Joe Baker:  
37 Years of Service to the Industry

Tributes to Joe Baker

I’ve known Joe since 1968, having met him at my first convention in Chicago. Joe, we’ve climbed a few mountains together since that first meeting, and hopefully we’ve been as good for each other as you’ve been for AWCI.

As you move confidently into your future, we hope you’ll recall AWCI well. You leave having influenced the lives of many manufacturers, contractors, and union members who will remember your sense of loyalty and dedication; they have benefited from your straightforward style and the way you dealt with people. We will all miss you and think of you often. Thank you for 37 great years.

As you and Cam move into an exciting new part of your lives, we hope you will think of us as often as we will remember you.

Very Best Regards,
Joseph A. Feldner
McNulty Bros., Chicago

For the past 37 years, Joe Baker has been the chief staff officer of the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries - International and its predecessor associations. He has announced his retirement effective June 30, 1992, and tributes and honors have been pouring in from around the country. Perhaps the highlight of this outpouring of gratitude for a career devoted to the wall and ceiling industry came at a “roast-toast” dinner held in his honor on March 21, 1992, in Washington, D.C. Joe was presented with the Pinnacle Award, AWCI’s highest honor, and was thus inducted into AWCI’s Circle of Leadership. At the 75th AWCI convention, Joe was subsequently named an Honorary Lifetime Member.

Joe’s accomplishments are legion; when he was named Executive Secretary of the Contracting Plasterers’ International Association (CPIA) at its 1955 convention in Pittsburgh, the membership consisted of fewer than 300 contractors and dues were $65 a year. Today AWCI has nearly 1200 members, an annual budget of almost $3 million, and a current staff of 14.

Along the way, he has implemented many changes and worked closely with many individuals to mold the association into what it is today. He has made sure that AWCI’s membership receives full credit for the changes, building consensus and agreement on directions in which to proceed. But he has been the catalyst. A few of the major accomplishments AWCI has achieved under Joe’s leadership:

—Joe literally built AWCI’s chartered chapter program from scratch, visiting numerous state and local associations throughout the U.S. and Canada and working out agreements that would be
Joe:

It has been a dilemma to know you all these years. I say dilemma instead of “honor” or “privilege,” etc. because with you no one could know what needed to be done; kick your ass or love you! I have felt over the last 37 years like I wanted to do both many times. However, with all the trials and tribulations we both have gone through, we have remained friends to this day. I didn’t say “till the end” because hopefully neither one of us is done yet. Just slowed down a bit.

In any case, I know that everything you or I have ever done was for the betterment of our industry. For this I will always respect you. So in dosing, let me just wish you God speed and fair winds in whatever your future might hold.

Bill C. Carroll
Carroll Venturea, Inc., Albuquerque

Joe with AWCI members Jimmie Crane, Bill Bell, Dick Martin, and Steve Watkins during a Continuing Study Council trip to Capetown, South Africa. He’s holding a shoe that he paid for on a “per shoe” rather than “per pair” basis.

Going back to Joe’s first year of employment, he was introduced to Marleine and me by Lloyd Peterson, mutually beneficial to all parties. He was able to satisfy strong and established associations such as the Florida Wall and Ceiling Contractors Association, as well as the smaller local associations. In addition, he spearheaded efforts to establish chapters and local associations where none were in existence before. His efforts guaranteed AWCI a stable, growing membership base, and he provided a framework for chapters to share ideas and resources. Today, AWCI’s charted chapter system continues to benefit members at the state, national and international levels.

—He has been present at each step in the evolution of AWCI. One of its predecessor organizations, the Contracting Plasterers’ International Association (CPIA), changed its name to Contracting Plasterers’ and Lathers’ International Association in 1955, the year Joe was hired, to admit lathing contractors. It changed its name again in 1969 to the International Association of Wall and Ceiling Contractors (IAWCC) to more accurately reflect the industry’s increased participation in “diversified” systems. In 1976 IAWCC merged with the Gypsum Drywall Contractors International (GDCI) to form IAWCC/GDCI. In 1979 the group’s name was changed to AWCI. Joe made this merger possible, and for the first time the entire industry could speak with one voice through AWCI.

—Joe enabled AWCI to serve non-union as well as union members. Originally composed of 100% union membership, by 1976 the organization recognized a growing trend and established an Open Shop committee. Joe and the leaders of the period took a great deal of criticism for their actions, but they enabled AWCI to provide a wide variety of

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then president of our association, at the Elmwood Casino in Windsor, Ontario, at which time the Detroit Contracting Plasterers Association was holding its annual Christmas Party.

By the end of a great evening, my impression was he tells super Episcopalian jokes. I hope he can do as well running the association.

During his 37-year tenure, Joe has never wavered from his goal of making our association the best and most effective of all associations in the industry. To this very day his concerns and ambitions are still the same.

Joe’s accomplishments in the field of labor relations have been second to none including the all powerful A.G.C.

Things we have taken for granted in the past may not be available to us in the future, only because of Joe’s unique abilities.

Al Ricca
Tri-County Interior Systems
St. Clair Shores, Michigan

Having known Joe Baker since the day he was hired by the old CPLIA and services to nonunion members. Joe has renewed his commitment to union members as well by formulating a Council of Union Contractors, which is currently still in the development phase.

-Joe has always kept an eye on the future, looking for emerging trends and enabling members to learn about those trends and take advantage of them. He helped found the Exterior Insulation Manufacturers Association and promoted EIFS to members at a time when this was a brand new technology. He supported investigation into asbestos abatement, and in 1979 AWCI held the first ever asbestos abatement seminar in the U.S., followed by the establishment of the Asbestos Abatement Council to allow members to serve this growing niche. He encouraged members to widen their markets by serving new areas such as demountable partitions, fireproofing, acoustical ceilings, light gauge steel framing, metal lath and furring, exterior stucco, and many others. He supported the establishment of a consultant system, with experts in specific areas serving as AWCI-sponsored consultants to the industry. And he helped open the way for computer applications to the wall and ceiling industry.

—AWCI has been at the cutting edge of association management techniques, one of the reasons Joe has been honored so often by the American Society of Association Executives. One of a very small handful of association leaders nationwide to receive the “Key” Award, Joe instituted such innovations as a single registration fee for member and spouse at the AWCI convention; giving suppliers to the industry full member status; developing sponsorships for the convention, to help hold down registration

Joe and Daniel J. Bennet of the Associated Builders and Contractors sign a Joint Venture Agreement to establish a drywall/plaster curriculum.
fees; and winning national recognition through such awards as the President’s “C” award for volunteerism.

—Although a severe economic recession has taken its toll on AWCI’s resources, Joe built the association from virtually nothing to a well-respected group with its own headquarters building in prestigious Alexandria, Virginia. The building, located within walking distance of a subway stop to downtown Washington, represents the ultimate in long-term financial stewardship and management of reserve funds.

—AWCI’s Wall and Ceiling Political Action Committee became one of the most influential political action committees in Washington under Joe’s stewardship. The fifth largest PAC in the construction industry, at its peak WAC/PAC was able to distribute some $120,000.

—Joe’s political contacts in Washington benefited AWCI immensely over the years, giving its members influence far greater than they could have achieved otherwise. AWCI members visited every U.S. President from Eisenhower through Bush, and “I’m a friend of Joe Baker’s” opened doors to Congressmen and Senators throughout the city.

—For 37 years, Joe has worked with a wide variety of individuals in many roles—AWCI Presidents, an ever-changing Board of Directors, Committee Chairmen, supplier representatives, union leaders, and many others whose cooperation was necessary for the success of AWCI and its programs. As he said in 1985, “I’ve never had a bad president in all of my (then) 30 years with the wall and ceiling industry. As St. Paul said, ‘They all have different talents,’ so it is my responsibility to recognize, understand, and work with the God-given talents of each one.”

A 1967 CPLIA Board of Directors meeting in Washington. Joe’s at the lower left.

What can you say about Joe Baker that hasn’t been said already? His accomplishments in our industry are well documented. Perhaps it is the little things Joe has done that I will remember most. At my first couple of AWCI conventions, Joe made it a point to find me and introduce me to some of the other members, to get me involved in the committees, to really make me feel a part of the association. He did this in spite of his many other

watched his progress through the merger with the various wall and ceiling organizations and in the Washington scene, I can only say this is one very talented hard working gentleman. I was on the board when he was hired at which time he was known as “young Joe.” His potential was just beginning and proved successful. I know that he is leaving the association in very good condition and he will be missed by both the membership and the Washington, D.C. community.

Best wishes in retirement, Joe.

Wally Stabbert
Springfield, Oregon

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responsibilities at convention time.

That’s the sort of thing which helps to build an organization. The association is obviously Joe’s pride and joy, his life. I know his leadership will be sorely missed. Joe, thanks!

Phil Neely
Acousti Engineering of Alabama
Birmingham, Alabama

Joe, as you embark on your most deserving retirement, we at Zellner Plastering say “Thanks, stay well and may God bless you and your loved ones each and every day.”

Mike Zellner
Zellner Plastering, Los Angeles

Joe:

Our association and friendship began in 1966 when I was a mere lad and you were middle age. Now that I am where you were and you are older, I look back with fond memories to our Continuing Study Council trips and those numerous meetings. I will always be grateful for your support in allowing me

Pictured at a meeting some years ago are several industry founders. Back row are Joe Baker, Bob Maidt, Bill Martin, Loyd Peterson. Front row are John Rooney (president of the Plasterers’), Lloyd Mashburn (president of the Lathers and former Secretary of Labor), Joe Baker Sr., Ed Venzie, and Joe McNulty.

Active from the Beginning

Joe was born in Asheville, North Carolina. His father, Joe M. Baker, Sr., had been managing director of the National Bureau for Lathing and Plastering and director of the Florida State Lathing and Plastering Contractors Association (Joe never succeeded his father as chief staff executive of CPLIA; in fact, Joe Sr. never worked for that group).

Joe attended the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, New York, and the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in Washington. He received a degree in Business Administration from the University of Tennessee. During the early ’50s he was a building supply company salesman in Washington, D.C., where his enthusiasm and willingness to work attracted the CPIA. Its officials hired him as the eastern field representative, later naming him Executive Secretary.

While devoting his full-time attention to AWCI, Joe managed to fill the remainder of his life with a whirlwind of activities. Among some of his affiliations:
— He ran for Congress in 1962. He came in second, but the other guy came in next to last.
— He has been a Senior Warden for St. Charles the Martyr Anglican church in Annapolis, Maryland, a Past President of the Churchmen’s Association of Southern Maryland, and a Delegate to the Episcopal Convention, Archdiocese of Maryland, three times.
— He was a Founding Member and later Chairman of the Republican Organization of Anne Arundel County, Maryland.
A typical shot of Joe several years ago shows him trying to do 10 things at once. His dedication to AWCI and his love of work meant a great deal of overtime.

—He was Founder and 5th Congressional District Chairman, Goldwater for President Committee of Maryland, in 1964. He was also a delegate to the Republican National Convention that year.
-He served on the Board of Governors of the National Republican Club of Capitol Hill (the “Capitol Hill Club”) for 11 years. He was Chairman of that group’s Nominating and Membership Committees.
—He was founding member of a local Kiwanis Club, Past Member, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Third Degree Mason, and past president of his children’s elementary school’s PTA.
—His work with the American Society of Association Executives included serving as Chairman of the Educational Committee; Member of the Board of Directors for four years; National Vice Chairman in 1982, Chairman of the Convention and Exposition Section; Instructor in Convention Certificate Courses for ASAE for approximately eight years; Chairman of ASAE’s Political Action Committee, 1983-85; Chartered Association Executive (CAE)—was in the first class to receive this designation in 1960; and recipient of ASAE’s highest award, the ASAE Key Award, in 1979.
—He was also active with the Greater Washington Society of Association Executives, serving on GWSAE’s Board of Directors for eight years and as its President in 1978.
—He was a founding member of the National Association Executives Club and served on its Board of Directors for three years.
-He was a founder and is still a member of the “Diligent Dozen,” a networking group of association executives in the Washington area that continues to

as a manufacturer to be the first elected to the C.S.C.

No one, Joe, has ever served any industry with the dedication and sincerity of purpose as you. Tempers flared, opinions differed, politics arose, and personalities prevailed. But you always stated your belief, were willing to compromise and most of all, supported the decision. It was not easy to have so many bosses that changed each year. You have handled it well.

I will miss our “end of the day” cupped hand of cheer, our smart-ass remarks to each other, but mainly cherish a time tested friendship that will never “retire.”

Bill Baird, President
Alabama Metal Industries
Birmingham, Alabama

Throughout the years you encouraged me to stretch a little and take on more responsibilities. You were also there to give me counsel. As I grew in knowledge and confidence, other opportunities opened up, not only in the association, but in my business as well.
Although we didn’t always agree, we were able to maintain respect for each other and get the job done.

We were both there when the organization changed from a plastering association to include other interior finishes. Then we merged with the drywall contractors. We also played a large role in merging the lathers and carpenters together. Through it all, you were working behind the scenes to make it all come together. No one else could have accomplished all these things and still kept the members pulling in the same direction.

I know you must be as proud as I am of all that has been accomplished. Looking back and reflecting on the good times, good friends, and jobs well done should give us both a very warm feeling.

Joe, it was the best of times. With love and good wishes,

Don Chambers
J&B Acoustical, Mansfield, Ohio

Another early meeting shows Joe seated next to his father, third and fourth from the left. At far left is Ruth Rosenthal (now Ward) who was working part time for CPIA until Joe was hired in 1955, when he made her his first full time employee.

J&B Acoustical, Mansfield, Ohio

—He has served on the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Alumni Association’s Board of Governors, and he was their National Vice President in 1955. He received the association’s highest award, “Outstanding Alumnus,” in 1955.

—He has been a member of more than 50 “steering committees” for candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate.

—In addition to his Lifetime Membership and Pinnacle awards from AWCI, several local associations in the industry have conferred honorary lifetime membership on Joe, including the Texas Lathing and Plastering Contractors’ Association; the Wall and Ceiling Contractors’ Association of St. Louis (AWCI’s St. Louis Chapter); Wall, Ceiling and Carpentry Industry Association of New York (AWCI’s New York City Chapter); Drywall and Interior Systems Contractors Association of New Jersey (AWCI’s New Jersey Chapter); and the Florida Wall and Ceiling Contractors Association (AWCI’s Florida Chapter).

Joe Baker’s 37 year tenure with the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries saw many innovations in the industry and the association. Through all the changes and all the years, he kept his commitment to the industry and did what he could to make it grow. For his many years of service, he deserves thanks.

Joe is the father of five children. He and his wife Camilla Lacy Baker live in Annapolis, Maryland.
Dear Joe,

In 1988, George Bush spoke of “A Thousand Points of Light.” This association is very much like “a Thousand Points of light.”

As our leader, you have focused the thousands of diverse business and professional communities into one great association. In doing so, you have allowed each member to add their light to the sum, without diffusing the intensity. For this, I will always be grateful. I must admit, there were occasions when the bulb got a little dim, but I always knew one of us would either replace or re-adjust the bulb.

Joe, remember the good times and the challenges you’ve experienced. And as always, continue to give to those who cross your path or enter your life. May your light shine forever in the minds of all who have had the opportunity to meet and serve with you.

Mike Chambers
J&B Acoustical, Mansfield, Ohio

JOE BAKER

We’ve shared the laughter, we’ve shared the tears
Over far too many, many years.
You’ve been a friend and a pal when problems grew tall.
Your support during my presidency is cherished most of all.
We haven’t always agreed on issues, as you well know.
However, your loyalty to our association and industry is unsurpassed, Joe.
I’ll miss the calls, I’ll miss the chatter.
But not your lobbying efforts on many matters.
We wish you and Cam the best as your retirement nears.
Hope you find time to relax through the upcoming years.
Just a reminder, dear Joe, keep one thing in mind.
When you and I and the association are all far behind.
There will still be mountains left to climb.
And all of them easier than me trying to compose this rhyme.
Joe, best wishes and good luck!
Jim Biddle
Mader Construction Corp., Elma, New York

Mover and Shaker
Joe Baker meets with the Presidents

With President Reagan

With President Eisenhower

With President Nixon

With President Ford