



Vector company photo at Mine Expo 2024 in Las Vegas.



108 Years Old Is the New 30

**Why AGMA's tenure doesn't
affect its relevancy to a modern
manufacturer**

**Rebecca Brinkley, Senior Director,
Member Engagement, AGMA**

It was a busy year for the gear industry. Large and small companies had to navigate the interest rates, tariffs, supply chain disruptions, labor shortages, and the unknown economic outlook with an election year in the U.S. Leaders that normally would be brainstorming their five-year strategic plans had to get comfortable with a day-to-day strategy. As each quarter ended, however, AGMA witnessed resiliency, innovation, collaboration, and even quite a bit of growth for some sectors—it was an exciting year to visit members in person.



AGMA Member Federal Gear showcases various-sized projects they handle at their manufacturing plant in Cleveland.

AGMA Member Forest City Gear CEO Kika Young shows AGMA's Senior Director, Events & Education, Leah Lewis, some of the products they manufacture at their facility in Rockford, IL.



AGMA staff, including myself, logged thousands of miles traveling worldwide to see first-hand the incredible work that manufacturers and suppliers do to keep the industry healthy and up to date with emerging technologies, smart factories, apprenticeship programs and so much more. The right association does not just support its members from behind a desk but goes to events, tradeshow, manufacturing plants, and conferences to connect those it serves—AGMA goes where its members are, and that is how we can offer the best value even after 100 years.

One of the most consistent things between all the places I traveled was the focus on modernizing the plant floor, creating sustainable solutions to improve processes and life cycle, communicating with end users, and, as usual, growing and training the future workforce. Let's take a deeper dive into what much of this means for those here in the U.S. and what we saw at the international level.

Modernization of the Manufacturing Process

Four years ago, AGMA dedicated a full-time person to developing an Emerging Technology department to: "Identify, investigate, and inform AGMA members of emerging technologies that may disrupt or significantly impact the gear manufacturing industry." The AGMA Board of Directors and staff built the department based on members' needs to further understand what could affect their business on a technological level and to be the conduit for subject matter experts to share real-time data and solutions through webinars, guest speakers, or industry events. Many of the members who

Head of Customer Service Cutting and Grinding Oils at Blaser Swiss-lube, Patrick Toenz, teaches Senior Director, Member Engagement, AGMA, Rebecca Brinkley how to measure and detect impurities in lubrications to avoid any downtime in manufacturing.



visited this year expressed the unparalleled value that this department has brought to their plant managers, operators, and even the leadership at the strategic planning level.

Across the globe, smaller factories brought in automation for the first time. They invested in having the capability to remove the third shift, if necessary because they had a cell that could work overnight to complete work. Many did not know if bringing in robotic arms or more sophisticated machines would be financially viable. Still, they beamed with pride when demonstrating the efficiency and productivity the technology made possible. Although some employees are still skeptical about how their future fits with the “machines,” they do acknowledge that there is more flexibility. As automation becomes more mainstream and affordable, one question remains: Now, you are not just bringing in a robot; how do you train your current operators to run it?

Sustainability of the Manufacturing Process

You will hear the word sustainability if you have visited a trade-show, conference or manufacturing company in Europe recently (along with many other places). This is where many of the visits differed among members – the focus of what that word means. For some, it is a marketing term that meets the demands of what the end user’s consciousness tells them to buy, but for others, it is an authentic way of life. From government regulations to company footprint policies, many suppliers and manufactur-



AGMA Board Member, Star SU President, Andreas Blind and Director of Marketing, Mark Parillo, stand in front of their gear-cutting tools table at the 2024 IMTS in Chicago.

ers prioritize clean energy, operational efficiencies, protecting natural resources and environments, and just taking a long-term approach to how they offer solutions. I could see charts on plant floors, listen to staff meetings at foundries, and learn how companies want to maximize the importance of “thinking before doing” in all parts of their jobs.

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A new AGMA Member Affolter Group apprentice demonstrates learned machining skills at the manufacturing facility in Bien, Switzerland.

It is important to note that even with the best intentions, sometimes the job needs to get out the door as quickly as possible. Many manufacturers stated that for most of the year, they were not even out to bid—they either did not have enough capacity or lead times, pushing them back with some supply chain issues. Either way, it is all hands on deck, and although they will meet the regulatory requirements, the sustainability effort might take a back burner to meet customers' demands. If you are in the defense, aerospace, space or medical industries—you might be able to relate to this. Either way, we see an increase in the number of members talking about the subject; AGMA is committed to ensuring that all the regulations, government contract requirements and other important resources are discussed during our Trade Webinars—another way we offer value to the modern manufacturer.

Workforce of the Manufacturing Process

Having a well-trained staff has been a challenge for the trades for decades. Whether it is the reputation of doing dirty jobs, the lack of decent pay, or just difficult hours to balance a family and work, people have not given manufacturing jobs a fair shake, and our members feel it. It does not matter what country you work in; the workforce issue is everywhere. When touring many factories, it was evident that machines were left unused and entire cells were dark from months of not having enough staff. Although that is not a great news story, it is a truth that many people face and, therefore, find ways around it. Many staff



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AGMA's Senior Director, Member Engagement, Rebecca Brinkley, stands shocked after seeing a giant double helical gear at her recent Horsburgh & Scott visit.

saw fewer people at tradeshow booths to avoid disruption back at the plant, some events did not attract two or three people from the same company to avoid downtime, and unless the programming was imperative, our Gear Geeks had to weigh out the ROI of each thing they signed up for.

AGMA has pivoted to meet this issue by offering many resources online. The Workforce Training Series, the three online courses that are free to members, has been fully revamped and updated to help businesses provide an immediate training tool right from the comfort of their computers. Other classes have been put online and now, more than ever, our instructors have been contracted to go onsite to teach operators on their machines. The business saves money on travel and hotel expenses, and its employees get to apply the skills they have learned in their direct work environment. This value goes far beyond the dollar and can ensure employees feel invested, making them stay longer.



Our association's job is to make our members' jobs easier. Whether that is through being the periscope for emerging technologies and gathering subject matter experts to share realistic solutions or through offering education to help teach and grow their workforce, AGMA and its Board of Directors work diligently with members to drive the value of what is included with membership. Traveling around the world to visit with hundreds of members in 2024 gave us great insight into the needs and wants of those on the plant floor and in the C-Suite. We are grateful to be the resource many in the gearing community consider their go-to. We love gathering our industry professionals and talking about the important things happening to them and because of them. A great deal of planes, trains and automobiles later, I still think that I have the best members on the planet, and I know my fellow AGMA staff members are working to ensure that we reach another 108 years of providing value (but still only looking 30)!

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