

MEET MICHEL GENDREAU

An interview with the new DASMA president



Michel Gendreau became the new DASMA president in January, succeeding Steve Lynch of Clopay Corporation at the completion of Lynch's two-year term. Gendreau is the founder and longtime leader of Garaga, which has two production plants in Canada (Saint-Georges, Quebec, and Barrie, Ontario) and one in the U.S. (Mid-America Door in Ponca City, Okla.). We talked to the manufacturing association's new president about the pandemic and his view of our industry.

First, how is Garaga dealing with the coronavirus crisis?

In Quebec, the government shut down all businesses, schools, and manufacturing plants on March 17. So, we have staff who have been working from home and conducting meetings via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Our manufacturing plant in Quebec reopened on April 20. In Barrie and Ponca City, we're doing our best to protect our employees and keep production moving at the same time. In the plants, we provided additional protection for our workers. For example, we've increased

periodic handwashing, maintained a 6-foot distance, and we staggered break times so we can maintain social distancing in break-out areas. Other safety processes have also been implemented.

When the crisis ends, do you think that some of these new practices will continue?

I think that all companies may consider the benefits of having more people working from home. This telecommuting approach has been talked about for many years, but I think we are now realizing that it may be a viable option for some office employees. Yet, it has some positive and negative aspects.

On the positive side, it certainly reduces employees' exposure to viruses and sicknesses. Working from home also reduces commuting time and expenses and it gives employees more flexibility. Yet we must be sure that productivity is not affected and that all the work gets done.

How might this crisis affect the industry's trade associations?

I'm concerned about attendance at future Expo and DASMA meetings. Virus concerns could keep people away.

Manufacturers and dealers invest a significant amount of time and money to be at the show and at association meetings. Good attendance is essential to getting a great value and a return on that investment.

Attendance at Expo is already a problem. For a long time, I've felt that the trade show should be rethought to meet dealers' and manufacturers' expectations.

I think this virus crisis may prompt IDA, DASMA, and IDEA to discuss how the annual get-together can be reshaped to meet the education and exhibition needs of all

concerned. DASMA and IDA have established a subcommittee that will find the best solution for this annual industry event.

Do you think that the coronavirus crisis may change the way manufacturers and dealers do business?

It's possible, but it depends on the extent of virus concerns in the post-pandemic period. If consumers are reluctant to have face-to-face meetings with dealers, we will likely see increased use of technology and the internet to complete the sales process. Certain consumers may prefer to go to a website to see a virtual showroom, review detailed product information, and get a quotation online.

I'm curious about how you built Garaga from a small company of five employees to a company of nearly 250 employees. What has been the secret to your success?

In 1983, when I started Garaga, I was 26 years old. For the first two years I was a one-man show, handling sales, product design, hiring and firing, purchasing, and credit collection. So I quickly realized that I needed to build a solid team of young educated people to handle all these functions and prepare the company for growth.

Overall, I realized that if I wanted the company to be successful, we had to play a role in the success of our customers. We had to offer a quality product, provide on-time delivery, be competitive, and always listen to our customers.

In other words, I think our success comes from building a company of professional and passionate people who are dedicated to the success of its customers.

In 1996, Garaga was among the first garage door manufacturers to launch a fully functional website. How did this transform your business, and how do you think

Michel Gendreau: A Personal Timeline

- 1978** Graduates with a business degree from Laval University, Quebec City, and begins working as a stockbroker
- 1983** At age 26, buys the assets of Garaga Doors Ltd., in Saint-Georges, Quebec
- 1986** Garaga named New Business of the Year by the Quebec Chamber of Commerce
- 1996** Member of the Quebec Chapter of the Young Presidents Organization
- 1997** Elected president of the Canadian Door Institute
- 1997** Elected to the IDA board, serving until 2002
- 2002** Elected as industry vice president of the IDA board
- 2012** Elected to the board of the Circle of Presidents of Quebec
- 2012** Named Ernst & Young's Entrepreneur of the Year for Quebec
- 2012** Board member of the School of Entrepreneurship of Beauce
- 2014** Elected to the DASMA board of directors
- 2018** Becomes executive chairman of Garaga
- 2018** Elected first vice president of DASMA
- 2020** Elected president of DASMA

technology will continue to affect the industry?

Ever since the beginning, my motto has been "Innovation Through Technology." We were early adopters of computer technology, and our website was a part of that emphasis.

Technology continues to offer many ways to streamline business, reduce costs, automate the manufacturing process, and enhance communication internally and externally with our dealer network. To compete today, you need to have employees who embrace technology and look for new ways to use it.

In 2018, you turned over the reins of your company to your twin sons. How's that going?

Excellent. Martin and Maxime both grew up with technology; it's second nature to them. They studied business in the United States to understand American culture, and they have played a key role in using technology to improve our business processes.

They have both been involved in the company for more than 25 years, they have

been trained by our key people, and they have experience in all departments. They are very focused on working for the success of the dealer.

While I serve as the executive chairman of the board of Garaga, they are co-presidents of the company and in charge of daily operations. I'm very pleased with how it's working.

You will serve as DASMA president for two years. What are your primary goals for the association?

We first need to continue to partner with IDA to expand IDEA education, certification, and accreditation. I believe that IDEA is our industry's best tool for elevating professionalism throughout the industry.

I have an agreement with Kevin Pettiette, president of IDA, to have a conference call every quarter to keep both of us informed of our progress and challenges. It should help to align both associations to better serve our whole industry.

Second, I want to see DASMA complete its years of work toward adopting U-factors

and moving the industry away from R-values.

Traditional R-values are the result of an unreliable and inconsistent calculation of a section's thermal properties. DASMA's U-factors are a legitimate thermal measurement that is the result of a certified test of an actual installed product by an independent laboratory.

DASMA needs to stand for manufacturing products that meet professional standards. The U-factor program is a key part of doing that. It's time to adopt the U-factor program and move on. The window industry has already made this transition, and we should too.

Third, we need to ensure a smooth transition to a new technical director for DASMA. Joe Hetzel will retire from that position in 2021. I want to thank him for his work, which has been so instrumental toward elevating the technical professionalism of our industry.

Thanks to his work, DASMA is now respected by code and regulatory bodies everywhere. A smooth transition to hiring his replacement will help us maintain our reputation. ■

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