Written by Bob Baldwin Editor
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User group meetings and workshops are a bargain. The host wins because there is an opportunity to learn from users and to promote upgrades and ancillary products. Users win because they learn more about the features and benefits of the product and how to use it profitably. Users receive an added bonusthe opportunity to build a support network of fellow users on good maintenance and reliability practice as well as on the vagaries of the product. Some user group meetings are big, well-orchestrated extravaganzas with games, prizes, and plenty of hoopla. Others are small intimate meetings with one-on-one discussions and camaraderie around the dinner table. Whether large or small, these meetings always get me pumped up because they have an added dimension, something extra, when compared to ordinary seminars or training events. The atmosphere is similar to a club or fraternity meeting. There is an initial bond created by being a user or supplier of a unique product; that bond is strengthened as the meeting progresses and experiences are shared.

One of the best user group meetings I've attended recently was the MCE Motor Testing Technical Conference presented by PdMA Corp., Tampa, FL. The program had an excellent balance of speakers from the company, its customers, and outsiders. Although my own presentation was listed as the keynote address, in my view the highlight of the conference came an hour or so later in the presentation, "Making a More Effective Case for Your Recommendations," presented by Robert Yontz of the Inspection and Reliability Group at an ARCO Products Co. refinery.

Yontz provided a balanced perspective covering the benefits of a comprehensive equipment condition monitoring process as a part of an overall reliability process, noting that success depends as much or more on human factors as it does on technology factors. Monitoring technology cannot meet its potential until it is accepted by the owners and operators of the equipment, as well as the maintenance crafts.

His plant invested in interdisciplinary training for craftsmen, operators, engineers, and predictive

analysts, allowing all participants to appreciate the capabilities and limitations of all the technologies and job functions. The plant's investments in technology and training produced an exceptionally high return.

My take from Yontz's presentation: Investment in condition monitoring technologies pays dividends. So does investment in training. But put the two together and you get a synergistic bargain that can't be beat.

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