Hanging together at the 2012 Allentown ERA Show

"We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately."—Benjamin Franklin

Franklin's quotable quote—reportedly uttered at the signing of the Declaration of Independence—seems an appropriate theme for the 24th Annual Electrical Rebuilder's Association (ERA) Show held last month in Allentown, Pa. Whether it was rebuilder to rebuilder, rebuilder to supplier, or association to members, the message from the three-day event was loud and clear—it is only together that we will move forward as an industry.

According to ERA Founder and show promoter Polly Shea, attendance was up a whopping 20 percent and the East Penn Manufacturing tour set a record with 125 participants and rave reviews.

"The momentum from last year's show was certainly not lost this year, and it brought with it a sort of newfound clarity regarding industry cooperation," said Shea. "Over and over again I had and heard conversations about how no one can be a loner in today's environment. We are accepting that we just can't do this without each other."

Driving that point home was the support Vensel Enterprises received in Dick Vensel's absence. Joe Davis of Joe Davis Enterprises, Alan Melton of NW Regulator Supply, and Juan DelValle of KAR Industries, all pitched in to run various live demos at the Vensel booth.

"I don't think that type of 'got your back' sentiment is a common occurrence in most industries," said Shea.

She also said there was "great activity" on the show floor, and was excited to have four first-time exhibitors (Arrowhead Electrical Products, DS USA, Rand Group, and STM Heavy Duty Electric).

ASPD's Brad Wright said they were more than pleased with the traffic: "I am thrilled with the contacts I made this weekend. When I finally arrived at the office I had a phone message to call a rebuilder that heard about us through the show and I already have his first order being shipped out today. That's what it's all about!"

Even the seminars—11 in all—illustrated the fact that things are looking good. Many of the presentations were standing room only. Dan Marinucci opened the event on Friday to a crowd of more than 100. (His lovely wife, Dawn, was also an irreplaceable member of the show team.)

Joe Bradish of Kaestner Auto Electric in Waukesha, Wisc., said Marinucci is "the most effective presenter in the industry."

Gene Kaiser's Friday presentation on regulator control technology was also a full house.

Remy's Dennis Tobin opened Saturday's seminars with a presentation on their cutting-edge technology. B&H Electric's Bob Thomas's warranty seminar actually morphed into the roundtable topic discussion.

The formal roundtable was moderated by Melton for the 16th year. With Mike Schroeder and Bradish answering questions, most dubbed it the only candid, mutually supportive exchange between rebuilders and suppliers they had ever heard.

Litens' Al Steadman's presentation on pulleys drew another crowd, and he gave the show "two thumbs up."

ERA President Hank Henke showed the younger generation a thing or two about magnetos and how to make extra money by adding this to their services. Casey Barrett of Dakota Battery and Electric in Rapid City, S.D., said Henke inspired him to set up a test bench and start repairing magnetos.

WAIglobal's Mario Cespedes rounded out the Saturday seminars with a presentation on water-cooled alternator and electronics technology.

Sunday seminars were focused on marketing and promotions, with Dan Smith of Arrowhead Electrical Products speaking on promoting the small rebuilder. First-time presenter Neil Szigethy of CarKnack shared some excellent information on why and how to brand your business. Szigethy's decades of international marketing experience with Lexus and Subaru provided some fascinating anecdotes and priceless practical branding nuggets.

And last, but not least, new ERA officers were elected at the annual Sunday morning ERA breakfast and board meeting. (See page 18 for the full list of ERA's newly elected national board of advisors.)

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