

Blowing Our Industry's Collective Horn

They say in life if you don't blow your own horn, nobody else will. This past month our industry celebrated its 60th annual National Business Aviation Association Convention and it was an industry gathering that truly celebrated our collective lifeblood.

Over 32,000 attendees converged in Atlanta, Georgia, to blow our own industry horn. We had so much to celebrate, as we met to create relationships, to see the new offerings presented by aviation product manufacturers as well as Aircraft OEMs, and to compare notes and learn the latest in operational tips. Rich with content in the form of tax, maintenance and safety seminars and presentations, opportunities for exchange abounded.

This year, as in recent years past, the International component of our industry keeps getting stronger and greater in numbers, and the convention gave us an opportunity to see this significant change, with attendees coming from all corners of the globe. Most manufacturers of aircraft report that between 50 to 60 percent of their current deliveries, as well as their backlogs, are earmarked for shipment and delivery abroad. We always think of the manufacturer delivering a finished product, but seldom do we dissect the product and think of the product mix now leaving our country and creating a presence abroad for avionics, engines and aircraft components manufacturers.

So often we find ourselves defending our industry, but in Atlanta we were able to stand proud and tall. The convention honored many of our industry's top contributors. Mr. Bryan Moss, President Emeritus of Gulfstream Aerospace, was given the Meritorious Service Award in recognition of his 40-year career in the aviation industry and substantial contributions to the advancement of business aviation. Mr. Pat Epps, founding member of Epps Aviation, was honored with the Doswell Award to honor his demonstration of a long, continuous history of volunteer service in the field of aviation.

Both honorees were genuinely touched by

their respective awards. Just watching and listening to their individual acceptance speeches made each person attending the ceremonies equally as proud of their successes and proud to be a part of this industry.

Additionally, as another source of pride, this year the NBAA, along with Home Depot, provided funding and supplies for the building of an aviation-themed playground for an Atlanta elementary school. The park, complete with two playground areas, an outdoor classroom, an airplane-shaped sandbox, and a community garden, will be enjoyed by Atlanta kids for years to come.

Of course I want to be very careful to point out the very real challenges that we as an industry face in our very near future. We are running out of skilled professionals to fill the jobs that our success is creating. Pilots and maintenance technicians are in short supply, and growing new talent will be essential for our industry to sustain and grow.

Career days and fairs are being hosted on a regular basis and this is an area where each of you enjoying the growth of our industry can play a vital part. Watch the industry press for events in your local areas. Get involved and be a part of the planning and execution of these important events. We must attract the attention of kids to begin to dream of a future in aviation, and then as they get older, show them ways to find meaningful careers in aviation. Growing a pool of talent is our future. Passion for aviation cannot start too early in a person's life.

Additionally, we as an industry will be tasked with making meaningful contributions to our environment. We will be called upon to be positive contributors to a healthy environment. This year at the convention, as I went to meetings and gatherings, this subject came up often. We must meet the challenge head on and be a proactive force in change. I assure each of you that this conversation was not a passive one. It was an active theme this year. I didn't hear anyone discount this topic or fail to give it its due importance when questioned. I am not sure we have all the industry answers yet, but I am sure we are collectively focused.

Lastly, our industry is in a huge battle over a future increase cost due to User Fees as part of the FAA Reauthorization Plan. This fee that is being suggested could add new, sizable cost and administrative hassles to



our aviation operations. I implore each of you to go to the NBAA website - www.nbaa.org - today and learn what you can do to fight this fee. On the site you will find not only a tremendous amount of information about the issue, but also important ways for you to get involved.

Please do not be passive about this issue. Using the tools on the site you can easily communicate directly with your representatives in Congress to let them know how this fee could negatively affect your industry and your very own future. The site makes this communication easy with its one touch "Contact Congress" button. The effort that NBAA as well as all the Business and General Aviation associations have mounted to fight this battle has been quite impressive, and our hats are off to all their respective leadership for this effort.

So with the high fives and the horn blowing over, and the day-to-day back in place, we have our work cut out for us to keep our industry populated, safe, informed and conscious. I do not know of a better group of dedicated and passionate professional partners with whom to move into the future. Needless to say, I am a very proud participant in this industry that I have called home for over 30 years.

› Jay Mesinger is the CEO of J. Mesinger Corporate Jet Sales, Inc. He is on the NBAA Board of Directors and is Vice Chairman of AMAC. Additionally, he is on the Duncan Aviation Customer Advisory Board. He also hosts the Aviation Leadership Roundtable found at www.jetsales.com ■