



EDITOR'S INK: MAKING PROGRESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

By Brian Cruickshank, AAP



Consider all the challenges our industry faces. And then consider that the solution to them just might be in your own hometown.

You've probably never heard of Wellsville, NY, or Alfred State College for that matter. But both have an impact on this industry.

Wellsville, located near the Pennsylvania border, is a small town, typical of that part of the country. It's home to Alfred State College's automotive and heavy-duty programs, which train student technicians who are recruited from as far away as Georgia.

So while you may not have heard of Alfred State College, the folks at UniSelectUSA/MAWDI sure have. At a recent open house I attended at Alfred, the distributor's executive vice president Jim Buzzard talked about his passion for supporting educational programs such as those in Wellsville. Think about the industry's many, many challenges: the high cost of business, OE competition, increased automotive complexity, the industry's tarnished image, the lack of qualified employees. The list could go on and on. A lot of brain power, honest hard work and lip service have been devoted to addressing these challenges. However, if you ask Buzzard about them, he has a simple answer: Education.

As executive vice president at one of the largest WD and store groups in the United States and Canada, Buzzard is in a position to do something about these challenges, to put his money where his mouth is, so to speak. And he has. His own company has developed a special partnership with Alfred State that Buzzard believes will prove fruitful for everyone - repair shops, motorists, parts stores and manufacturers. You can read about his company's efforts to help industry education in an article that starts on page 116.

Buzzard and the people at Uni-SelectUSA/MAWDI are right on the mark. A strong educational foundation is the only way this industry will be able to address the challenges it faces. Unfortunately, vo-tech schools and technical colleges are perennially in trouble. They are routinely under funded, and are among the first to go on the chopping block when levies fail or money gets tight. I know of at least one technical college that recently disbanded its auto parts program in the Pacific Northwest. Think about the effect that will have on the local stores and repair shops in the area.

From personal experience, I can tell you that the automotive and heavy-duty programs at Alfred State College are real gems. They are full of students who are enthusiastic about this business. They want to make the automotive service industry their careers. They are our future.

Look around, and I bet you'll find a gem just like Alfred State in your own area. Take Uni-Select/MAWDI's lead and go meet with them. See how you can support them. It will be good for your community, good for your customers, good for business and good for the industry.