

## **“Focus on the Future”**

*Speech given by N. Britt Lovin, vice president of Andy Oxy Company, to delegates at the Annual Convention after his induction as GAWDA's 2008-09 President.*

I would not be standing on this stage today were it not for the tremendous amount of support and encouragement that I have received over the years from my wife Julie, my family, the employees of Andy Oxy Company, GAWDA's Past Presidents and during this year, Gary Stoneback and Jenny McCall. I give them all my heartfelt thanks and deepest appreciation.

During the past 6 years, it has been my honor and privilege to have the opportunity to serve on GAWDA's Board of Directors and give a little back to the industry that has given me so much during my career. With two young boys, a company to run and, frankly, not wanting to be under the spotlight, I have to admit that when Whip Seaman asked me to consider becoming president, I hesitated—but not for long!

To me, GAWDA is a critical part of the tool set that I need in order to do my job as the vice president of Andy Oxy. Participation in GAWDA gives me the knowledge, resources, professional contacts and friends that are an important part of succeeding in this business and building for the future.

Focus on the Future is the theme of my year as President of GAWDA. I strongly believe that if we do not plan now for our future, our future will be non-existent.

Some of the broad issues that I feel will have a major impact on our industry and our individual companies in the next several years are:

### **Globalization**

News, good and bad, travels as fast as the press of the send key on your computer or the talk button on your Blackberry. The decisions you make this morning impact your business this afternoon and are communicated to your customers immediately, whether they are around the block or on the other side of the world.

### **Digitization**

Computers, e-mail, instant messaging and other communication technologies have changed the “pace” of life to the “race” of life. Andy Warhol said that in the future everyone would be famous for 15 minutes. Today, 15 minutes has become the amount of time you have to respond to an e-mail before the other person picks up their cell phone to call to see whether or not you received it. Taking the time to contemplate a decision has been replaced by the need for an instant response, where “I'll get back to you” is often too late.

### **Localization**

These global changes are also impacting GAWDA. The weakening of the economy, production moving overseas, the decline of welding as an occupation and the consolidation of the gases and welding industry have forced GAWDA's leadership to take a long, hard look at how the association operates and to question whether we are doing the right things in the right ways. How much change will our organization require in order to remain competitive over the next five years? We are not a 1,200-member organization anymore.

### **Regional Meetings**

GAWDA's strength begins at the regional level. This is where the relationships that directly impact your business are formed. The Board of Directors spent a considerable amount of time during this meeting discussing ways to increase the value of GAWDA's regional meetings. Next year's meetings will have standardized formats, Board attendance, increased support from

Headquarters and financial resources necessary to provide more educational content through industry speakers and GAWDA's consultants.

### **Governance**

We will continue to strengthen GAWDA's governance structure by giving the Board the tools they need to focus on the future by acting strategically. I plan on creating task forces to update our Bylaws and Standard Operating Procedures so that they reflect how GAWDA really operates today and to account for the changes that have occurred within our industry and our membership.

### **GAWDA U**

GAWDA University Online is off to a strong start. During the coming year, we will survey the members to determine the training and educational needs of their employees. Our committees and consultants will then work with our members to develop content to reflect those needs. If your company has already developed education content, we would appreciate your donation of that material to GAWDA U. This program is designed for both distributors and manufacturers.

### **Committees**

I will continue the work that Gary started to strengthen our committee structure. Committees will be oriented toward achieving specific tasks within defined timelines. Each consultant will be assigned to a committee which will monitor their performance and conduct annual reviews. We will also continue to seek member volunteers who are willing to contribute their time and talents to strengthening GAWDA. I am also committed to developing a broader base of leadership to ensure that the future of GAWDA is in strong and capable hands.

### **Contact Booth**

We made a concerted effort during this meeting to increase participation by our distributor members in the Contact Booth Program. I think it paid off. We will continue to exert peer pressure and to offer incentives to increase attendance. As the Executive Committee stated in our letter to our fellow Distributors, "GAWDA is a partnership between the distributors and the suppliers in the gases and welding industry. As in all business partnerships, there are certain responsibilities and obligations that make the partnership viable and create value for each party. As partners, we have an obligation to GAWDA's supplier members to strongly support and to heavily attend these events."

### **Consultants**

During the "State of the Association" presentation on Monday, I reviewed the process the Audit Committee went through in evaluating and restructuring our consultant relationships with the goal of increasing the value of this benefit to the members. Even though the Committee has already dedicated an enormous amount of time to this effort, the process is far from over. We will continue to look for ways to increase the use of our consultants by our members and will work with the committees to annually evaluate their performance.

### **Spring Management Conferences**

In 2009, we will continue to have 2 Spring Management Conferences. The first will be held in Chicago from March 21-24. We will have 3 distinct educational tracks during our workshops— Operations, Sales Management and one specifically for owners. We will also have a session on supply and demand in the steel industry.

The second SMC will be in my home town of Asheville, North Carolina, April 21-24 at the historic Grove Park Inn. Sessions will include presentations on:

- Adding 3% to Your Bottom Line
- Emerging Markets for Gases
- Cylinder Management, and
- Promotion of Careers in Gases and Welding Industries.

The meeting will also include a special workshop and social event for the Young Executives, a golf outing and a tour and lunch for the spouses at the Biltmore Estate.

### **Annual Convention**

The Annual Convention next year will be held at the brand new Grand Hyatt on the Riverwalk in San Antonio, September 20-23. The Convention Planning Committee will be meeting this November to plan the speakers and networking events.

### **Closing**

At heart, I am a conservative thinker; therefore, I will be mindful of your membership dollar. I want you to call me at any time with concerns and questions. Open communications is a must for our future. Thank you for this opportunity to serve as your President in the coming year.

At the end of the day, we all have one common goal and that's to advance our industry.