

From Our Perspective: 'I Six It'

Written by Ken Bannister, Contributing Editor
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I grew up in the shadow of The Beatles, in the industrial port city of Liverpool, England. Dad was a fleet-truck mechanic for a frozen-food company; Mom was a seamstress.

While both were skilled workers, due to our modest post-WWII means, the only family transportation was a motorcycle and sidecar—a *British motorcycle that Dad regularly needed my "help" to "fix."* Always up for a challenge, I would dive in, shouting, "I six it! I six it!"

I must have shown real promise. On my third birthday, I received my first toolbox. It was an honest-to-goodness toolkit with a small wood saw—*sharp metal teeth included*—a hammer, rule, screwdriver and wrenches, all packed neatly in a wooden chest (no plastic for kids back then). Armed with these tools, I embarked on a relentless campaign to re-engineer everything I could put my hands on. Nothing was spared, including a leg of the family's heirloom dining room table that I sawed halfway off!

Despite such setbacks, my parents continued to be supportive, supplying items for me to dismantle, then helping me reassemble them, patiently providing answers to my constant "Why?" "Why?" "Why?" At the early age of three, my destiny was sealed: I was, and remain, an incorrigible tinkerer, fascinated by the design and inner workings of all things man-made.

At the recent MARTS 2010 event in Chicago, Keynote speaker John Ratzenberger (famous for his work in the *Cheers* and *John Ratzenberger's Made in America* television series and all Pixar films to date) introduced us to the work of his "Nuts, Bolts & Thingamajigs Foundation" (NBT). Through humor-laden personal testimony, this self-confessed, inveterate tinkerer evoked powerful memories in quite a few of us in that room full of skilled maintenance pros. Who among us wasn't thinking back to a time when someone first encouraged us to find our inner "tinkerer," something that helped define both our careers and our self-esteem?

[inset side=right]Consider helping sponsor, or getting your company to help sponsor, a new generation of tinkerers.[/inset]

Ratzenberger's NBT organization works to introduce young people to the joys of working with their hands through sponsored summer industrial camps, and provides scholarships for those

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pursuing technical degrees at trade schools and colleges. A skilled carpenter turned actor, he has long recognized what much of North America seems afraid to accept—*that our one-time manufacturing might, supported by the greatest skilled workforce in the world, is rapidly disappearing*. With an average skilled-worker age of 56, and no national backup plan to replace these critical "assets" once they retire, we're facing one of our greatest challenges ever. An early, widespread addiction to television, along with a pervasive video-gamer numbness and the closing of school "shop" programs, have led to an almost non-existent pool of up-and-coming tinkerers to fill the critical skilled-trade positions of tomorrow.

John Ratzenberger has had enough—*he's out there trying to "six it."* Let's help. Let's encourage our own children and grandchildren and those of others to tinker. Help them see that learning a skill is not only for life, it's an honorable pursuit. One way to do this is by sending a deserving youngster to a Nuts, Bolts & Thingamajigs Camp!

Go to www.nutsandboltsfoundation.org ASAP. Consider helping sponsor, or getting your company to help sponsor, a new generation of tinkerers. Working together, we can help "six it!" We can help secure North America's future, and make our industries great again!

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