

DASMA executive director Addington retires

Industry leaders reflect on his impact

By Vicki Jones, Editor

A rock symbolizes stability, support, and a solid foundation. It also keenly represents John Addington's role as executive director of DASMA and of its predecessor, NAGDM. Addington served as the industry's behind-the-scenes facilitator for 31 years, and his guidance helped establish and advance a professional trade association with an international reputation.

The backstory

The National Association of Garage Door Manufacturers (NAGDM) was formed in 1968. In 1989, John H. Addington and his firm, Thomas Associates, was hired to manage the association.

Thomas Associates had been managing trade associations, mostly manufacturer associations, since 1913. Addington had



Addington had served as executive director of several associations while working at Thomas Associates since 1973.

served as executive director of various manufacturer associations since 1973. As it turned out, he was the right person at the right time to bring long-term stability to the association and the industry.

Around 1994, the NAGDM executive committee tossed around the idea of merging the industry's related associations into a single manufacturers' association. After a number of meetings, they concluded that establishing one unified association—to serve the interests of the door, operator, and remote-control manufacturers—would be better than three smaller entities.

There were many advantages to establishing one association, including that it would be more convenient and effective to have one collective group to deal with regulatory challenges and enhancing consumer safety.

Under Addington's direction, NAGDM offered the Door Operator and Remote Controls Manufacturers Association (DORCMA) and the American Rolling Door Institute (ARDI) the opportunity to merge with NAGDM. The DORCMA merger was completed in late 1995, and ARDI joined in 2006.

Addington is one of the few people still in the industry who was intimately involved in the birth of the new association. He said that the first order of business was to determine a name for the newly consolidated group.

"We ultimately decided on a name that no one particularly liked but it stuck, and the Door and Access Systems Manufacturers Association (DASMA) was formed."

Collective pursuit

The merging of the associations was a smooth process. This can be attributed in part to Addington's strong leadership. His experience working for similarly sized associations was valuable when DASMA

began to strategically plan its objectives.

Tom Wadsworth, the former Door + Access Systems editor for almost 20 years, said, "John helped to steer DASMA into being a professional and financially sound trade association that focused on the important topics. DASMA's stature grew because others recognized it as a first-class, professional, intelligent organization. We can thank John's steady hand at the wheel for that."

"I consider John a very close friend, a kind and honest man of the highest ethics, and he's easy to have personal conversations with on virtually any topic."

—Berge Miller, Miller Edge

Addington helped guide discussions that were beneficial to all parties, and his stable management was also behind bringing ARDI into the fold in 2006.

"At ARDI, we struggled with losing our independence," said Berge Miller, former ARDI president. "But

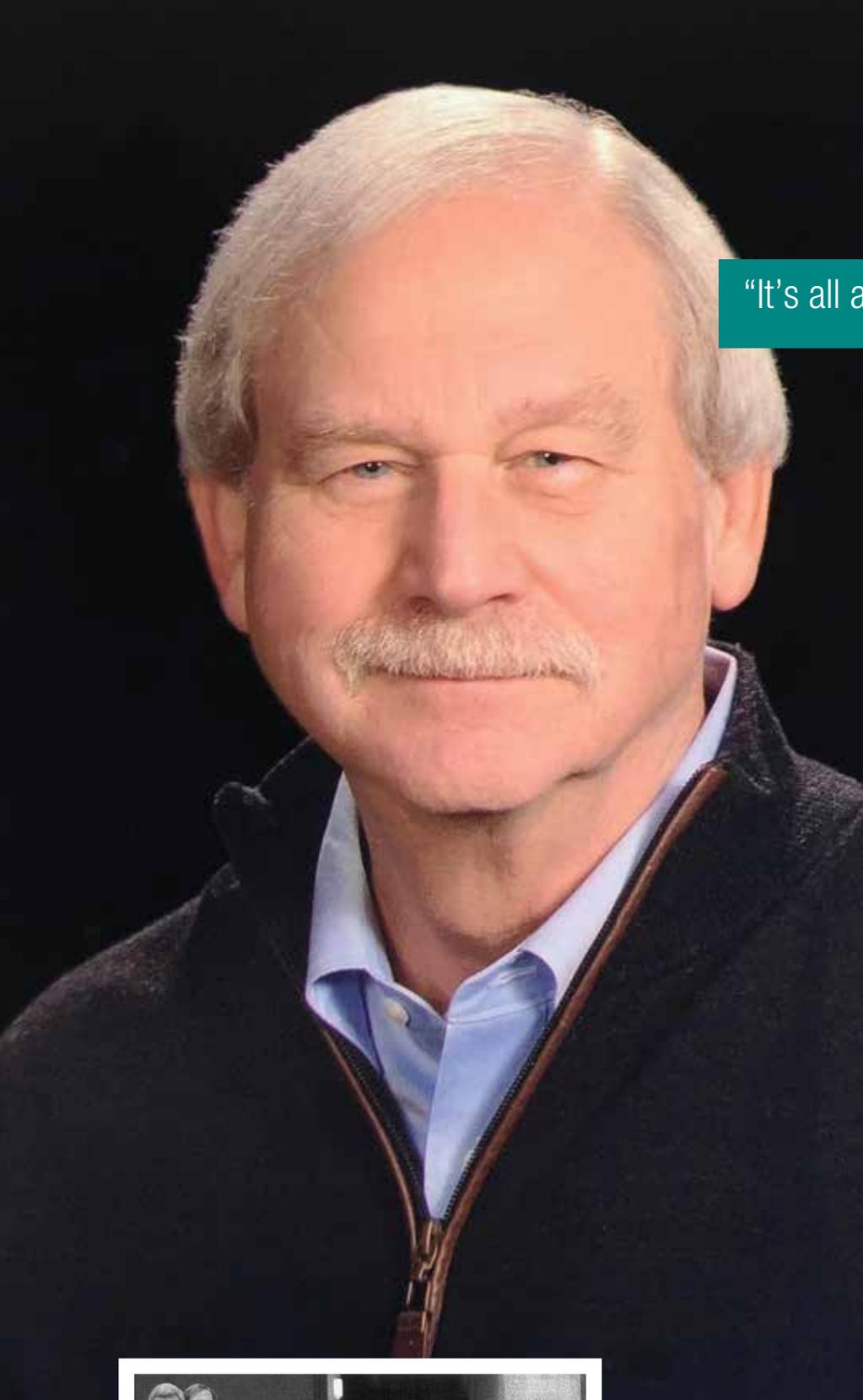
John helped convey the many advantages of having ARDI join DASMA. We finally realized that John was right, and the decision to merge has proven to be of great benefit to us and our industry."

Next, Addington and DASMA's executive team helped the Operator & Electronics Division focus on topics that would help the automatic gate industry. This action helped leverage existing relationships and added experience with door operators, as both the gate operator and door operator industries were focused on UL 325.

"By working together, DASMA was able to represent both groups to the UL 325 audience and present one unified viewpoint instead of having to get feedback from individual manufacturers," Addington said.

Members determine direction

Addington strongly believed that the association members must determine their own direction and make their own decisions.



“It’s all about the members.”
—John Addington

Executive Director of the American Fence Association (AFA) Tony Thornton said, “John understood the role of an executive director, and that is to make sure the board members are provided with accurate and timely information to help them make good decisions on behalf of DASMA.”

Thornton said that one of John’s greatest traits is his ability to listen and provide effective input when required.

“John saw his role as a person who must ensure that DASMA’s decisions and directions were sound and that the association made continual progress toward their completion,” said Wadsworth. “And he did that with extraordinary expertise.”

This hands-off approach has been instrumental to the success and longevity of the group. “My role,” said Addington, “was more than just helping the executives look ahead. I needed to push them to think far into the future.”

A guiding hand

Addington understood that knowledge is knowing what to say, and wisdom is knowing when to say it. “He was a resource of information and guidance to DASMA members,” said Barge Miller, DASMA president from 2016 to 2018. “In board meetings, he constantly identified future issues and facilitated proactive actions as directed by the board.”

For example, when the members expressed the need to have one technical authority represent the organization and the industry, Addington drew upon his previous experience to help make it happen.

“In the past, we worked with associations that had technical directors. We used this as a model to help develop the guidelines and requirements for the DASMA position,” said Addington.

Hiring a dedicated technical director in 1996 turned out to be a wise decision. The position

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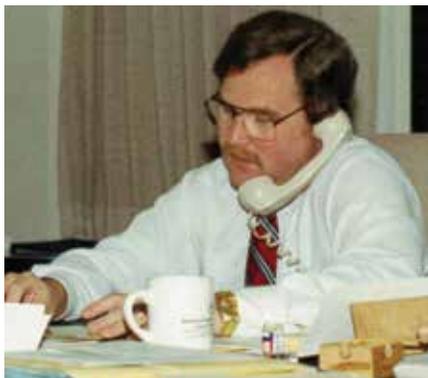
Industry leaders who helped to direct the establishment of DASMA. John Addington, (second from the left) was executive director of NAGDM and DORCMA at the time.

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helped establish DASMA as a respected technical authority within the garage door and related industries.

One equal vote

In 2005, it was proposed that all active DASMA members pay the same membership fees and that every member have one equal vote. This would ensure that no one member's viewpoint was more valuable than any other.



Addington said that if a member had a good idea, it was the board's job to flesh it out and make sure that the board had all the information it needed to make a good decision.

He presented various options for dues and the "one vote, equal fees" proposal to the strategic planning committee. It was voted on and ultimately adopted.

This turned out to be huge for the association. "It guaranteed that every member's opinion would be heard and that each member had an equal opportunity to contribute on association matters such as standards and code development," Addington said. "No company was disenfranchised."

Naomi Angel, DASMA legal counsel, said, "This was also significant in building trust and fairness among the members and as a result, membership increased."

Spreading the word

Early on, Addington suggested that the association transform its existing newsletter into a full magazine that targeted the industry's dealers. In 1991, the Garage Door Business magazine was launched with a circulation of 7,000 industry professionals.

When DASMA was formed in 1996, the magazine became Door & Access Systems. By 2000, circulation had increased to 13,000. Today, it reaches 20,000 and continues to serve as a valuable platform to communicate important and relevant news stories to the dealer audience.

Wadsworth said, "I'm convinced that many association executives would have stopped the magazine's efforts to report on tough industry issues were it not for John.

"For example, when we exposed fraudulent dealers who were ripping off customers, some association executives would have killed those stories because they would cause turmoil in the industry. But John supported the magazine's gutsy approach, and he helped us manage the risk."

History made "On the Hill"

DASMA relied on Addington's wise counsel when he, Naomi Angel, and Clopay President Steve Lynch travelled to Washington, D.C., to advocate that insulated garage doors be considered for an energy tax credit.

Initially, DASMA presented its case to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), arguing that garage doors should be eligible for the tax credit. During the D.C. trip, they met and spoke with various aides and senators.

Lynch said, "You have to remember that we were just climbing out of the worst building economy since they kept track of records. Industry business was down 40-50%.

"If garage doors weren't approved for the tax credit, we were concerned that the industry would lose out on the remaining remodel business that was available to other products already included in the tax credit, such as entry doors, windows, etc."

"John was a master at setting the table for all of the important, and sometimes divisive, discussions. He would make sure we understood and considered all the nuances of a topic, and then graciously guide our deliberations to some thoughtful conclusion."

—Ray Neisewander III, Raynor Garage Doors.

As the DASMA team approached each elected leader, they were prepared with a full list of DASMA and IDA members who were constituents of the voting districts of each U.S. senator and representative. "We also presented a strong financial justification to support our proposal," said Lynch.

Mission accomplished

In the end, the group was successful in getting the energy tax credit extended to the garage door industry. On March 28, 2007, DASMA received a letter from the IRS confirming that qualifying insulated residential garage doors would now be eligible for the \$1,500 energy-saving tax credit.

"We all look back on that hectic day, standing in line at the congressional commissary, with some fondness," said Lynch.

Angel said that it was exciting to watch the group band together, to see legislation at work, and to be a part of the experience. Addington was instrumental in gaining the support of DASMA members and IDA for this mission, and his efforts paid off.

He said, "Thanks to the collective leadership of DASMA, we were able to effectively reach out to the appropriate representatives in Congress to accomplish this and make a positive change for the industry."

Keeping it together

Having the same person serving as executive director for more than 30 years certainly helped solidify DASMA as a force in the industry. "In a word, John was always so consistent," said Ray Neisewander III, DASMA president from 2014 to 2016.

"He was consistently prepared, organized, pleasant, and professional. With his leadership and attention to detail, DASMA has always been an efficient, effective, and well-run organization, regardless of who was president," he added.

Addington's retirement marks the end of an era, but thanks to his long and steady management, DASMA will carry his values into the future. "I am extremely confident that under the leadership of new Executive Director Chris Johnson, DASMA will continue to make a positive impact for all the manufacturers and dealers in the industry," said Addington.

"I have worked closely with John since 1993. He taught me all I know about associations. Our job now is to maintain John's general approach as we continue to advocate for the industry and the members of DASMA. I know I can always turn to John for wise counsel as we look to the future," said Johnson.

Fortunately, DASMA's growth and success will be guided by the wisdom, diligent preparation, professionalism, and respect for all members that Addington helped establish throughout his tenure as executive director. As for John, he is looking forward to spending time in the Cleveland and Fort Myers areas with Nancy, his wife of nearly 49 years, their two sons, and five grandkids. He will also continue the challenging job of supporting the Cleveland Browns, Cavaliers, and Indians. ■