

Associated Express



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Another year has come full circle and it's time to sit back, review the course AFI has run, and plan the direction it will travel in the near future.

We continue to be thankful that we are situated here in the U.S.A. where we can enjoy free enterprise. Americans across our nation recently participated in elections to select those individuals who will begin to influence and implement national policy over the next several years. The issues they will be addressing are serious ones which may affect all citizens greatly. Hopefully, these men and women will use the power vested in them wisely.

While our miniature mascots Flip, Dip and Hip (pictured) don't seem to mind delivering our Christmas message to you in swim suits, I'm betting few of us would opt to follow their example. We'd prepare for the task by donning our warmest outerwear!

In like manner, American businesses need to prepare appropriately. Our government must have our support in order to effectively combat future attempts to disrupt American society and the lives of the it's citizens.

None of us knows exactly what the future will hold, but we have many reasons to remain optimistic. We live in a land where *a majority of average citizens* still has a direct influence upon the affairs of the nation. We can render personal opinions, meet with one another, worship, direct lawful commerce, publish our thoughts, and live our respective lives without fear of governmental oppression. Many places on this planet are not so fortunate.

In our democracy, it is certainly our right to preserve the way of life we cherish. This right is coupled with a duty to prevent, where we are able, terroristic activity by any organization whose aim it is to disrupt other societies and demoralize people as a method of furthering its own agenda.

In these times, it is essential to remember that One Almighty God is ultimately in charge of our universe. God sees the Entire Picture as we can not. Knowing this, we can move forward with confidence to concentrate on ways which we, individually, might assist our neighbors and business associates. Whether we are a large business, small, or sized somewhere in between, there are ways we can help one another to survive the current economic crisis. Then, together we will continue to meet the challenges of the future.

Associated Finishing is a Christian based company. Next time you happen to read the words "In God We Trust", know that the majority of people at AFI do. Because of this, our business dealings with you and your company will reflect the type of ethics the Christ Child expects of us, not only during the Christmas Season, but throughout the year as well.

*Powder Coating -Liquid Coating -- Pad Printing
Paint Stripping -- Silkscreening -- R.F.I. Shielding*

MnTap Internship Program

Have you or one of your employees ever had *a great idea* which you were certain could improve some facet of your operation, but you just didn't have the time or technical resources in-house to research your "hunch" to see if it was feasible enough to pursue?

We did. AFI's Alan Baer got to thinking about all the drums of hazardous waste that we send out of our plant each year for proper disposal and of the costs involved. He got to wondering whether there might be some way to reclaim some of the chemicals in our waste stream and reuse them in other areas of the stripping department. This would decrease the volume of material we sent to landfills as well as the amount of new chemicals purchased.

Out of sheer curiosity, Alan bench tested his theory and found that his idea was possible. But, his other duties for the company did not give him time to expand upon his findings in order to discover if it would be cost effective for AFI to implement the process.

Enter MnTap! **Minnesota Technical Assistance Program** has a pool of young college students just looking for an opportunity to put classroom theory into solid application.

MnTap Advisor, Paul Pagel, and Intern Coordinator, Deb McKinley reviewed our "project" and agreed to assign a qualified chemical engineering student to our company for 3 months to conduct a feasibility study on Alan's proposal.

Sarah Williams, University of Minnesota School of Chemical Engineering, joined us over the summer to design and implement that study. She was to dedicate 536 hours to either developing a usable plan or, possibly formulating alternative solutions to the original problem.

For her effort she received college credit and an hourly salary from MnTap. It was a Win/Win arrangement.

Sarah had the time to focus on this one issue completely. She was free to do all the leg work involved in researching the many facets involved in actually putting Alan's idea into effect.

Sarah worked in concert with AFI, MnTap, & several members of the U of M faculty. She also identified and consulted numerous contacts within governmental regulatory agencies and the finishing industry.

Her findings at the end of the summer were surprising, helpful, and will ultimately be profitable.

While our initial "project" did not prove to be cost effective at this time, Sarah did uncover some interesting data which in itself proved invaluable to us.

Through a chemical analysis of our waste stream, Sarah discovered that it actually fell into the classification of "Industrial Waste" rather than "Hazardous Waste". She contacted the MPCA and obtained a reclassification for us, which means we are no longer considered *a large scale generator* of hazardous wastes!

Sarah also calculated the total amount of phosphates used annually in our cleaning and stripping departments and offered several recommendations on ways to decrease our phosphate load. This, in turn, will lower our annual fee to the City of Mankato Water Treatment Plant.

So, does your company have a great idea, but insufficient time or expertise to research it's feasibility? Each year the Mn Office of Environmental Assistance funds 6-7 top notch students supported by a technical staff with years of experience in industry. MnTap may have just the right student for you, too.

Why not check them out? (www.mntap.umn.edu)



Recognize any of these people?

Back row: AFI's Chuck Klammer (Pres.), Joe Appelhof (V.P. Engineering), Alan Baer (Quality Assurance)

Sarah Williams would be the good looking one up front.

(Rumor has it that employees are busy looking around for more projects to research so she'll return to help out!)

