got credibility from AGMA because he could assure his customers that the way he was making their parts was the best because the technical committee had rejected the others.

“(The most important) voice is the voice of our members. At AGMA, the members set the agenda. If members do not support something, AGMA will



**AGMA's Training School for Gear Manufacturing takes place at Daley College in Chicago. Here, instructor Dwight Smith (left) gives a demonstration.**

not waste time and money offering it. And when members have a need, the organization will work to provide it.

One example: in the early 1990s several smaller companies came to me with the idea that we start our own gear training program at a community college. They helped acquire some machines, find instructors, and together we got agreement from Daley College in Chicago to set up our Training School for Gear Manufacturing on their campus. Today we have taught innumerable individuals in our industry how to make gears. Interestingly, about a quarter of those in the school never make a gear. They are executives who came from another industry or PR staff or sales engineers. All need to understand gearing, but will not generally be called on to make gears.

“As long as AGMA continues to build opportunities for members to network, as long as members perceive value in membership, and as long as Board and staff continue to hear the voice of the customer, AGMA will attract the full range of companies and executives in the industry.”

### **A**re you satisfied with AGMA's accomplishments in gear education and job training?

“Developing a set of education programs for an industry is not a simple task. Because of the diversity of members and of education and training needs, it cannot be done quickly if you want to be effective. The nature of “crowd sourcing” means that you can get a very robust result—but it is never fast.

“Today, we have a group of proven courses and proven instructors; and we have a new Director of Education on staff and new instructors eager to begin working.

“I think AGMA is well positioned but, as always, is dependent on motivated members who are interested and capable of helping develop new courses.”

**Y**ou have presided over the association's greatest period of growth during your tenure. To what would you attribute that?

“I came to AGMA at a time much like today. Many of the employees and executives who came out of World War II were retiring and a younger group was coming in. Some were moving into their parent's companies; others were buying existing companies or starting from scratch. They all needed a way to know each other; all needed technical information and standards and all needed business tools like benchmarking studies.

“Additionally, with the greater attention on international technical standards, more international companies were interested in AGMA. We also increased our activity with international organizations like the Hannover Fair.

“The Board and our staff responded to the needs of the members; we tried to increase value of membership and

we met frequently with individual companies to discuss membership.

“In many regards, success builds on success and so it seems it did at AGMA. Membership grew, our revenue generating programs grew enough to allow improvements in benefits, and the cycle repeated.

“I always come back to the voice of the member. We were resolute in not offering what was not wanted, and in providing what was.

“As we had staff turnover, I moved to bring in specialists who knew trade shows, meeting management, adult education, and how membership organizations worked. I outsourced non-revenue-generating positions and used the savings to add staff that could generate revenue and grow the membership.

“Associations must not get out of sync with their members. I joke about the parade leader with the big hat and baton; every once in a while he needs to look back and make sure the band didn't turn without telling him.

“AGMA has been successful because the 22 Chairmen I have worked with,



**AGMA's Training School for Gear Manufacturing offers hands-on learning for gear manufacturers.**

and for, along with the 100 or so Board members since the early 1990s, loved this industry and worked cooperatively with the staff to meet the needs and desires of the members. The U.S. Department of Commerce classifies the industry as a mature or declining industry. Fortunately, they neglected to tell the thousands of individuals who work daily to improve the power transmission components and devices that almost no one in the general public knows is working for them.”

**W**hat were some of your toughest times in the job?

“Industry downturns are inherently difficult. Many times, members need information and programs from the association in bad times more than they do in good, but many times do not have the necessary cash flow to support it. Bad times for the industry translate directly to bad times for AGMA. Still, we have a mission and purpose. I am pleased that most of the time we had the flexibility to accommodate what members needed.”

**W**hat, if anything, would you have done differently—or acted sooner on—or later?

“With 20-20 hindsight, I probably would have done a number of things differently. The key is not to focus on the past but to learn from every experience and build a body of knowledge that helps you improve next time.”



**Since its beginnings as a table-top show in 1987, Gear Expo has grown to become the gear industry's largest event. Shown here is the Gear Expo Solutions Center.**

**H**ow does the AGMA Foundation, which supports and strengthens education, training, and research for the gear industry, look as you prepare to turn over the reins?

“The Foundation Trustees and staff are refocusing the AGMA Foundation away from some of the purposes it had in the beginning. The most significant of the original objectives have been achieved and the programs are part of AGMA’s operating budget, not special projects.

“I am excited that the Trustees are increasingly moving to fund scholarships for college students who have an interest in mechanical engineering, and gearing in particular. The Foundation also funds the development of education courses.

“I have confidence that this will be the primary direction into the future. It makes more sense to give money directly to students than it does to fund university research programs that many times are a way of giving a student a fellowship. The scholarship puts 100% of the money toward getting the student educated; research can be considered on its own merits.

“Members have responded positively to the refocusing, and I hope it succeeds to help individuals like those the Foundation has funded over the past several years.”

**W**hat would you like your AGMA colleagues to consider as your legacy, if you will, to the association?

“I have tried to do my job with honesty and integrity. I have approached each member with respect, knowing that in most cases their job was rarely easy. And, if I or AGMA could offer a solution – that’s why we were there.” *(By the beginning of July, Matt Croson will be on the job full time and Franklin will drop his hours for the balance of the year. Croson will take over day-to day management of the association as Franklin works through 2016 with*

*the primary responsibility of working with Croson on the transition. Both men will be visiting both individual companies and hosting smaller, regional group dinners, so Croson can meet the industry and get to know the players.)* ⚙️



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