

Regional approach works well for area with a legacy in spring making

Business may have hit hard times, but one sector continues to be well represented at a biennial tabletop show held April 14 in a heartland of the U.S. spring industry. The single-day 2009 Table Top Trade Show, put on by the New England Spring & Metalstamping Association (NESMA), drew nearly 500 attendees to the Aqua Turf Country Club in Plantsville, Connecticut.

The event, started in 1957, had been annually until it switched to a biennial format in 2007. Attendance numbers have dwindled from the high point in the last 1990s, when as many as a thousand people attended, but the Northeast spring manufacturers continue a generations-old legacy that stems back from the 1800s, when Bristol, Connecticut, was known as the spring capital of the world, the organizers note.

“This is a very tight-knit group,” declared NESMA President Mark Leahy, national account manager for Connecticut Spring and Stamping, who said that the goal “is promote our industry and provide a forum for spring makers and suppliers to meet.” He said that 90 percent or more of the manufacturing attendees come from a 20-mile radius of Bristol, which was home to Associated Springs, now part of the Barnes Group, from which many smaller spring companies were started by former employees.

GEMCO Manufacturing’s Mark DiVenere, a third-generation springmaker who was a key organizer for the event, said the event continues to serve an important function. “That we drew what we did shows that despite the economy, we’ve got a great group of people here.” He pointed out that springmakers can compete yet remain friends as



From l-r, Suzanne von Steiger, Richard Rae, Jr., and Richard Rae, Sr., all of ERA Wire, and Connecticut Spring and Stamping’s Mark Leahy.

well as partners for special projects. Having 186 people stay for dinner following the show reflects how spring-making is both an occupation and a fraternity, he said.

It was a casual event, and while every company had been hit to some degree by the economy, the atmosphere was positive. Attendees could also inspect equipment from five exhibitors (Wafios, SPX/Fenn, Orlimec, AIM and NIM-SCO). Many suppliers were local, but one tabletop representative, A.I.Technology’s Terry Pettinger, said that he felt the event was worth the 11-hour drive from Detroit. “This is a large market for us,” he said, noting that his company has “a couple hundred pieces of machinery in the area.” Even if the spring field is slow, there is value in seeing some of the people who are using the equipment and letting them know you are there, he explained.

NESMA Board Member Richard Rae, Sr., who said that he has not missed a show, explained that the event remains special for the spring field because it provides a practical venue for the industry to meet. “There’s a lot of knowledge here,” he declared. The event also featured two technical presentations, one by Bob Iorio and Shannon Riotte from Gibbs Wire & Steel and one by Luke Zubek of the spring Manufacturing Institute (SMI).

Groups supporting the event included SMI and the Small Manufacturing Association (SMA). DiVenere also gave credit to efforts by the NESMA board, which also includes Secretary/ Treasurer Cindy Scoville, Bristol Chamber of Commerce; Bill Lathrop, Colonial Han Dee Spring; Bob Iorio, Gibbs Wire & Steel; Art Funk, Fourslide Spring & Stamping; George Fournier, Acme Monaco Corp.; Scott Kirkpatrick, Radcliffe Wire, William Waseleski, Century Spring and Manny Tavares, Rowley Springs. For more about NESMA go to www.nesma-usa.org.



Wafios Machinery Corp.’s Al Clement demonstrates the finer points of the Wafios FMU Superstar multi-axis CNC torsion spring machine to attendees at the April 14 NESMA show.