

## **SPEAKING OF ISSUES FOREWORD**

On April 13, 1997, an 80th birthday, I left the day-by-day operations of ELEVATOR WORLD. During some 45 years, I had – as publisher, editor and/or owner – written a personal message in the front of the book almost every month, beginning with the first issue in January 1953. The early contributions could hardly be termed “editorials” – pieces that traditionally are given substantial forethought and relate to a current problem or pertinent activity of a particular industry. During ELEVATOR WORLD’s embryonic days in the mid-1950s, the short personal message was essentially a report that the magazine had survived one more month – still alive and functioning.

The elevator industry’s first trade publication was created and sustained as a hobby, the bulk of activity by my wife, Mary Sands, and myself being at night and on weekends. Unable to support itself financially for about seven years, ELEVATOR WORLD depended upon the largess of the family and the Mobile Elevator & Equipment Co., an independent elevator contracting firm of which I was partner and president. The firm operated in Alabama, the Florida Panhandle and Southern Mississippi. A sales territory stretching 400 miles north from Mobile to the Tennessee border and from Gulfport, Mississippi to Port St. Joe in Florida (with substantial emptiness between towns and cities!) required constant attention and coverage. As a consequence, the editor’s personal messages in the early issues of ELEVATOR WORLD were given only a “lick and a promise.” A perusal of the earliest “Speaking of Issues” reveals short progress reports concerning a hobby trying to turn itself into a business.

Thoughts concerning a medium that would educate and bring news to the industry – providing the glue that could hold previously isolated specialists and companies together – emerged after I became one of a dozen founders of the National Association of Elevator Contractors (NAEC) in 1950. Shortly thereafter, as association president, then volunteer executive director, the problems and aspirations of the independent elevator contractors gradually became more fully understood. These industry elements, operating in relative isolation, required a message center or clearing house, facilitating the exchange of ideas. The majority of NAEC contractors wished to circulate a newsletter only among members. I and others felt that the communication medium should have wide circulation, drawing many industry members into membership. Paul John Kern, a prolific technical man, writer, philosopher and publisher of the NAEC newsletter, also felt that a trade publication could best hold together an entire industry. He became ELEVATOR WORLD’s Associate Editor and my strong right arm. Much was learned from him about keeping messages simple and relevant to the everyday lives of industry members.

Editing a trade magazine would be a completely new enterprise. Question: did I have the ability to communicate, selecting obvious industry problems for the monthly message? I had dealt with a number of component suppliers while operating Mobile Elevator & Equipment Co. and had a reasonably good impression how editorializing might serve their best interests. The two years spent in the field as a helper and mechanic for the contracting firm had provided a feel for the industry’s equipment; handling all the bits and pieces on the jobsite, I knew how they joined together to perform their combined function. As a founder of International Union of Elevator Constructors (IUEC) Local 128, I had gained an understanding of union politics and operations – and goals of the industry’s union leadership, as well as the grass roots membership. Editorials could reflect knowledge of, and many conversations with, various segments of the industry.

However, with the publication being supported by my contracting firm, I was wearing two hats – trying to gain advertising, subscription and editorial support from an entire industry, even while competing in the contracting business with some of the very companies whose help was needed. A choice had to be made – contracting or independent full-time publishing and editing. In 1963, the contracting firm was sold to the Montgomery Elevator Company, a 100-year-old manufacturer in Moline, Illinois. Thereafter, only one hat was worn – that of editor/publisher. The matter of writing an editorial each month had to be examined afresh. How would our editorial policy now be affected? Could editing be realistically carried on as a life's work? Readers expected much less from a hobby than a full-fledged business operation. Would the total industry adequately support even a "one-hat man"?

Of concern was the absence of formal journalistic training. Would this be a serious handicap? Five years in the service during World War II taught much about handling staff communications, quickly and accurately. That written in ELEVATOR WORLD, however, would be a far cry from concise military correspondence and the honing of official directives. On the other hand, my elevator contracting firm's correspondence with specifiers and buyers, of necessity, had become ever-more creative and expository. Best of all, communications within the trade associations had engendered correspondence requiring substance as well as style. Service as a volunteer executive director of NAEC over a span of 18 months, mothering the embryonic association's members, had whetted the appetite for another level of mentoring – through a new trade publication.

Later, when the contracting operation had stabilized into a profitable operation, involvement with local and state political, cultural, civic, social and educational groups had led to years of written and oral presentations relating to a wide range of activities outside the elevator industry. Such involvement, when massaged editorially, often appeared to have relevance for our own industry. When involved with the Federal Civil Defense Administration, editing the independent CIVIL DEFENDER magazine, our elevator industry members were envisioned among any nuclear conflict victims and physical survival became a topic along with economic survival. Over the years, readers would ask that subscriptions be addressed to their homes, as the editorials spoke to the "whole person as well as industry specialists." This was the ultimate gratification, for we always saw industry members as human beings first – members of a particular discipline, thereafter.

ELEVATOR WORLD was founded with the assistance of a group of suppliers that pledged to advertise for one year. The suppliers; Alexander Sill, C.J. Anderson, F.G. Arwood, A.M. White, Looms Machine Co., Peelle Co., Rotary Lift, Security Fire Door, Sedgwick Machine Works, Shepard Elevator Co. and Standard Steel Specialty Co. had a valid reason to advertise. Monthly issues of a trade magazine were, for the first time, being sent to many of their best customers. Even so, these suppliers were taking a flyer on a project never before attempted. Without these initial advertisers, the magazine would not have come into being and been sustained for the first few years.

Our existence, initially, was owed to companies supplying components and systems to the elevator companies – primarily the so-called "independents." The contractors bought bulk subscriptions and, in supporting the advertisers, supported the publication. In time, we received editorial support from the major international manufacturers, whose specialists submitted technical articles. From the beginning, those firms marketing components and systems joined me in feeling that the magazine, to have long-range perpetuity, should represent every segment of the industry, all manufacturers,

suppliers and contractors – large and small – and union as well as nonunion operators. Later, when inspectors and consultants became a viable portion of the industry, they were served as well. This philosophy of inclusion has been maintained for almost half a century.

The editorial page was the one site belonging solely to the editor, the place for his personal opinion – where he could let his hair down. Hopefully, when he did, readers would separate an issue's general content from that of the editorial, accepting that the editor could and should speak out, and stake out, a position even while the magazine stood in the center, serving all segments and ideologies impartially.

Even so, the publication's first board of directors and Technican Advisory Committee (TCC) developed what they considered to be our "industry dynamics", topics most often concerning the industry leadership (education, safety, liability, historic preservation, codes, standards, new technology, market analysis and statistics, labor management relations, big government intrusion, to name a few). The status of these dynamics were continually addressed.

Periodically, a substantial group within the industry would request that an editorial, or series, concern a contemporary problem – even crisis; that possible solutions be laid out. The three-part "State of the Union" editorial was such, as were the editorials concerning the appearance, evolution and over-abundance of industry trade fairs. Only lengthy interviewing of resource people could give such pieces relevance.

Once my contracting business was sold and full time devoted to the publication, the industry could be seen with new eyes. An editor on the road, visiting factories and attending industry conventions and other meetings, holding discussions with industry leadership, was convinced that the editorial page was, indeed, the place to "speak out on issues." Once the magazine came to serve an international readership and advertisers, it was logical that editorializing would concern the worldwide industry.

The editorials were well-received over the decades, and in recent years, a number of readers suggested there be a compilation providing newcomers a feel of the atmosphere that existed in times past. For old friends and associates, a rereading might bring a bit of nostalgia. As we did speak monthly about the dynamics of the industry and current issues, the sequence of editorials provides a feel for the history of the industry over almost half a century; construction booms and recessions, strikes, interference by the government, the founding and growth of a score of trade associations and of emerging elevator trade publications, pioneering congresses and expositions. We sought to unearth the history of our industry and to peer into the future. What was an "elevator"? What was the composition of our industry? Ropeways? Industrial lifts? Horizontal people movers?

Innovation was ever sought. We continued to editorialize concerning the changing nature of ELEVATOR WORLD, itself. References to the teletypewriter, fax and Internet bore out that technology was ever-changing for international trade publications. Feeling the readers would want to maintain familiarity with "their" publication, we editorialized concerning: the first Annual Study; the Source Directory; the first industry library; the Elevator World Educational Program; the Educational Division; the acquisition of headquarters buildings, growth of staff from two to twenty-five, and growth of correspondents from none to some 40, around the globe. The better the readership knew our physiognomy the more they would tend to read and accept that written. This compilation provides a sense of how a trade magazine was conceived and grew over half a century. The editorials also bespoke an evolving elevator industry, innovative equipment and the coming into being of new specialists, including the elevator consultants.

In scanning the editorials into my computer at home, I find a “mixed bag.” It is not surprising that over nearly a half century, certain themes were repeatedly visited; with the editor harboring strong feelings about certain subjects, redundancy reared its head! Many reiterations have been edited out. Even so, it is difficult not to have a pride of authorship and write concerning organizations founded. A godfather is apt to dwell upon his offspring.

Many pieces were written during the uncreative periods with which all humans – particularly writers – are afflicted. The readers shouldn’t be burdened with them! The editorials within this compilation came out of the typewriter keys in a flow, having an immediate appeal to the writer. Subsequent oral and written responses from the field indicated that these also touched a nerve with readers. This was the purpose. My best times at the typewriter were when “Speaking of Issues”. If some in the readership felt the monthly editorials were written specifically for them, that was the frosting on the cake.

They were!

. . . William C. Sturgeon, Chairman of the Board