

## Uptime: Meeting Of The Minds

Written by Bob Williamson, Contributing Editor  
Thursday, 01 May 2008 00:00

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Rosemont, IL in April could never be confused with the sunny south. Nor will it ever be classified as a relaxing resort, entertainment hub or exotic portof- call. Nonetheless, despite having made a weeklong pilgrimage to Rosemont around this time for the past five years, I keep coming back for more.

This year, as usual, the huge “buffet” I have grown accustomed to finding in Rosemont did not disappoint. Over time, it has continued to serve up a vast selection of the tastiest, most nutritious items for our times. With many places to visit, the lines were again short and the crowds, representing a cross-section of people from all over North America and the world, were very friendly. Year after year, those of us who join in this pilgrimage spend our time sharing with each other about our interests, our work and the many and varied mysteries in our lives.

No, my annual trip to Rosemont is not a family outing. It’s not recreation. It’s not a vacation. What it is, however, is one of the best work-related venues available to those in our industry. It’s where participants— regardless of company and specific job titles and responsibilities—can get fired up about reliability, get excited about change and get answers to most, if not all, of their maintenance and reliability mysteries. The Maintenance & Reliability Technology Summit (MARTS) event provides so much for so many. This year, as always, it was a true meeting of the minds, focused on improving plant, facility and equipment performance and reliability.

### **Plenty of offerings**

This April, I met many people who had been reading my columns for years—and many more who had just begun reading them. They came from a wide variety of industry sectors, including manufacturing industries, power & utilities, petro-chemical processing, mining and production, higher education, facility engineering and more. More than 190 companies were represented, from 36 states, five Canadian provinces and two from outside North America.

The “nutritious buffet” went well beyond the meals to include something for every maintenance

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and reliability person in attendance:

- Nearly 30 highly experienced and insightful professionals presented in 11 pre/post-conference workshops and 47 conference sessions on 30 different subjects.
- Forty exhibitors displayed state-of-the-art products and services for improving maintenance and reliability.
- For those seeking another competitive advantage, MARTS provided the CLS (Certified Lubrication Specialist) review workshop and an on-site exam, and the CMRP (Certified Maintenance & Reliability Professional) review workshop and on-site exam sponsored by the Society of Maintenance & Reliability Professionals (SMRP).

Come to think of it, MARTS is not just a meeting of the minds; it's a veritable "one-stop shopping" destination for today's (and tomorrow's) maintenance and reliability leaders!

### **Plenty of take-aways**

I met people from many different industries and locations who were looking for something specific, be it in the form of a tools, a strategy or just a new way to help improve their plant or facility performance and reliability. Some were new to our profession, some were old hands. Some of the participants were there with teams of others from their respective companies, dividing up among the sessions to learn about as many answers/solutions as they possibly could in a few short days—answers/solutions that they could take back to their plants and begin sharing with others.

While I wasn't able to sit in on all of the sessions, I listened to a range of variety of presenters who told of their maintenance and reliability challenges and how they successfully addressed them. I heard from seasoned veterans and leading experts—people who I have followed throughout my own career—as they talked with authority about maintenance and reliability best practices.

Session participants asked some very hard-hitting questions about problems or opportunities back at their workplace—and expected hard-hitting answers. They received invaluable advice. MARTS sessions not only covered the nuts-and-bolts topics, they also covered some of the "soft" side of maintenance and reliability—i.e., people, organizations, training and work methods. Here are just a few of the nuggets I gleaned from MARTS 2008:

- A "business case for reliability" helps increase shareholders' return on assets (ROA).

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- Functional separation in organizations leads to disconnected improvement strategies.
- Get the basics right first. Avoid the “new technology/ tool traps.”
- Standardized plant-specific training for operations and maintenance improves performance.
- PM optimization begins with eliminating nonvalue- adding tasks and adjusting frequencies.
- PM optimization has removed 12,000 maintenance hours and improved reliability.
- Involve operators in startup checks, minor maintenance and end-of-shift cleaning/ inspection.
- Maintenance apprenticeship programs are restarting to stem the Baby-Boomer retirements.
- “5S” methods “error-proof” the workplace and increase employee efficiency, safety and quality of workmanship.
- 70% of mechanical failures and 20% of energy costs can be attributed to the lubrication program.
- Operations is not the “customer” and maintenance is not the “supplier.” These departments are partners for capacity and reliability assurance.
- Partnership organizations improve equipment and process reliability and lower life-cycle costs.
- Unreliable equipment leads to higher costs and lower profits. Oil and gas prices are higher in part because of refinery problems and pipeline leaks in North America.
- Hydraulic fluid should last forever. Cleanliness, lack of moisture and temperature prevent this.
- Firefighters reflect a good model for maintenance and reliability, through their ready-state of preparedness and controlled work processes in the context of absolute chaos.
- Visual cause-and-effect diagrams help solve complex problems and improve communications.
- Reliability is a common goal for quality, safety, environmental and equipment performance.

### Plenty of tools

“Tools you can use” is a term that frequently came to mind as I was sitting in the conference sessions. In other words, what all of us were picking up at MARTS were real tools we could take back to our jobs and immediately put to use. Sometimes these “tools” were the ones that could be used to pry some of the old ideas and paradigms out of the rut we often find ourselves in back at work.

The well-prepared exhibitors also provided tools and methods for addressing specific performance issues with modern and not-so-modern, plants and facilities. Smart tools and smart equipment incorporating some of the “smartest” technologies in the marketplace were demonstrated everywhere we looked in the exhibit hall.

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An added bonus at this year's MARTS was the participation of the 2007 North American Maintenance Excellence (NAME) Award winners. Representatives of the two honored plants—Alcoa Mt. Holly, SC, and Baldor Electric/Reliance Dodge, Marion, NC—discussed their “winning ways.” In both cases, these operations had created a “reliability culture” using the proven methods of Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) to achieve best-in-class equipment and process reliability. The “lessons learned” from past NAME Award winners included examples of operational excellence focused on a foundation of health, safety and environmental plans; clear organizational and strategic planning goals; reliability engineering and defect elimination teams; operators involved in routine maintenance; and asset reliability as a shared responsibility between manufacturing and maintenance.

### **Plenty of satisfaction**

The part of this two-day conference and the two days of pre- and post-conference workshops that impressed me the most was how “hungry” for knowledge the participants were. As noted previously, I talked with countless attendees who were looking for something specific—something that they could put to work back at their facilities to help make their jobs easier, their plants more reliable and their businesses more competitive. Their gnawing hunger certainly appeared to be satisfied by week's end!

### **Thanks to you**

To all of you who attended and presented at MARTS 2008, I wish to thank you for sharing your insights with me and with each other. Every year at this event, I learn so much about your various challenges—and so much about the effective solutions that you're implementing to address those challenge. As a contributing editor, your sharing with me is extremely important. It helps me to focus more accurately on the types of issues that confront you day-in and day-out. Everyone who participated (regardless of your role) added great value to this and future MARTS—as well as future issues of this magazine. I am already looking forward to meeting you next year in Rosemont to learn even more from you.

This year's meeting of the minds may have come to a close, but the tools, the ideas and the insights are no doubt being put to good use by all of you to make your jobs easier and more productive. What you learned at this year's MARTS (and those of past years) will contribute to your own organization's performance, reliability profitability and growth, as well as bolster your respective countries' competitiveness in a difficult global economy.

We'll see you at MARTS 2009. **MT**

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