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Spring 2017

CONNECTION

A trip to Dallas

- A record-breaking POLYCON
- Visits with ICPA members
- The history behind R.J. Marshall

Also:

Building the best team



ICPA
TO GET NEW
LEADERS

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...



- 4 Richard and Joanie Marshall of R.J. Marshall
- 8 Finding your company's passion
- 16 Profiles of Dallas members
 - Martech, 16
 - Clarke Products, 18

12 POLYCON 17
Dallas



DEPARTMENTS

- 2 President's letter
- 20 Industry spotlight
- 20 ICPA news to know
- 22 Index of advertisers

ON THE COVER: Among the displays at Clarke Product's showroom in Colleyville, TX are some of the outstanding tubs made from solid surface. The tub in the middle, for example, was inspired by the designs of Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann, a French designer known for this work during the French Art Deco period of the 1920s. Photo: Genilee Parente

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Our organization soars



I DON'T OFTEN ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO PAT THEMSELVES ON THE BACK, but that's exactly what I feel our organization should do following POLYCON Texas 2017 in March. The positive attitude of attendees, suppliers and presenters regarding both the industry itself and our trade association as its main sail illustrates how right we were to make the decision to stand alone without the oversight of a large organization.

We are once again a strong proponent for the cast polymer industry, and those of us who attended this show saw this strength. The presentations were top notch, the demonstrations heavily attended, the exhibit area packed. The record numbers of attendees, the positive comments we've received on the sessions and from our suppliers affirm how important it is to hold these meetings. We visited with old friends, and we made many new ones. As an association, we spread our wings broader and soared.

I was heartened to see the high numbers of first-time attendees and younger people who came to the event. These two valuable sources help fuel

the expansion of our organization we know is coming. A special roundtable designed for the next generation of leaders sizzled with exchanges of ideas. It's clear to me that those of us who have been in the industry many years can look forward to an even stronger industry going forth.

I also noted how diverse a group we were. There were representatives from several very large companies, and there were people from small mom and pop organizations. The products we talked about ranged from the traditional cultured marble to whole new ways of making outstanding surface products.



ICPA President Bill Sanders (right) presented his President's Award to Larry Branan, district manager, Eastern U.S. & Canada, the R.J. Marshall Company. Branan helped plan this year's POLYCON.

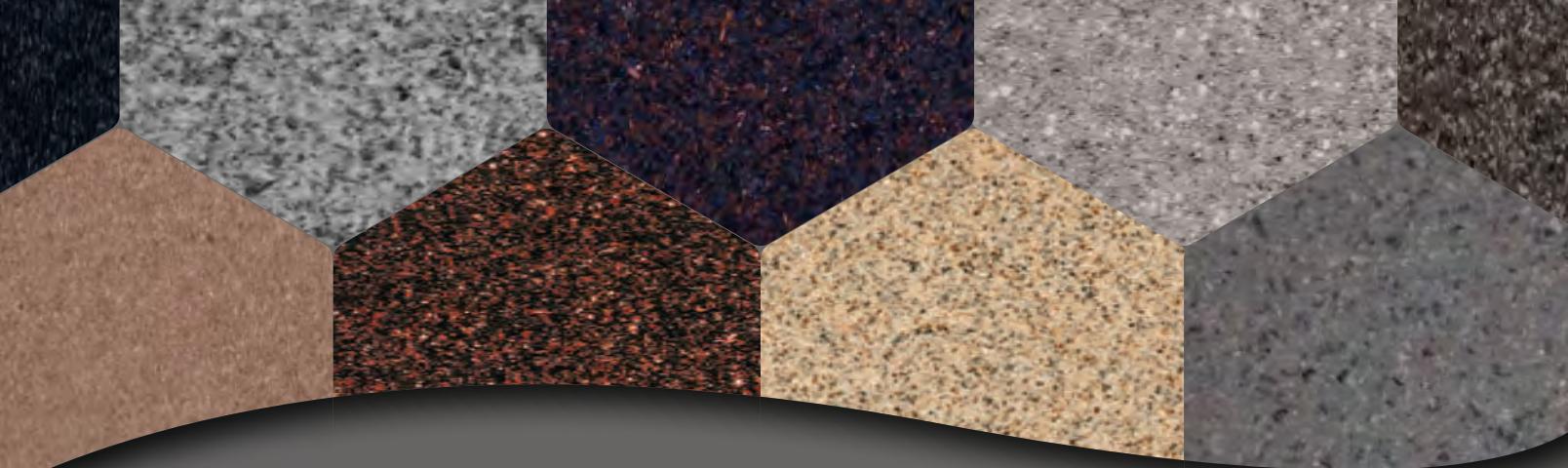
This diversity is one of our strengths as we stand side by side in our quest to further the industry.

I think we owe a giant thank you to the organizers of this event. Executive Director Jennifer Towner did a terrific job ensuring an uptick in attendance, as well as selecting the event location of Dallas. We also owe our deep

gratitude to the many people who helped her plan the sessions and get out the word including our POLYCON co-chairs Luke Haas and Larry Branan, our marketing committee led by Sean Jacobs, and our own board members led by the experienced crew of Dirk DeVuyst, our secretary/treasurer,

and former president Todd Werstler. Lastly, this event would not have been the success it was without our sponsors, who made the event the best of its kind by supporting us financially and showing us what they offer that will help us create our quality product.

This is my last letter as your president and I want to thank all of our members and our board for the support they've given me. You've made my term rewarding and fruitful. I'm glad I leave following a hugely successful POLYCON 17, and I look forward to watching as the organization gets larger and we hold even bigger and better events in the future. ■



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The two-person team behind R.J. Marshall

BY GENILEE PARENTE

Many people who attend ICPA events recognize Richard and Joanie Marshall. They're the couple that own R.J. Marshall, a long-time supplier to the industry, and they've made a lot of friends over the years.

What some may not realize is how much their company epitomizes the foundation upon which the cast polymer industry was built: The Marshalls started their company in 1978 out of their own home. The small, family-run organization has grown steadily since those early days to become one of the leading vendors to and supporters of ICPA. What many people also don't know is that the Marshalls chose this industry exactly for that reason.

"We saw early on that this was an entrepreneurial industry with many families at the helm of its companies," Richard says. "Family values are a part of its backbone just as they are part of ours."

"When people didn't pay their bills on time, it was because they couldn't; not because it was a way of doing business," Joanie adds.

Today, even though some of those early companies have become pretty large, overall, it's still made up of entrepreneurs, the Marshalls conclude.

A late start

Forming the company was a major life change for both halves of the couple. Joanie was a registered nurse who spent her early career raising three children; Richard Marshall was a high-paid, on-staff sales representative for many years, eventually becoming vice president of a company that produced and sold minerals and particulate chemicals for use in foundries and ceramics. He was 42 when he decided he needed a career change.

"I tried for about a month to get a different job—stood in line at the unemployment office in a suit and tie and really



hated the thought of it all," Richard says. "But I was used to the company car; I had three kids in school; I had a nice house with a big mortgage," he adds.

Then a friend assured him he probably had enough connections to form his own business.

"At that point, Joanie and I sat down and talked about it and decided I'd try going out on my own," Richard says. "I was advised at the time that 42 was a little late to get started with a business," he jokes.

The couple shrugged their shoulders at that advice and decided to take a risk, with Joanie plunging into learning to run the office operation, do the bookkeeping and take charge

of administrative tasks. Richard originally intended to become a private manufacturing representative, a lucrative consulting position back in those days in Detroit, where the couple lived.

"There were many such reps back then, and they made a very good living by taking on two or three major clients and selling for them," Richard says. But the business took a different turn when the couple realized there was a need greater than selling to giants such as the automakers of Detroit.

"We discovered that the commodity producers were not interested in selling specialty products to small or medium-size business customers, including manufacturers: There was a market for products to solve specific problems," Richard says. "We could provide what they needed."

Instead of becoming a sales rep company, R.J. Marshall became a supplier, distributor and maker of products to several industries, including cast polymer.

Getting started was a challenge.

"During the first year, we withdrew \$1,000 a month from savings to pay expenses. Joanie did all the paperwork and answered phone calls while I made sales calls, arranged for raw materials and made packaged products. Our children, who were still in school, cleaned and filled used milk jugs for samples," Richard says.

"It was a big change for us," Joanie adds. "Instead of that company car, we used an old car my parents gave us. Our office was in one room in the house, the room that housed our grand piano and now housed a desk," she says.

"I didn't even know the difference between a credit and a debit when I started," she adds. "I had to learn fast. We had a good accounting firm come in at the end of the month to balance everything up, but we had to keep track of every detail to be profitable."

Considering the fact that most of the world wasn't even yet computerized, that was a major undertaking.

"I had a look at our old record books not too long ago and couldn't believe how many entries we had to enter by hand in those days," she says with a laugh.

Things have progressed exponentially over the years, and the company now has its own office staff, as well as a management team, sales team and other employees: a staff of about 80. Yet both Marshalls remain active in the business.

Today, the company has five manufacturing locations in the United States that produce a variety of filler and additive solutions. Most recently, R.J. Marshall bought the consumables arm of Gruber Company, LLC, adding Gruber Suppliers and Accessories (Marshall-Gruber) to its offerings. Joanie is

Richard and Joanie at the Marshall-Gruber facility in Mansfield, TX.



down to about three hours a day several times a week, but still keeps her hand in it all—including making the calls no one else wants to make: late collections, and attending staff meetings. Richard continues to work more than full time, but just this year began pulling back and letting his management team run much of the day-to-day operations.

The greatest changes

When asked what some of the greatest milestones in the history of R.J. Marshall have been, Richard goes back as far as three years into the business.

"We were finally making enough profit to stop taking money out of savings to pay living expenses. We purchased our first facility when the owner of a building loaned us \$10,000 so we could pay him \$10,000 as a down payment on his building," Richard says.

Another historical milestone was hiring their first employee—Daniel Mahlmeister, who went to work for the couple for less money than he was making at his job at the time. He became the first in a long line of people who stayed with the company for years, which Richard says has contributed to R.J. Marshall's success.

"There is no question that experienced employees contribute to success. In distribution, it's a two-pronged street. We need sales efforts by competent well-informed representatives and our clients need well-designed products that we can stand behind with expertise," Richard says.

Through the years, Richard says the company has primarily grown through increased sales, though it conducted a major acquisition in its early days of a division of Richard's former employer. The other milestones have included opening up new plant locations and most recently, purchasing Gruber Supplies and Accessories and forming Marshall-Gruber.

That last move was an exciting one for the Marshalls.

"For many years, Gruber was the really big supplier to the cultured marble industry. To know that we've gotten to the point of being able to buy when they were ready to liquidate is rewarding," Richard says.

It's also a reflection of the many ups and downs of the business the Marshalls have seen in their years at the helm.

Both Marshalls say one of the greatest challenges in the business over their 39 years was the great recession. "The cast polymer industry, our customers, saw almost a 60% decline in activity during that time," Richard says. While there were almost 1,500 companies in the business at one time, it went down to several hundred.

Still, the couple is enthusiastic about what's happening today and glad to be part of it.



The couple was on hand to greet POLYCON Dallas 17 attendees who toured the Mansfield Marshall-Gruber plant.

"The business is growing again. New people are coming into it. The older ones are reemerging stronger than before," Richard says.

The greatest challenge going forward will be to recognize innovative ways to recapture the market that has been lost and to compete against players such as natural granite and marble, he says. For R.J. Marshall, "the changing marketplace has required us to develop new products and innovations for new markets. We've taken risks and some have failed. But others have succeeded, and we feel it's important to remain flexible and be creative," Richard adds.

For the Marshalls themselves, the challenge may be finding ways to let go while still keeping track of what's happening and finding ways to continue enjoying their growing family. They plan to do that as they've done everything: side by side.

"There's a story about how we've done things," Richard says. "When we decided to incorporate, I didn't have the \$1,000 a lawyer wanted so I went to the department of licensing and registration directly. They gave me the forms, which cost \$35 to submit, and we answered all the questions, then decided to split up shares equally with 10,000 to me and 10,000 to Joanie," he says.

A year or so after that, a lawyer informed the couple that a 50/50 split had been an unwise decision since a major reason small businesses go out of business is divorce. Again, the Marshalls shrugged their shoulders at the advice and have continued all these years as equal partners.

"We've enjoyed operating the company together, traveling and talking about business. Making decisions together. Being equal partners has only contributed to our marriage," Richard says. ■



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Finding the passion that pulls you and your employees

GENILEE
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MOST PROFESSIONALS IN THE CAST POLYMER BUSINESS

NESS know that the success of their companies depends on how good their staff is; but inspirational speaker Caytie Langford, who is a John Maxwell Team certified speaker and coach, brought home an important point to POLYCON attendees about what that means.

"If we are lucky enough to be business owners and lucky enough to employ other people, and we want those people to help us build the companies of our dreams, it's our responsibility

to be the best leaders we can be with no exceptions," she said.

That doesn't mean telling them what to do; it means understanding what they want and assuring those goals align with your own, she added.

Lessons learned the hard way

Langford began her session with a story about a painful lesson she learned. She started an exciting new executive position and ran almost immediately into a head-to-head, combative relationship with one of her key directors.

Langford was already overwhelmed with day-to-day duties and this relationship made the job close to unbearable; she truly wanted to fire the person but couldn't.



"We were worse than oil and water—more like gasoline and a match. It was a completely explosive," she joked. The two simply could not see eye to eye and at one point, things got so bad, a meeting ended in a yelling match.

"I realized, however, that instead of leading my team, I bent under stress and micromanaged. I was hired to do these bold new exciting things, but the only thing I was doing was starting rumors, making waves and getting people angry. It was horrible."

With an attitude adjustment, however, she completely turned things around to the point that the employee left after Langford left, saying she couldn't work for the next manager. In her time in the position, Langford had built what she calls a "bad ass team" that included the troublesome employee. She shared with POLYCON attendees how creating such a team happens.

Start with a vision

The first step in the process is to recognize what your company's vision is, Langford explained.

"I know that many of you have worked in the industry for decades," she said. "Ask yourself why. What is it about the cast polymer industry that gets you excited? What is it about your company that makes it better than the competition. Is it your client base? Is it your particular product? Are you a leader who deeply cares about your team? Why are you doing what you do?"

Sitting down and outlining what you truly want to accomplish as well as what you hope your company will accomplish creates a pathway for both you and your team, she said. The vision has to be one you're passionate enough about to spread the desire to pursue it to the rest of the team, she said.

"Steve Jobs once said: If you're working on something exciting that you really care about, you don't have to push to get there, your vision will pull you," she said. "I can almost guarantee that if your vision doesn't get you fired up personally and pull you, those back in the office and plant will not be pulled either."

Langford gave a few examples from other industries:

In 1970, Honda's vision was to "destroy" its main competitor at the time: Yamaha. "When was the last time you saw a Yamaha car driving down the road?" she challenged the audience.

Microsoft's original vision was this: a computer on every desktop and in every home. Back then, people didn't even have computers at home. "Now, can you even imagine walking into any office today and not seeing a computer?" she asked.

From the cast polymer industry, Langford pointed to The R.J. Marshall Company, an ICPA member and platinum sponsor of POLYCON.

Their vision is: *to be a world leader providing specialty industrial raw materials and manufacturing supplies.*

"They've put this goal into writing ... they want to be a world leader," she pointed out. "That's an impressive vision."

Next up: create a culture around that vision

Once you've defined why you exist, Langford said the next step is to create a culture that supports it.

"Whether it's intentional or unintentional, every company and every team within that company has a culture," Langford explained. In her case, she could see the culture of her former job was becoming negative—she had to find a way to turn it around and align it better with the vision she had for what the company could be and what she could accomplish. She discovered that the key was to develop ways to help her staff get what they wanted out of their jobs.

As another example of creating the right culture, Langford pointed to one of her favorite past-times: baseball. She's a huge Texas Rangers fan so she reached back to 2014 to explain to the POLYCON audience what the team was going through. The Rangers lost their manager and ace pitcher that year. By the time the next season began, a new manager stepped in and at the very first game, the backup pitcher was injured. The team spent the first part of the season losing. However, the new manager, Jeff Banister, created a culture that became the team's and its fans' mantra: never ever quit. By the last game of a grueling season, the team had clinched the American West division, and Banister was voted manager of the year for the American League.

"He knew his role as a leader was not to buy into what others were saying. While the media and others were negative, he was there to say, we're not quitting," she said.

Those in charge of the company create its culture, "and I guarantee businesses that are not paying attention to what's happening will have to be happy with mediocrity," she said. What's more, "Someone or something is bound to come in when they are not looking and undermine what positive culture is there," she added.

Provide the right pathway for others

The third step towards creating a bad-ass team is to recognize what members of that team want and provide a way for them to get it.

"Think about the mentors or people in your life that helped you personally get what you wanted," she challenged the audience. "Wouldn't you do just about anything



“WHEN WE ALL GET DOWN TO IT, WE REALIZE THAT OUR COMPANIES ARE MADE UP OF OTHER PEOPLE. WE ARE NOT ABOUT TO GET WHERE WE WANT TO GO IF WE CAN’T LEARN HOW TO GET OTHER PEOPLE TO GO ALONG WITH US.”

— Caytie Langford

for them?” she asked.

In the case of the gas/match relationship from that former job, she used StrengthsFinder, a tool developed by Gallup Research that pinpoints 34 talents and shows people the top five things they do best.

“It made me realize the way I was leading this employee was completely wrong, and the work she was doing was out of scope with her skills. Research shows that when we focus people on their own strengths, they are six times more likely to be engaged in their work,” Langford said.

Once she pinpointed the women’s real talents, “I was able to unlock all her potential and our relationship completely changed in just a few short weeks. A month after we started the process, she was telling me she’d never had a leader who cared what she wanted in her career,” she said.

In the cast polymer business, “Ask yourself, who is the guy in the plant that has dreams of being a supervisor? Who is the guy who knows your products frontwards and backwards and would be the best sales person ever? Who is the guy or gal who will be your successor?” she said.

Langford pointed out that former GE CEO Jack Welch, who went on to become a business management guru, said it best with: “Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.”

Celebrate every success

The last piece of advice Langford had to give was that it’s important to celebrate successes, even when there have been many bumps along the way.

“We too often go along from one thing in our daily lives to another either forgetting or not thinking how important it is to celebrate success,” she said.

Langford’s example again came from her own life. Her husband, who is also a business coach, came home one day after a really grueling experience with a new potential client. His team had received intel on why the client was leaving a former firm so they thought they had what they needed to win over the potential customer. Then everything fell apart at the office. Her husband’s staff spent an all-hands-on-deck day during which each team member pinpointed exactly what he or she could do to help fix the problems and how they were going to do it. The entire staff got home well after it was time to put the children to bed.

While Langford’s husband came home exhausted and somewhat discouraged by the entire experience, Langford’s question to him was: “What are you going to do tomorrow to celebrate?” she said.

In other words, her fresh eyes saw that, when things went awry, her husband’s team came together in their vision, and created a solution side by side.

“You have a new client that could be great for you and your team found a way to make it happen,” she told her husband.

The next day, even though there were bruises to show, the team celebrated.

“When we all get down to it, we realize that our companies are made up of other people. We are not about to get where we want to go if we can’t learn how to get other people to go along with us,” Langford said. ■



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POLYCON PROVES THE SAYING:

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WITH RECORD ATTENDANCE, a new venue with more sessions, more sponsors and bigger audiences, it was clear how much POLYCON Texas 2017 grew beyond its two predecessor meetings. But it was the attitudes and moods of those who came that revealed its success.

The meeting was March 22 to 24 at the Sheraton Arlington Hotel, Arlington, TX, with plant demonstrations at the Marshall-Gruber Company Facility in nearby Mansfield, TX.

"It's been many years since I've seen the kind of enthusiasm that greeted us in Dallas," ICPA President Bill Sanders said. "I felt like we had returned to the days when our industry was growing so fast we were hungry for knowledge to keep up. But I also felt we were glimpsing what our future holds," he added.

"It's always a challenge to meet the needs of our diversity of members," said ICPA Executive Director Jennifer Towner. "For our manufacturer attendees, the goal is to offer a variety of presentations, break-out sessions and demonstrations for them to select what would be most valuable for their business size and specialty. This POLYCON did just that—it offered highly technical presentations as well as forums to discuss problems and solutions on the plant floor."

Attendance high

Attendance at the 2017 event had grown to over 160 from about 120 in 2015, its first year, when the event was held in Atlanta. Those in attendance in 2017 came from 85 companies located as near as Dallas itself and as far away as Germany.

"One of the most exciting aspects of this year's event is that we had so many new faces in attendance. We were able

Sessions at POLYCON were packed and enthusiasm was high.
AT RIGHT: Jerry Killian, HK Research, shows attendees a gel coat repair method at Friday's plant demos.
OPPOSITE PAGE (Clockwise from top): 1) Attendees at one of Thursday morning's general sessions; 2) Dirk DeVuyst (right), International Marble Industries, receiving congratulations from ICPA President Bill Sanders. DeVuyst and Todd Werstler, Tower Industries, received the Royce Newsom Pioneer Award; 3) John Schweitzer, ACMA, brings attendees up to date on regulatory events.





to report to members during an update on membership that we're now up to 90 members," Towner said. "We were also pleased to welcome attendees from across borders. Besides Germany, we had companies from Canada, Mexico and Colombia in South America."

A packed agenda

Members traveled to Dallas on Wednesday this year, spending the first afternoon roaming the Arlington Stock Yards, visiting the AT&T Stadium or taking a tour of the Marshall-Gruber facility in Mansfield. They got together for the first time Wednesday night for an opening reception at the River Ranch Stockyards, a reception held in a saloon complete with dance girls who stepped straight out of the 1800s and kept in character for the evening.

Thursday was packed with events starting early with the opening of the exhibit floor and continuing that morning with welcoming comments as well as inspiration from keynote speaker Caytie Langford, a John Maxwell Team speaker and coach (see page 8). John Schweitzer, senior advisor to the president of the American Composite Manufacturers Association (ACMA), took the podium to bring ICPA members up to the date on the regulatory developments critical to the industry. (Schweitzer will be giving a special report to MasterCast™ Connection in an upcoming issue.)

That afternoon, attendees gathered in various locations for a series of speaker presentations and roundtable discussions facilitated by industry experts.

A popular new session this year was a table of "Generation Next"—the younger professionals and those looking for innovative ideas to propel the industry into the future.

Attendees traveled Friday to Mansfield for hands-on

demonstrations of the processes that go into making quality products such as the software that now runs some of the plants, gel coat spraying techniques and best practices, repair of gel coat and mold set-up and repair.

Larry Branan, R.J. Marshall, who coordinated this year's demonstrations, attributed the success of those demos to the people who gave their resources and talents to put them on.

"I believe the time and effort the presenters put into planning their demos, as well as preparation by associates at Marshall-Gruber, was the source of the quality programming.

"It would be nearly impossible to plan any event without such great volunteers and the participation of their companies," he said. "We are already in the beginning stages of planning another great show for POLYCON Chicago 2018 hosted by Marble Works in South Elgin, IL."

The other aspect of this year's event that attendees praised highly was the exhibit floor. Towner said one commenter summed it up well: "I had plenty of time to visit with direct customers and distributors...precisely the goal I set for POLYCON. And interestingly enough, potential new customers were found, which is really great!"

Commenters also praised the practical advice they got from some of the sessions.

"I heard many good comments from manufacturers about programming such as Tips and Tricks from the Shop Floor and the tile mold demonstration and AutoCaster demos on Friday," Towner said.

"Comments received after these sessions included statements such as 'A real manufacturer showing a usable technique' and 'it helps us understand the latest technology and how we can help our customers understand the benefits.'"

One of the features of this year's POLYCON many attendees commented on was how well the hall of exhibits worked and how there was plenty of time for vendors and attendees to visit.





The family of Royce Newsom was on-hand at the awards dinner to help honor an industry pioneer. From left are ICPA President Bill Sanders, Mary Jo Newsom (Royce's wife), Nathalee Newsom Lowrie and Tommy Lowrie (daughter and son-in-law).

Honors night

POLYCON attendees gathered Thursday night for a gala event that celebrated the successes of its members and the efforts of individuals.

A special part of the evening was remarks by Mary Jo Newsom, the wife of long-time ICPA industry icon Royce Newsom, who passed away in June 2016. Mary Jo recalled for those in attendance what the cast polymer industry meant to her husband, who was a cheerleader for the association and a major player during the transition from an umbrella organization of the larger ACMA to its own independent association. Jamie Myers of Aztec Industries and a close friend of Royce's, echoed the thoughts of many in attendance as he talked about his love and respect for Royce and how instrumental he was in the success of Myers' business.

The ICPA Board of Directors renamed the Pioneer Award to the Royce Newsom Pioneer Award in honor of Royce. The award is given to those who, like Royce, lead by example and are dedicated and supportive of ICPA and the cast polymer industry. This year, the award was presented to both Dirk DeVuyst, owner of International Marble Industries and current ICPA secretary/treasurer, and Todd Werstler, owner of Tower Industries, and ICPA past president.

ICPA's current leader Bill Sanders presented the 2017 President's award to Larry Branan, R.J. Marshall, for his excellent service to the association, in particular his efforts in coordinating the demonstrations for POLYCON 2017.

POLYCON Texas 2017 also had a Best of the Best Display and Competition, an anonymous competition held during the event for manufacturers. The competition was sponsored by ACS International and entries received votes from POLYCON attendees. The winner for 2017 was Sand & Swirl in Utah. Owners Rebecca and Cory Erdmann received a trophy and cash prize. ■

Thank you to our sponsors

POLYCON Texas 2017 would not have been the success it was if not for the support from sponsors—both to help defray costs and, just as importantly, to keep manufacturers up to date on the latest design trends and supplies.

ICPA owes its gratitude this year to:

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Mark Kemp (left), co-owner of Martech, consults with plant manager Tito Vargas.

Two Dallas members represent diversity of industry

**GENILEE SWOPE
PARENTE**

BECAUSE **MASTERCAST™ CONNECTION** was in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area for the highly successful POLYCON Texas 2017 (see page 12), we made a few stops at area members. The two profiled here illustrate two different styles of business and operations as well as different lines of products.

Martech represents a company with a traditional background of manufacturing and more traditional products. Clarke is a new member who joined the association to learn more about the world of solid surface manufacturing so that it could expand a line of high-end products. Here's a glimpse of these two stars:

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- Composite marble, composite granite and engineered stone vanity tops, bowls, shower pans, shower walls, tubs and more
- Manufacturing facility and product display room in Midlothian

Mark Kemp and Tom Hardick, owners of Martech, are former accountants who previously worked in the home building industry. As a result of corporate transactions, their



Martech applies fiberglass to the back of its bowls for strength and to reduce the weight of its products.

jobs disappeared. Both wanted to run their own businesses so they began looking around for a solid company to buy.

"I was looking for a business that was not high tech. I wanted to offer a basic product that was not a fad, and I wanted it to be something that was made with a process I could understand," Kemp says.

They bought Martech in 2011, and the company has been growing steadily ever since.

"The economic recovery didn't go quite as quickly as we wanted it to, but we've seen substantial progress—especially since 2015," Hardick says.

The company has a 50,000-square-foot plant, which is 100% devoted to making composite bath products. Its main clientele is large-volume builders, and Kemp says much of the early success could be attributed to one large, quality builder. But the business expanded, mostly by word of mouth.

"We have a very good reputation, which we work very hard to keep," Kemp says. That reputation is based on top-level customer service.

"We're a proactive company; we keep an open dialogue with builders on every project," Kemp says. "If something isn't quite ready or right, our customers will find out directly from us. We update them daily by email on the progress of projects."

The company also prides itself on flexibility.

"Since what we provide to the building process comes fairly late in the game, that flexibility is crucial to keep-

ing customers happy," Kemp says. "It often means finding a solution for a problem we didn't cause in the first place, but we've gotten very good at coming up with creative solutions," he adds.

One indicator of how much the company has grown is that the staff has doubled in the time Kemp/Hardick have been at the helm: from about 15 when they bought Martech to 30 today.

The recent growth has been helped along by the fact the building business in the Dallas area is booming, and the company is at near capacity in keeping up with orders. That makes the staff even more invaluable to continued progress.

"These are smart employees—they have to know what they are doing. Our core staff is made up of an employee base with an average tenure of nine years. Our installation team averages over 10 years and our field manager has over 28 years," Hardick says.

The company recognized right away after buying the company that to be the best, they needed to keep their own employees happy.

"We believe in treating our people right both in terms of payment and benefits and by challenging them—giving them the rope they need to do their jobs," Hardick adds.

Kemp and Hardick also believe in making people take their vacations and they've implemented a bonus plan based on profits.

They also attribute the company's success to vendors, who they say have been critical in the education process and who remain open to helping Martech solve its challenges.

"Now that we've had six years, our challenge has become how to take this to the next level," Hardick says. "We continue to make monthly and yearly progress so now it's become a matter of prioritizing and seeing where next we want to invest," he says.

Martech's 50,000-square foot facility employs 30 local skilled workers.





Drew Thompson, Clarke Products, stands in front of one of the company's showpieces—a stand alone tub with flair.

Clarke Products

Colleyville, TX

- Freestanding and installed tubs, shower bases and drainage; specialty sinks/basins
- Acrylic and solid surface
- Showroom in Colleyville; plant in Waco

Clarke Products is a recent new member for ICPA, having joined the association after entering a new line of business three years ago: solid surface manufacturing and sales. The company itself has been around 34 years, specializing in acrylic bathing products. It is one of the largest such manufacturers in the U.S.

Clarke Products is a family business owned by Don Clarke; the treasurer is Liz Fletcher, his daughter; and his wife Colleen Clarke is a vice president. The company has a thriving private label business and also markets under the brands Clarke and Clarke Architectural to wholesalers, designers and e-commerce customers.

According to Drew Thompson, chief financial officer,

Clarke ventured into solid surface by creating a new division, Clarke Architectural, after recognizing that tastes were moving away from therapy bathtubs to freestanding bathing units.

"The trend today is towards soaking tubs and showers in the master bath," Thompson said. "People are also looking to make a statement in their bathrooms," he adds.

"We've seen what solid surface can do in creating high-end tubs and architectural bath pieces," Thompson says.

Getting into the new area required a substantial investment in new equipment, such as a dispersion machine, and in molds and training for staff to bring an artisans' approach to detailing the product.

Clarke markets itself through print ads and sales staff, and by attending kitchen and bath shows, including the Kitchen & Bath Industry Show (KBIS), where Thompson says he saw a lot of interest in what solid surface can create.

"We've also partnered with architects and designers in preaching the benefits of solid surface both in the kitchen and in the bathroom. While consumers are familiar with



ABOVE, LEFT: Clarke Architectural Products showroom. RIGHT: This drop-in tub is encased in a black box Clarke designed to better showcase the sharp lines and the tub's unique design. It is part of the company's collection of minimalistic designs available in both solid surface and acrylic.

well-known surfaces such as Corian in the kitchen, they are less informed about what can be created with solid surface in the bathroom," he says.

The company also recently entered into an agreement to become part of a showroom in New York City called Project 6, the first international specification showroom for plumbing fixtures and faucets in the U.S. Project 6 will showcase high-tech and high-design bath pieces, and Clarke Architec-

tural is the primary vendor for bath tubs, shower receptors and washbasins.

The reason the company has thrown its hat into the solid surface ring is that: "We see consumer preference moving towards modernistic style, which solid surface services well. At shows like KBIS, consumers don't know exactly what it is, but the minute they touch it and see what can be done with it, they fall in love," Thompson says. ■

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Luke Haas (second from right) was on hand at the popular Generation Next table at POLYCON.

Haas heads board next year

The annual ICPA Board of Directors Meeting took place March 22 during POLYCON. The board unanimously voted to appoint Luke Haas as ICPA president for the 2017-2018 fiscal year. Dirk DeVuyst agreed to remain on the board one more year to continue as secretary/treasurer.

Completing the 2017-18 Executive Board will be Bill Sanders, who becomes the Immediate Past President. Past President Todd Werstler and Supplier Board Member Ken Lipovsky are stepping away after completing their terms.

The board is now reviewing qualified candidates who would like to be considered for director positions being vacated for the 2017-2018 term. New board members will be announced in early June and will begin their terms July 1.

POLYCON meets next in Chicago

Planning is already underway for next year's POLYCON show. It will be April 18 – 20 in Chicago and comments from this year's POLYCON attendees will influence what happens for the educational program in 2018 and help planners finalize details of the event.



Check the POLYCON event website (www.POLYCONevent.com) often for announcements regarding the venue and programming. Marble Works, owned by ICPA member Tom Wienckowski, will host the plant demonstrations at its facility in South Elgin, IL.

Mark your calendar for CAMX

The Composites and Advanced Materials Expo (CAMX) is Sept. 11-14 at the Orange County Convention Center, Orlando, FL.

CAMX was created four years ago by the American Composites Manufacturing Association and the Society for the Advancement of Material and Process Engineering to connect and advance the world's composites and advanced materials communities. The conference addresses trends and business opportunities in those areas.

It's the largest event of its kind and has an educational program of more than 250 conference program sessions as well as a trade show that includes over 550 exhibitors. Many of ICPA's supporting vendors attend the show.

Among tracks and topics covered are advances in new materials, additive manufacturing, bonding and joining, regulations and business development, design, sustainability, processes for manufacturing, testing and market applications (including bath and consumer products).

For information, go to www.thecamx.org.



"Members only" portion of website up

A special part of the ICPA website is now operating for ICPA members. Each company will be given a unique login and password to access the resources available exclusively to members. The members only section will include a Manufacturer Forum Page, which will be used for manufacturer members who want to buy and sell used plant products, post interesting and helpful industry updates, and ask questions or seek solutions to problems they are facing. This forum page will be monitored by association executive director Jennifer Towner so that it maintains association integrity and to be sure manufacturers are receiving the help they need from industry experts.

Go to www.theicpa.com for more information.

It's time to renew

ICPA membership renewal takes place during the months of May and June. Invoices for dues will be sent out both electronically and mailed in hard copy form. Membership dues for the 2017-2018 year are paid on or before July 1, 2017.

For information on membership and payment options, visit the ICPA website, www.theicpa.com/join-today.

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Americans spending more on home renovation

First-time home buyers and Millennials may face challenges entering the housing market, but those that do are spending more than ever on home renovation, according to the sixth annual Houzz & Home Survey. The survey queries 100,000 people.

According to Houzz, people who are buying a first home but renovating it spent \$33,800 on average in 2016 for the new work, which is a 22% increase over 2015. Houzz' economist Nino Sitchinava said the renovations are in response to the lower inventory of affordable homes.

While this is a newer market for remodels, the older generations (Baby Boomers and older) continue to spend about three times more than those in younger households (25-34).

Overall, the year 2017 is on track to be another boom year for renovation with over half of homeowners planning to begin or continue renovations (52%). Both first time and repeat buyers are taking on larger scope projects with kitchens and baths "significantly more likely to be renovated than any other room," Houzz said. Average investment in kitchens is \$19,100 while master baths are at \$11,700.

The full survey is available at <http://info.houzz.com/HH2017.html>

Manufacturing employment changing face

Modern American factories today are smaller in size, more productive and filled with more educated workers, according to a report from the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) called "Job Creation in the Manufacturing Revival."

The report says employment in industrial markets has seen a steady decline since the start of the 21st century, when 17.1 million Americans worked in plants. Two recessions later, that number had fallen to 12.3 million workers.

At the same time, productivity doesn't seem to be suffering. Since June 2009 (the low point), output has increased by 21% while employment increased by just 5%, FAS says.

While FAS said there is no single cause for the employment outlook in manufacturing, it gives some credit for the mix of employment and productivity to technology, decreases in industries that are labor intensive and demand decreases in industries with traditionally high employment numbers (paper and tobacco are two).

FAS' report also says that the nature of work is changing.

Goods production is no longer the principal occupation in manufacturing with only about two in five manufacturing employees directly involved in making something, a fall of about 3.3 percentage points from 2000.

The full report is at: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R41898.pdf>

Consumers feeling better about economy

Consumer sentiment reached its highest mark in 12 years, according to a Survey of Consumers conducted by the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center. The university says the optimistic outlook is a result of something it calls the "Trump bump," the rise in sentiment that followed the November elections. The December to May average is at 97.4, compared to 91.8 during a comparable six-month period a year ago and 94.5 two years ago.

The university's chief economist Richard Curtin said that the most recent numbers reflect more favorable income gains and lower inflation, which are giving consumers better income expectations—the most favorable in a dozen years. Not surprisingly, the overall outlook on the economy varies widely by party with 66% of Republicans expecting an improved outlook compared to just 18% of Democrats.

For information, go to www.sca.isr.umich.edu. ■

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