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*“A World of Plastics Information”*

**Part news. Part views.**

SPECIAL ISSUE

JUNE 2014

15<sup>TH</sup> YEAR

### EDITORS NOTE

Dear Colleague:

In our May-June 2014 issue we only published the first part of this interview. In the belief that it contains an important view of our industry's future, we are publishing it in its entirety in this special edition.

**INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS: ... Don Loepp, Editor, *Plastics News*, the pre-eminent publication covering our industry, with a weekly circulation of about 45,000. We interviewed Don in person and by email at his office in Detroit.** A graduate of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, Don worked at *The Milwaukee Journal*; *Daily Press* and *Times-Herald*, Newport News, VA. He joined *Plastics News* in 1991 and was promoted to News Editor in 1993, then Managing Editor in 1995 and Editor in 2011. Don has homes in Akron and Detroit.

*Q. What's the history of Plastics News? When founded? By whom? Where located?*

A. Plastics News was founded in 1989 – we will be celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. We have always been part of Crain Communications, a publisher of trade newspapers based in Detroit. PN was based in Akron, Ohio, until late 2013. Crain's Akron office is still home to two rubber-related publications: Rubber & Plastics News and Tire Business.

*Q. What is your background? How long with Plastics News?*

A. I have a bachelor's degree in journalism from Northwestern University, and I worked for daily newspapers in Wisconsin and Virginia for eight years before I joined Plastics News in 1991.

*Q. What's behind the relocation from Akron to Detroit?*

A. Moved to Detroit to take advantage of some of the resources that we have in our headquarters office. For example, Crain has a professional video studio in Detroit, which we now use for our weekly Material Insights video. We expect to use this, and other resources, more in the future.

*Q. How many staff writers are there? Support staff?*

A. Our editorial department has 11 full-time employees, plus about the same number of regular correspondents, many of them based around the world. In addition to that, we can call on the resources of sister publications like European Plastics News and PRW in Europe; Rubber & Plastics News; Automotive News; and many others.

*Q. How do you decide what front page stories are published?*

A. I could talk for hours about this one. The short answer is that it depends on what we're reporting each week. A story that might be on Page 1 one week could end up on an inside page a week later. I like to give prominent play to our big scoops. We're big on business news and interesting feature stories.

*Q. How do you cover the global plastics industry?*

A. Another good question. We've changed over time, our coverage is more international than it was in 1989. We have a staff reporter based in China, and regular correspondents just about everywhere else. In print, our readership is mostly in North America, so our coverage is written with them in mind.

*Q. What's your assessment for the "State of the Plastics Industry" for 2014? What about the rest of this decade?*

A. This is looking like a pretty good year for the plastics industry. There are signs of a manufacturing renaissance in North America, thanks to trends like re-shoring, low energy costs, and new investments in resin capacity. The auto industry has recovered. The construction market seems to be poised for a slow recovery. These are good signs for plastics processors, now and for the rest of the decade.

*Q. What are some of the most challenging problems faced by the industry this year?*

A. Plastics processor and toolmakers keep talking about the trouble they have recruiting and retaining enough talented workers, and this seems to be a real issue. We all know that parents and educators tend to steer kids away from manufacturing jobs. Fluctuations in resin prices are always a concern, that never seems to go away. A lot of the healthiest companies that we report on are conservative when it comes to taking on debt, and smart about developing a diverse and healthy base of customers. It seems like a simple strategy, but it works.

*Q. What are some of the biggest changes coming to the industry in the next 10 years?*

A. We continue to see consolidation in a lot of plastics sectors. Entrepreneurs that started plastics companies 10-20-30 years ago are retiring, or in some cases the second generation is getting ready to retire. Many companies are owned by private equity firms. International competition is real and will only increase. This will impact all sectors: tooling, machinery, materials, processing.

*Q. What advice would you give a new journalist just starting with your publication?*

A. One of the first things we tell new reporters is they should ask lots of questions. Most people in the plastics industry are eager to share information. Not many people ask them about what they do, so they tend to get fired up when someone shows an interest. That also applies to asking our experienced staffers for help and advice. We have some really smart journalists at PN, people like Bill Bregar (who covers machinery), Frank Esposito (materials), Steve Toloken (our staffer in China), Rhoda Miel (our news editor who covered the auto industry for many years), Nina Ying Sun (our managing editor for China), and Hollee Keller (our editorial research coordinator). A new journalist can learn a lot from these people.

*Q. On a personal note, what would you consider your greatest achievement?*

A. Professionally, I'm very proud of Plastics News' position in the market, and our reputation for doing really excellent show dailies. We've been doing dailies at NPE since 1991, and we did our first dailies at the K show just last year. Personally, my wife and I are very proud of our three daughters, who were all graduated from college last year and all found good jobs in their fields.

*Q. If you could return to Ohio or Michigan in another life, who would you be?*

A. That's a good question. I enjoy journalism, and would probably do it again if I was a kid just starting a career. But maybe I'd give some serious thought to being an entrepreneur. I have a lot of respect for the successful business owners who I talk with every week at Plastics News. I also like working with young people. I was an assistant high school soccer coach in Ohio, and that was very rewarding. I also had an opportunity to help elementary pupils in Akron learn to read, and that was something I looked forward to doing every week.

Thank You.

*Information contained in this newsletter has been taken from trade and statistical sources that we consider reliable but we cannot assure its accuracy or completeness. Any opinions expressed reflect our judgement as of this date and are subject to change.*

MEL ETTENSON'S GLOBAL PLASTICS LETTER™  
is published monthly by Lucitron Corporation,  
P.O. Box 250235, Franklin, Michigan 48025,  
USA. Postage paid at Royal Oak, Michigan. \$175 for 12 issues.

ISSN: 2164-7291

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