

Spring Conference Highlights

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PMI members and Spring Conference attendees participated in a Habitat for Humanity project in New Orleans' Ninth Ward neighborhoods still recovering from the 2005 devastation. PMI photo.

Plumbing Manufacturers International hosted its Spring Conference Mar. 27-30 at the Hotel Monteleone in New Orleans. "Let the Good Times Roll...Again" was the theme for this meeting, capturing the idea that, as the economy picks up speed and member companies see their business expand, good times will come back to manufacturers. Intertwining with economic success, political and environmental themes hold significant influence.

The PMI 2011 Spring Conference started with an opening keynote presentation by Democratic political strategist James "The Ragin' Cajun" Carville. Carville spoke on the political environment in Washington, D.C., and offered his opinion on world issues. A native and resident of Louisiana, Carville's passion for his home state was clear as he talked about people's "unique ability to

change, and to do it quickly." Addressing the topic of responsible water use, he acknowledged consumer choice includes awareness, education and the ability to make personal decisions and trade-offs.

Terry Swack of Sustainable Minds, LLC followed Carville and spoke on Life Cycle Assessment. Swack shared examples of how the company's on-demand, Web-based software acts like a "TurboTax for LCA" to estimate, compare and track the life cycle for the environmental and human health performance of products during early design stages. These easy-to-understand, graphic and data-rich summaries allow users to evaluate trade-offs affecting their products' economic and ecological footprints and maximize greener product innovation.

Continuing on the topic of sustainability, Scott McDougall of TerraChoice examined green marketing issues. Part of Underwriters Laboratories' global network, TerraChoice authors the acclaimed "Sins of Greenwashing" studies and works with clients to help avoid these. Greenwashing is the act of misleading consumers about the environmental practices of a company or the

environmental benefits of a product or service.

Between March and May 2010, TerraChoice visited 34 retail stores in the U.S. and Canada. From these visits, McDougall noted the 2010 study found big box retailers stock more "green" products and more products with legitimate environmental certifications than smaller "green" boutique-style stores. The study also reported marketers and product manufacturers are getting better, with greenwashing trending down among those who have been focused on environmentally preferable practices longer than others. The proportion of "sin-free" products is five times greater in "mature" categories like building, construction and office products than in "immature" categories like toys and baby products. TerraChoice's research also highlighted that "good eco-labeling helps prevent (but does not eliminate) greenwashing-of the products certified by a recognized third-party certification, more than 30 percent are sin-free."

McDougall provided insight on language choices in TerraChoice's own marketing efforts, describing the connotative differences of "sinning," "fibbing" and "lying." An expert in deciphering public perception, Pat Cleary of Fleishman-Hillard gave a spirited presentation on crisis communications in a world where search engines and social media drive consumers' opinions and purchases.

Beyond opinions, Norbert Gannon of the U.S. Department of Commerce shared an

overview of unfair trade laws dealing with product dumping, unfair foreign government subsidies, and the process of filing a petition requesting an investigation. Gannon also emphasized any counseling provided prior to the official filing of a petition is held strictly confidential. He offered examples from other industries, including the shrimp industry, given his inspiration from PMI Spring Conference's Louisiana cuisine.

Louisiana resident, Simone "the Demo Diva" Bruni also provided inspiration with an emotional, personal tale of how her life changed after Hurricane Katrina. In the face of disaster, she saw an opportunity to create a new reality for herself in the residential demolition business. In addition to learning from Bruni's story of rebuilding after a disaster, PMI members and conference attendees participated in a Habitat for Humanity project in New Orleans' Ninth Ward neighborhoods still recovering from the 2005 devastation.

PMI volunteers also saw the progress on the Make It Right Foundation's largest, greenest neighborhood of single-family homes in the U.S., as well as the successful completion of the New Orleans Habitat Musicians Village. Supporting these efforts, a financial donation was presented to the New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity during the PMI 2011 Spring Conference. This is the second consecutive year PMI has contributed with both money and time.

A new feature was introduced at the PMI 2011 Spring Conference—a separate marketing track was offered in addition to

the traditional technical track. This new, dual-track system generated a great deal of interest, including several first-time attendees and marketing professionals.

PMI president Jack Krecek of Elkay Manufacturing Co. also welcomed two new board members, Paul Patton of Delta Faucet Co. and Tim Schroeder of Duravit USA; and a new Member Service Committee co-chair, Tom Liebhardt of Moen Inc. Bidding adieu, Sally Remedios of Delta was recognized for her many years in the plumbing industry. Remedios has retired, but will continue with Delta on a consulting basis.

During the conference, PMI members received a lapel pin, pen and mug imprinted with the association's new name and identity. For 35 years, PMI was the acronym for the Plumbing Manufacturers Institute. While preserving the reputation and recognition of PMI, the updated name-Plumbing Manufacturers International-reflects the association's and its members' worldwide involvement and outreach.

PMI's mission is to promote the water efficiency, health, safety, quality and environmental sustainability of plumbing products, while maximizing consumer choice and value in a fair and open marketplace; to provide a forum for the exchange of information and industry education; to represent openly the members' interests and advocate for sound environmental and public health policies in the regulatory/legislative processes; and to enhance the plumbing industry's growth and expansion.

As the voice of the plumbing industry, PMI's conferences are part of the strategic plan to deliver on this mission. As websites provide 24/7/365 access from nearly anywhere in the world, PMI also continues to invest in enhancing these communication tools. Visitors to www.pmihome.org will see a redesigned site that aligns with the new brand identity. Also featured are RSS news feed subscriptions for the homepage as well as a place for member-generated news.

The educational website maintains its independent design. Frequent updates are posted on the homepage and via RSS subscription for lawmakers, journalists, industry professionals and homeowners seeking information about clean, safe drinking water and water efficiency.

The PMI 2011 Fall Conference is scheduled for Sept. 18-21 at the Liaison Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. New this year, PMI will host an industry CEO panel during the event. George Will, noted columnist and political pundit, will moderate the panel and provide the conference's keynote address.