

A Look Back and Forward

"The road is long. / With many a winding turn that leads us to who knows where. / Who knows where?"

The song "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" was recorded in 1969 by Manchester, England-based supergroup the Hollies, with Elton John guesting on the piano. The lyrics convey how a stronger person—either emotionally or physically—supporting another without complaint may act as a friend, acquaintance, or even a brother to another person finding it more difficult to make the same journey. An interesting backstory links this secular song with a sacred testimony to brotherhood. In his 1884 book *The Parables of Jesus*, James Wells, Moderator of the United Free Church of Scotland, tells the story of a little girl carrying a big baby boy. Seeing her struggling, someone asked if she wasn't tired. With surprise, she replied, "No, he's not heavy; he's my brother."

As I pen my last Industry Message before turning my presidential duties over to a great colleague and friend, Joe Leo of Atlantic Contracting & Specialties, I'm reminded of brotherly bonds. As the lyrics in "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" reflect upon a road that is long and winding, I will try my best to look back on the past year at NIA and also glimpse toward the future. To quote Ralph Abernathy: "I don't know what the future may hold, but I know who holds the future."

As incoming President of NIA in March of 2021, I chose the theme for my year of leadership as "Together for Tomorrow." This theme was inspired by the many people, conversations, events, and day-to-day interactions that have made NIA special to me over the last 20-some years of my involvement with an amazing organization. The metamorphosis that occurs as people start out as strangers and become friends, acquaintances, advisors, and mentors is more than special and goes beyond what can be described in words. Against the backdrop of relationship building and confidence in the future, "Together for Tomorrow" means that while we don't know what tomorrow will bring, we can control that we are together to support the power of

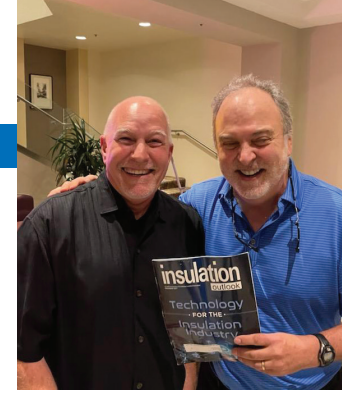


Corey Dean and Tim Settles from Performance Contracting, Inc. with Dave Cox at a Super Bowl event in Palm Springs.

insulation. We share unity as individuals, companies, and an industry. As a metaphor for that point, my column challenged readers to submit pictures from around the country showing them with their copy of *Insulation Outlook*—also an effort to create some fun, with a "Where's Waldo?" theme. Flip through the pages of this issue for lots more photos!

This past year was full of winding turns. NIA and I started the year of "Together for Tomorrow" in April 2021 by framing our message around sustainability, noting how mechanical insulation gets little respect and is not "sexy" as a strategy for going green, despite being tremendously effective. As global events put sustainability front and center, NIA extolled the benefits of mechanical insulation. These benefits can contribute toward helping countries and companies around the world meet aggressive goals to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and strive for net zero by 2050. Nearly 30 years from now seems like a long way off, but let's consider it again through the lens of music. It really does not seem that long ago that the duo Milli Vanilli lip-synced to stardom before returning their Best New Artist Grammy award in 1990. (I told you this column had a few twists and turns!) And don't forget that "End of the Road" by Boyz II Men was the number one song in 1992—that seems like yesterday. Over the next 30 years and beyond, NIA and our industry will continue to show that mechanical insulation is a cost-effective option for the world to reduce its GHG emissions.

From decades-old music videos to trucks—get ready for another shift here. My newly acquired 2.7-L truck became the focal point of this column's—and NIA's—messaging. We used my truck as an example of how just a small amount of pipe insulation can offset a year's worth of CO₂ emissions. My small truck even became part of a song at our Convention in Washington, DC, as



Retired CEO/President of Performance Contracting Group, Bill Massey and Dave Cox.

our keynote speaker—Grammy-nominated songwriter Jimmy Yeary—penned words to a new song. Jimmy's lyrics included the line (sing it with me), "Some of us buy our truck in the toy section at Walmart." Regardless of whether you enjoy songs about trucks (or hunting, fishing, and lovin' every day—thank you, Luke Bryan), the truck example created a platform for all of us to learn to talk about CO₂ savings, and not just thermal savings, when it comes to mechanical insulation.

My wife Trudy and I had a wonderful time traveling to all the regional events this past summer. The only one we missed was TIAC in Canada (but NIA EVP/CEO Michele Jones and I visited virtually). Getting to see folks in person was just a treat. Zoom may have saved the day when the world social distanced, but meeting up at the first non-virtual event—the ESICA Spring Conference in Myrtle Beach last May—was a reminder of how great it is to connect in the "real" world.

But back to the "tune" of this message: The ballad, "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=fBI9i3HIFVE) features a harmonica wailing, underscoring poignant beauty...

"It's a long, long road, / From which there is no return. / While we're on the way to there, / Why not share? / And the load / Doesn't weigh me down at all. / He ain't heavy, he's my brother."

Looking at comments about these lyrics on YouTube, it is clear that this song resonates deeply with veterans—especially those who served in Vietnam. War is the setting for so many timeless stories, and the YouTube comments make clear that every veteran of every war has a story to tell about love for a fellow brother. A soldier never leaves a fellow soldier behind. This makes me proud to be a member of NIA, as oftentimes we lend support for our military. In fact, our Silent Auction at our Annual Convention in March will support Folds of Honor.



Steve Edris, Past President of Thermafiber, and wife Kim.

Speaking of supporting each other, I also want to thank the unwavering support of our dedicated Board of Directors. These servant leaders are all volunteers. I humbly thank NIA Directors for all their involvement and guidance to NIA this past year. I reflect on how our organization rallied, together, to support each other and our industry, virtually and in person. Also, I have always known that NIA staff are pretty awesome, even when I was just watching from the bleacher seats, but the vantage point offered by a leadership role in the NIA organization helps one truly understand what a well-oiled machine our association is and how much work we get done. Even among a community of believers, the NIA staff would be considered eager.

Our mechanical insulation industry's future is very bright, and we are poised to be center stage as the world pivots (there is that magic word...) on its journey toward environmental sustainability. We have a long and winding history that can illuminate a clear path for embracing goals in the areas of climate change, carbon emissions, energy efficiency, water scarcity, waste management, circular economy, renewable energy, embodied carbon, and more. As we wrap up my year of leadership and look toward the future, I am confident that the unity that has helped the insulation industry navigate a tumultuous year will continue to bring us together for tomorrow.

Thank you to the Hollies, Elton John on piano, and—most importantly—all the NIA community. To paraphrase lyrics from one more anthem of the '70s (thank you, Grateful Dead): *What a long, wonderful trip it's been.*

David J. Cox
President
National Insulation Association