Last year, we welcomed the third Boyd family member to the helm at AWCI. As we warmly thank Pat Boyd for his leadership over the last year, we also take great pleasure in welcoming the third member of another AWCI-committed family to the presidency. Ken Navratil assumed the duties of president at the beginning of this month. He was preceded by his brother-in-law, Mike Chambers, who was president from 1994 to 1995, and before that, his father-in-law, Don Chambers, who held the presidency from
1977 to 1978. In addition, his wife, Elaine, has been involved with AWCI for 35 years—12 years longer than her husband! While Navratil will be telling us in this interview how AWCI looks to him, the state of the industry, and what he intends to do over the next year, it would be a mistake not to let you in on what kind of a man Navratil is. So we have included comments from people who have known him over the decades. As one of them said, Navratil may be of small physical stature, but he stands head and shoulders above most of his peers. To find out why, read their comments in the boxes.

Perhaps a telling point about this man is that his love and passion is construction. He started as a 14-year-old painting for a developer of tract homes. “I don’t know if he just needed extra bodies,” jokes Navratil, “or whether he saw that I enjoyed working, but after we reduced the number of days it took to paint each house by 30 percent, I ended up on a
framing crew, which helped me through high school and college.” At college, Navratil took engineering classes because he figured it would help him become more professional at carpentry and as a builder.

Navratil has spent more than quarter of a century working with great success in the building trade since college, and what does he have to say about it? “During the week, I’m a frustrated carpenter. Sitting behind a desk all day long, my mind sometimes wanders to the next little detail on a piece of furniture or a wall detail I am working on at home. I spend a lot of time in my favorite part of the house, my fully-equipped 1,000-square-foot workshop.” Navratil has lived in nine homes in the last 29 years of marriage to Elaine, three of which he built and the rest that he completely renovated, oftentimes making some of the furniture, as well. When not building something, he tries to do something he is admittedly not very good at: relax! Boating on the Gulf of Mexico is as close as he gets. Ken has two boys, Aaron, a 24-year old fashion designer and Adam, a 26-year old estimator/project manager who works with Ken, who is the vice president, at J&B Acoustical, in Mansfield, Ohio. His extended family at J&B includes nephews Jonathan Chambers, part of the office staff, and Joel Chambers, a journeyman and carpenter.

CD: Welcome to your new post during

---

I’ve known Ken for 10 years as a customer. He’s a very fair man and true to his word and although I’ve dealt with him on a professional basis, we’ve often sat down and talked about our lives. He’s almost been a mentor for me and is a strong leader in his business as well as in the community—helping build the soccer stadium, for instance. Ken is the kind of person you want to be associated with, a go-getter who is not afraid to give his time to something he believes in. He has the industry’s interests at heart and as a business owner is very much on top of industry changes. He’ll bring the same interests and skills, integrity and business sense to AWCI.

—Wayne Lloyd, Regional Manager, ACD Distributors
what can only be described as challenging times. How would you describe the state of the industry at present?

KN: Competitive! The market today is much tighter because of the struggling economy. In our company, we’re dealing with this by focusing on customer satisfaction and service because that is about the only thing we have to offer that can make a difference.

CD: Very sensible. What areas do you see as pivotal for the future welfare of the industry?

KN: The industry is undergoing a series of insurance crises—capturing insurance for the different business segments and/or having a competitive insurance market. Some of our members are not even able to get coverage to perform work they have always done. So, we have addressed this issue over the last year, aligning ourselves with an insurance company called Acordia that is going to be our underwriter. Together with AWCI Executive Vice President Steve Etkin, they are setting up an offshore captive insurance company. This project is supported and backed financially by about 10 of the major EIFS manufacturers and AWCI. As soon as it comes

Ken was what you might call my apprentice for almost five years after he left school. He was a very determined young man who was able to bring profit to the bottom line within three years. He is very honest, caring and open about his feelings, particularly for a man—most of us tend to be cautious at first, but Ken is strikingly forthright. If he likes you, he makes it very clear. He tells you, “You’re really important to me! How often does one hear that, man to man? He’s just a guy full of heart! He is also willing to devote the time that it takes to be president. Most of us know that if we’re going to get something out of an organization, we have to put a lot of time and effort into it. He has done both. J&B has a history of being active in the industry. There are a number of ways to be active and they have chosen AWCI as their way to contribute—two generations right now and maybe not too long down the road, three—because both Mike and Ken have a son involved in the business.

— J.D. Flaherty, President, Construction Systems Inc.
I have known Ken almost four years through AWCI. He is very enthusiastic, always looking for new and creative solutions, but at the same time, he’s very practical about what it’s going to take to get things done. These three things are a powerful combination. He’s clearly accomplished, building a thriving business with his brother-in-law AWCI is an organization that places great value on beginning one’s involvement with the association at the grassroots level and then working one’s way up in a way that meets the needs of the association while also being rewarding personally Ken being president not only shows his strong desire to give back to the industry that has given him so much, but also the AWCI membership’s willingness to embrace his leadership style—because it’s a two-way street. —Rob Waterhouse, Vice President, Sales-Ceilings, USG

through in the next two to three months, those contractors who have been holding off projects will be able to obtain insurance and produce again.

CD: That’s excellent. How should the membership best proceed?

KN: Become more involved, either with AWCI directly, through
I've known Ken for quarter of a century I am a lawyer and have worked on labor negotiations with him—negotiating very favorable labor contracts with the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. Ken is an intelligent guy, very deliberate and thorough, and he knows when to dodge and leave, what's important and what he can give up—vital in labor negotiations. His background, including his family history in AWCI, and longevity in the association and industry make him an excellent fit for AWCI. He has a substantial company and is probably able to devote a significant amount of his energy and time to AWCI—one of the biggest requirements for being president. On a personal level, he is a very affable guy, easy to get along with. I have never seen him in a situation where he doesn't make you comfortable. Many times, we would be butting heads with the unions and he would come in and calm the waters. I think they made a terrific choice for the AWCI president. —Donald E. Morrice, Executive Director of and Counsel for Drywall & Interior Systems Contractors Association (DISCA) in New Jersey

our Web site or the monthly publication, so as to stay informed of progress.

CD: Good. How do you feel AWCI has evolved over the years?

KN: In the mid 1990s, because of very tight financial constraints on the association, we focused on recruiting members. We now have a good membership base—our membership has grown from 800 then to nearly 1,900 today—and have been able to spend the last four years concentrating on listening to and serving the members, many of whom have become involved in a lot of committees and said, “Here’s what we need!” It’s interesting that this in itself is growing the membership even further.

CD: Good point. How does AWCI itself look to you?

KN: If the membership reads the financial statements and some of our highlights, they’ll be very pleased because we are fiscally strong, serving the membership and in touch with the different technical committees that are on board. I would say that we’re much more technically capable at this point and well positioned for the turn in the economy.

CD: Thank you. What value do you see AWCI bringing to its membership?

KN: Bottom line, apart from all the ser-

I've known Ken since the late 1980s, mostly through his volunteer work on either the apprenticeship committee or labor/management drywall committees. He has taken a big and effective lead in making sure we have skilled craftsmen for the industry. Beyond that, Ken is a conscientious, hard working and focused man: when there is a problem, he goes to it like a laser and gets the job done right. He is an accomplished businessman in the drywall industry, very well respected by our unions, He cares about the industry and the association will benefit with him as president. —Douglas McCarron, General President, United Brotherhood of Carpenters & Joiners of America
vices we offer, is the opportunity to interact with other members, which allows us all to stay abreast of what is happening in the industry across the country. The success of our own family business is due in large part to the commitment we’ve made to AWCI, and the things we have learned through the relationships developed in AWCI.

CD: How do you see the members best enhancing AWCI’s growth?

KN: At this point, the membership and their financial backing are key. We are currently in an expansion and building mode. We are having discussions with other smaller associations to align their programs with ours. It’s membership driving the association and vice versa—a nice two-way street.

CD: What are your objectives for the association during the next year?

KN: We have quite a broad base of areas we have been addressing over the last couple of years: fire safety, mold and insurance. We are not going to take on any major new issues, but focus on what we have on our plate right now and make sure the results work for our members.

CD: Good idea. Do you have any particular message you would like to communicate to the membership?

KN: As someone who is strongly involved in the association, I urge members who aren’t involved, to become involved. We are a great group of industry leaders, and I promise that you’ll not only receive back more than you give out, but you will also have a great time and build some strong and lasting relationships.

I’d like to conclude by thanking a great group of individuals who make it possible for me to be involved in AWCI—the men and women of J&B Acoustical. I’d also like to thank the AWCI membership for allowing my wife, Elaine, and I to represent the association membership in the year ahead. We are proud and honored to have the support not only of the AWCI staff but also the membership.

About the Author
Steven Ferry is a freelance writer based in Clearwater, Fla.