



AASP-MN on Track to Break Membership Record

The Alliance of Automotive Service Providers of Minnesota (AASP-MN) is on track to break its all-time high membership record this year. Currently, the association consists of 717 members, including collision repair facilities, mechanical shops and industry suppliers. Though AASP-MN primarily serves the entire state of MN, Executive Director **Judell Anderson** explains that they also “offer an out-of-state membership at a reduced rate and have members in communities bordering MN in Wisconsin and South Dakota.”

As an association comprised of independently-owned automotive service businesses and industry suppliers, AASP-MN’s mission is to be “dedicated to improving the state’s automotive service industry and the success of its members.” Benefits of membership in the association include access to education and training, group buying programs, legislative

representation, industry information updates, and networking opportunities. “Membership literally does pay... it’s quite common for members who utilize just one of our group buying programs—like uniforms or insurance—to save many times more than the cost of their membership dues,” Anderson says.

Despite the significant value the association offers to members, Anderson has many short-term goals for enhancing its offerings, including to provide more opportunities for peer-to-peer information exchange and networking among members, refreshing the association’s website to make it easier for members to find and use the information they need, and working to expand the workforce talent pool available to the automotive service industry. Additionally, AASP-MN hopes to pass legislation which would prohibit insurer mandates and steering of estimates.

In discussing long-term initiatives, Anderson explains, “the four key pillars of AASP-MN are education and training, legislative advocacy and representation, group buying, information and networking. Our long-term goal is to continue to deliver innovative, relevant and valuable benefits to members in each of those areas. We want to maintain a professional, dynamic and financially-sound organization that is recognized as one of the best in the automotive service industry.”

Over the years, Anderson has noticed a lot of consistency in the biggest challenges facing the industry. They include keeping up with rapidly-changing technology, the availability of qualified technicians, and increasing insurer control. “Through its various programs and initiatives, including training opportunities, our scholarship program and legislative efforts, AASP-

MN is working to address each of these challenges,” Anderson says.

As part of these efforts, the association has organized several training programs this fall, including OSHA compliance workshops and seminars in gasoline direct injection and variable cam timing. AASP-MN will also hold a meeting for collision members to discuss the preparations necessary to repair aluminum vehicles. The association has also begun planning for the 2015 legislative session and annual meeting and convention.

AASP-MN also has a unique program for its mechanical members called “Get to Know Your Neighborhood Auto Repair Pro™.” Anderson describes this program as “a marketing campaign that promotes the benefits of doing business with independently-owned shops. Currently, commercials are running on-air and streaming on two popular radio stations in the Twin Cities area.”



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Like many associations, AASP-MN is faced with the challenge of identifying and preparing the next generation of volunteer leaders. Anderson notes, "the association depends on input and direction from members of the industry, and it is that involvement that drives what the association does and how we go about doing it. No 'good ole boys' club here; we enforce term limits and work to ensure that we have an ongoing influx of new people and new ideas."

During the 2014 Legislative Session, AASP-MN introduced legislation which would prohibit insurers from requiring insureds to go to a particular shop for an estimate or requiring shops to utilize specific vendors, distributors, manufacturers, suppliers, business platforms or internal processes to carry out vehicle repairs. Due to the time constraints of a short legislative session, the bill did not advance, but Anderson believes the groundwork has been adequately laid to try again in 2015.

This proposed legislation is important, Anderson says, because "it would restore the balance of power in the relationship between repairers and

insurers. Insurer mandates significantly diminish shop owners' control over how they run their business. Insurers too often abuse their power and interfere in the business practices and relationships of the shop. If we're successful, collision repairers will once again have the ability to determine repair decisions, vendor selections and business practices based on what's best for their customers and their business. Consumers will benefit by being assured that their shop of choice has the discretion to safely and properly repair the vehicle to its pre-accident condition without being unduly pressured by insurers to cut corners and control costs."

Of course, like any collision repair association, AASP-MN faces certain challenges when attempting to pass legislation, namely in terms of "the human and financial resources of the insurance industry." Anderson elaborates, "when AASP-MN goes to the Capitol, we're up against not only lobbyists from the insurer association, but lobbyists employed by a dozen individual insurers as well. But we have the upper-hand when it comes to grassroots participation. AASP-MN members are local, main street busi-

nesses who oftentimes have personal relationships with the legislators in their communities. That is what really makes a difference when we're working to advance legislation."

AASP-MN also takes a stance on national legislative matters. The association supports Right to Repair because "consumers should ultimately have the choice to decide where their vehicle is repaired. The ability of independent shops to conduct those repairs is contingent upon having access to the same technical information, communications, tools and training available to new car dealerships," Anderson states.

Although the association has not taken an official stance on the PARTS Act, Anderson notes that "generally speaking, AASP-MN members believe that OEM, recycled and after-market parts all have their specific applications and that shops are best positioned to select the appropriate part for the particular vehicle being repaired."

AASP-MN is opposed to insurer-mandated parts procurements systems, such as PartsTrader, which Anderson refers to as "perhaps the most egregious example of an insurer

mandate, to date. It unduly interferes in the business relationship between shops and their suppliers and has failed to demonstrate any benefit or value to the parts procurement and repair process."

The association, known as AASP-MN since 1999, was originally established as the Independent Garage Owners Association (IGOA) in 1955 and was later a part of the Automotive Service Council (ASC) and the Automotive Service Association (ASA) before settling on its affiliation with AASP.

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