

# AMERICAN NEWS



Compiled by Fastener World

## NFDA Panel: AI Attracts Younger Employees

A fastener company's adoption of Artificial Intelligence can be important in hiring younger employees who want a "forward thinking company," panelist Lonni Kieffer of SmartCert pointed out during a National Fastener Distributors Association panel on "Using the Power of AI & Automation to Make Your Business More Efficient."

"It's here," panelist Rosa Hearn declared of AI. AI is knowledge based, Hearn of Brighton-Best International said. "We've been feeding it for years." Any postings to Facebook or Google are now somewhere in AI, Hearn explained. Hearn advised checking what AI knows about your company already. "Be careful what you put into ChatGPT," she cautioned. She cited the incident of a Samsung engineer posting new proprietary information and "now those company secrets are in the public domain."

Can AI make you a better salesperson? AI can learn about Rosa's style from Facebook, LinkedIn and emails and be told to write a "personal" email to a customer. "Is it good enough to give the customer the "fuzzy wuzzies"?" Hearn asked. "Time will tell." AI "doesn't know how to say 'I don't know,'" Hearn pointed out.

Melissa Patel of Field said the Illinois-based fastener distributor chose to migrate to Power BI with a goal of improving results. "How do we find the right actions at the right time for the right people?" she asked. AI allows Field to manage profitability by categories such as by customer or even by branch. It also points to changing trends over time that allows Field to drill into item levels. It also allows Field to ask: What is the profit of this customer in the future? Is there a need to raise or lower prices? "BI allows us to see very clearly where we might have issues looking ahead," Patel said.



Using the technology, Field can create a customer profit scorecard, measure other costs such as VMI, freight, excess lines and payment terms. Patel termed BI "a culture shift" that provides data to make decisions that are elevated to a new level. Picking apart the data "allows us to see more about profit quickly." In the future, Field will be able to share more information with suppliers and customers that is specific to them, Patel forecast.

Lonni Kieffer, co-founder of SmartCert, said AI isn't really new if you think of consumer use of thermostats, GPS, online shopping and social media. Those have been moved from paper to digital and "these tools are all meant to provide efficiencies." It is also part of "continuous learning" needed in "upscaling workers." Kieffer sees SmartCert's job as a "technology partner" helping to "make life easier." AI can read documents on your behalf, eliminate human error that you have with manual entry and create searchable data. Older emails are "fraught with peril," Kieffer said. AI is going to get smarter yet, Kieffer predicted.

Alex Goldberg of AMPG said the fastener manufacturer began in AI by scheduling three of their 70 machines. AI finds parts that are meant to be run together because of the tools it took to make an item, Goldberg said. The first standardization was bar diameter. Now AMPG can group unlike products together to produce fasteners with the least amount of tooling changes. AI can "recognize patterns that humans can't." Goldberg said.

Goldberg said AMPG has used 30,000 setup sheets of paper previously in scheduling. "AI compliments traditional QC processes," Goldberg said. For example, measurements are fed into a database. If a product is growing or changing, a message is sent to stop the machine. "We run 24/7 with mostly unattended machines," and the alarms stop eight hours of bad parts, Goldberg said. AMPG will roll out more use of AI to the rest of the manufacturing floor.

## STAFDA President: Labor Shortages Delay Projects

Business owners and customers spent 2023 dealing with labor shortages on a large scale, the president of the Specialty Tools & Fasteners Distributors Association said in his State-of-the-Industry speech.

"Personnel shortages and lack of skilled labor have made it difficult for many to complete projects on time and on budget," Harry Klassen observed.

Klassen, of Fastek Inc. of St Catharines, ON, joined STAFDA in 1998 when the convention was in Toronto. Klassen said the province of Ontario has signed 27,000 people to skilled trades – a 24% increase over 2022. Ontario is using an "all-hands-on-deck approach," which includes building skilled trades training centers across the province, letting trades recruiters into high schools and even loosening rules on how early high school students can start apprenticeships.

In 2022, the construction industry employed over 1.5 million Canadians, or approximately one of every 13 working Canadians, Klassen said. The number employed in US construction is over eight million. The Canadian Mortgage & Housing Corporation predicts the country needs five



million more homes by 2030 for housing to be affordable. With retirements, the construction industry needs a “daunting” number of 300,000 workers by 2032.

“Ask any developer about supply issues and the availability of labour usually tops the list, Klassen said. “And there is no shortage of statistical evidence of that shortage. With no less than 80,000 job vacancies in the Canadian industry it is of a record high.” Klassen recalled he thought his high school classes offered “no bearing on my future” and was anxious to “get out into the work force.” He learned finish carpentry from his father, including framing houses, concrete work and drywall. “We even built a few homes together.” Klassen said he got his education through “the school of hard knocks.” Classroom learning “is advisable,” Klassen conceded. “The future of construction and distribution lies in the hands of younger people getting involved.”

Klassen started a distributorship with “nothing to lose: A 500 sq ft office “and some crazy dreams, I turned a clothes closet into my repair room and so it began.” He sold to anyone who would come into the store and repaired all of the pneumatic tools and compressors “on my own.” When Klassen started selling pneumatic tools “many guys were still of the point of needing convincing that this was the wave of the future.” Thirty years ago, “I went to the job sites where I used the tools and showed the doubters the speed and ease of these new systems. There were “objections like you would not believe!”

“They won’t hold!” workers doubted. “To which I replied ....The glue on the nails holds better than hand drive nails.” He set up demos alongside “the fastest guys on site and crushed them.” He used his 12th grade math skills to show them the payback. “With the long hours and hard work I convinced many to jump on board and a lot of those customers are still with me today.”

Klassen also “learned quickly that selling one line of products wouldn’t be sustainable for long or keep customers coming back.” He started to carry hand and power tools and “our product lines grew and grew.” “What I do know is that in history if times are tough... a slowdown or recession hits, our industry is typically the last one in and the first one out of any economic downturn,” Klassen observed.

Klassen predicted problems are going to be solved by being creative, such as “building with better materials and tools and I know that is why we are here. ....We have seen 3D printing with plastic. How about 3D printing with concrete?” In the world of modern construction, technology can help attract young workers who have grown up in a digitally interconnected world and want to make an impact in the industry, Klassen said. He noted 40% of companies are using A.I.

“As with the inception of pneumatic nailers when I started in business and cordless tools in general, technology is changing to increase the speed and ease of completing projects,” Klassen said. “We have learned to adapt and change over the centuries,” Klassen reflected. “And as we navigate this new normal, we will adapt as we learn to create new ways to speed up and improve processes. As we look around this room there are young and old and it will take all of us pushing our industry forward with new tools and technologies to help our customers succeed!”

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## Brighton-Best International & Parker Fasteners Partnership

Brighton-Best International (BBI), Long Beach, CA, USA, and Parker Fasteners, Buckeye, AZ, USA, announced the formation of a strategic partnership on October 10, 2023, at the International Fastener Expo (IFE) in Las Vegas, NV, USA, starting in 2024. This partnership is likely to revolutionize the fastener industry by having quicker lead times on domestic stainless-steel sockets. Parker Fasteners, a manufacturer with a strong foothold in the domestic market, has been operational for over a decade and has earned a reputation for being customer-centric. Brighton-Best International has been operational for nearly 100 years and is known for its commitment to socket products and national high levels of stock. The agreement will focus on promoting the expansion of BBI's stainless-steel lines. The partnership is expected to support distributor companies to expand their reach and increase their revenue and product offering of stainless steel.

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## Ford Fasteners Marks Its 60th Year Anniversary

Steve Cellary, President of Ford Fasteners, Inc., NJ, USA, reports, "Ford Fasteners is proud to announce our 60th year anniversary of supplying our customers with quality 410 stainless steel screws. We supply self-drilling, self-piercing/sharp point and thread cutting screws. We also provide EPDM bonded sealing washers. Washers are assembled to our screws in-house with our high-speed machinery for quick delivery. We pride ourselves with excellent customer service and we strive for same day shipping. We are independently owned and operated and are based in Fairfield."



## Huyett Acquires Big H Corporation

On December 1, 2023, Huyett, acquired all the assets and business of Big H Corporation, doing business as PacFas and Mobile Fasteners. Big H was founded by Buddy Beaman in 1974 and, over the next 49 years, expanded into 84,000 ft<sup>2</sup> of industrial space near I-45 and Hobby Airport in South Houston, TX, USA, just miles from the Houston Port. The acquisition of Big H solidifies Huyett's market presence as a master distributor of industrial fasteners. Huyett CEO, Timothy O'Keefe states that incorporating Big H's expertise and established customer relationships into Huyett's operations represents a significant step forward in the company's growth strategy. This move will lay the optimum foundation for a seamless transition into 45,000 new SKUs, largely consisting of threaded fasteners that Huyett previously was not offering. O'Keefe commented, "We are excited to welcome Big H Corporation into the Huyett family. We look forward to continuing the Big H legacy and delivering unparalleled products and services to our customers."



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## IFI Grows with 14 New Members in 2023

The Industrial Fasteners Institute (IFI) has added 14 companies to its membership roster in 2023. These new members comprise a diverse array of industry-leading companies, reflecting IFI's continued growth. The following companies have joined the ranks of IFI membership in 2023. New Manufacturer Members include Chicago Rivet & Machine Co., CSM Fastener Products, Indux, SA de CV and Level 1 Fasteners, Inc. New Supplier Members are Bluewater Thermal Solutions, Dimac Srl, Industrial Steel Treating, Jehren Industries, Inc., King Steel Corp. and SmartCert. IFI also announces approval of its newest members including CMC Anchoring Systems (manufacturer), Chicago Fastener Manufacturing (manufacturer), FPM Heat Treating (supplier) and Carver Labs (supplier). The Industrial Fasteners Institute's membership now stands at 135 manufacturers and 60 suppliers, which represents a 10% increase in the association's membership since the year 2020. ■

