

## Spray foam savors 'Super' promo

**M**ason Knowles was a 5-year-old eyewitness when polyurethane foam came of age in the hands of his innovative father. Fifty years later, he's thinking the roofing and insulation application has entered its Golden Age.

Members of the Spray Polyurethane Foam Alliance (SPFA) certainly validated the stance of their executive director by merely showing up at the group's annual meeting in Orlando, Fla. In what was the biggest turnout in at least 20 years, more than 700 individuals attended the January conference. The number of exhibitors jumped from 43 in 2006 to 53. And possibly most telling, the number of contractors taking an accreditation course improved from 100 to 150.

"It's a great growth market," Knowles says.

At least 70 contractors, including a few veterans that can be otherwise slow to ditch tradition, participated in the accreditation course on the fundamentals of spray foam in insulation.

"There was a lot of building envelope interest," Knowles says. "At least (contractors know) they can work in winter time, when the wind is blowing."



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**THOMAS SKERNIVITZ** RSI Editor-in-Chief

No doubt much of the enthusiasm also stems from higher fuel costs and the quest for energy efficiency. And the replacement of the Superdome roof in New Orleans definitely captured the fancy of the industry throughout 2006.

"We'll get a lot of good mileage off of (the Superdome)," Knowles says. "It kind of ebbs and flows — the recognition of spray foam as a viable roofing system."

Knowles knew about it before most. His father, Paul, was one of the first contractors to use polyurethane foam, in this case to insulate railroad tank cars. In 1957 the product was a fluid that was poured into place rather than sprayed. By the mid-1960s, Paul Knowles owned 10 foam rigs.

Ironically, the elder Knowles bid on installing the

original polyurethane foam roof of the Superdome, which broke ground in 1971 and opened in 1975. He lost — as did a guy named Wally Scoggins. Twenty-five years later, Scoggins, the owner of Texas City, Texas-based Brazos Urethane, won the bid to replace the Superdome's second roof — a membrane — which had succumbed to Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.

SPFA, at its annual meeting, went out of its way to honor the work of Scoggins and Brazos Urethane. The company received special recognition at the alliance's second-annual Industry Excellence Awards banquet, which featured winners in five categories.

"I liked the entries. There was a lot of variation to them," Knowles says, noting there were 42 total nominations, up from 20 last year. "There were at least a dozen of them where I thought, 'Gosh, this is a pretty good example of where spray foam could be used.'"

Meanwhile, the most popular question floating around the pool at the Disney Hilton was exactly how much spray foam is being used these days?

Knowles notes that the National Roofing Contractors Association (NRCA), in its annual survey, indicated that spray foam comprises between 3 percent to 4 percent of the total roofing business. At 3 1/2 percent, that translated into a \$450 million industry, he says.

"But any time there is less than 10 percent in an NRCA survey, the numbers are subject to being off one or two percentage points," Knowles says. "If they miss some of the larger contractors who don't get data to them, you might miss a large percentage of the market. There are some very, very large roofing contractors that do a lot of spray foam, people like Centimark and Insulated Roofing Systems."

A "little more accurate," Knowles says, are data released by the Alliance for the Polyurethanes Industry (API). According to its 2004 survey of systems houses and chemical producers, spray foam that is being used for residential applications is growing about 30 percent a year.

"At that time (2004), we thought 100 million pounds of spray foam was being used in roofing and around 75 million pounds used in residential insulation," Knowles says. "However, now if you go by (API's) percentages, residential insulation may have caught up."

Don't look now, but the same could be said for spray foam and its standing in the entire roofing industry. **RSI**

RSI Editor-in-Chief Thomas Skernivitz can be reached at (216) 706-3723 or at [tskernivitz@questex.com](mailto:tskernivitz@questex.com).