

# AAMA: The Organization



A Mercedes-Benz M-Class moves down the assembly line in Vance.

As the automotive industry has responded to the markets over the last 10 years, so has the AAMA responded to its members—supplying support and training where needed.

By Jim Dunn

**IN 2001**, when 11 companies and organizations created the Alabama Automotive Manufacturers Association (AAMA), the Alabama automotive industry was still in its infancy. Mercedes-Benz had just begun production of M-Class SUVs at its Vance facility in 1997, Honda's Lincoln facility had yet to begin producing Odyssey minivans and Hyundai's Hope Hull facility wasn't even on the drawing board.

By 2007, the latest year statistics were compiled on Alabama's auto industry, 48,457 workers were directly employed

by the state's auto industry, with another 85,769 workers indirectly employed as a result of purchases by industry employees and companies. The total payroll for direct and indirect jobs was \$5.2 billion, figures that put Alabama among the nation's top car-producing states. Through the decade of change from 2001 to 2011, the AAMA has been one of the key sources of communication and improvement for the industry.

Steve Sewell is a board member and officer of the AAMA, and has been from the organization's inception. He explains

why the AAMA was created.

"The idea back then was to create an organization that would support the growth and the continuous improvement of the automotive industry in the state. The founding organizations and companies wanted to establish a network for automotive-related companies in the state, and for companies and industries interested in doing business in the automotive industry. We also wanted to create this network for the exchange of ideas and best practices in the automotive industry."

Sewell says the AAMA took operating ideas from many sources. "Truthfully, a number of groups came together in-state, including the founding organizations, and they put their ideas together. Then, we looked at other statewide organizations, particularly in Tennessee. There, they had a more mature organization called TAMA, the Tennessee Automotive Manufacturers Association, and they shared some information with us, as well."

Both during the time Alabama's auto industry was starting and during the recent economic weakness, the AAMA has helped its member institutions become more efficient and productive. Sewell says, "We have continuous improvement



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—Steve Sewell, AAMA board member

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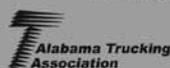


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programs, lean manufacturing, process improvement programs, quarterly meetings that feature speakers from both in-state and out of state on current topics and issues and the networking opportunities that we create through those meetings." In addition, the AAMA offers scholarships to high school graduates entering a two-year college's automotive program.

As the AAMA has helped its members evolve, it also has evolved in the type of benefits it offers. "Just last year, we had another major milestone in one of our quarterly meetings," Sewell explains. "We had what we called 'matchmaking sessions,' where companies were able to come to quarterly meetings and schedule, in advance, sessions with both OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) and top suppliers. The OEMs and suppliers made a commitment to be there at the meeting, and to entertain these companies that were interested in doing business. That really strengthened the networking that we had established."

Although the current recession has wreaked havoc on almost every aspect of Alabama business, including the automotive industry, there is a bright side to the rocky economy. Just as individuals and families have had to eliminate costs and inefficiencies, so have automakers. That kind of transformation has benefits, both for the lean times and beyond.

Sewell says, "I think that the AAMA has really demonstrated its value as an organization, because one, automotive-related companies have focused on continuous improvements, lean manufacturing and finding efficiencies, and the AAMA has continued to offer programs to meet those demands from companies. Second, companies have felt the need to talk with their peers about what they were doing, how they were managing in a downturn, and the AAMA has been the organization where they could come to hear speakers talk about the issues all companies were facing, and they were able to share best practices with other companies and talk about how they were managing difficulties."

Those leaner companies are now better poised to handle the demands of a more robust economy. "As the industry begins to ramp up again quickly, those suppliers who have been forced to get lean during a difficult period—and we saw this already in 2010—have been able to ramp up quickly themselves to meet the demands of the vehicle assembly plants. With just-in-time delivery components and the extreme importance of the suppliers in the supply-chain process, that's one of the challenges."

For some of the companies, they had to identify efficiencies, and in doing so, the companies have focused on getting prepared for the turnaround. And, this year, the numbers are starting to show an uptick in the Alabama automotive industry. As the AAMA and Alabama's auto industry has grown, so has the state's economy. Where once the state was home to low-paying textile jobs, now thousands of autoworkers have good-paying jobs. Sewell puts it this way. "Where would we be in Alabama without the automotive industry and the jobs it has brought to replace tens of thousands of jobs we've lost in other manufacturing sectors?"

*Jim Dunn is a freelance writer for Business Alabama. He lives in Alabaster.*

## FOUNDING MEMBERS

The 11 founding members of the AAMA were: Mercedes-Benz U.S. International, International Diesel of Alabama, Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama, Delphi Automotive Systems, Honda Manufacturing of Alabama, Alabama Technology Network, Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, Alabama Industrial Development Training, Alabama Development Office, Governor's Office—Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs and the Business Council of Alabama. Today, AAMA has 406 members.

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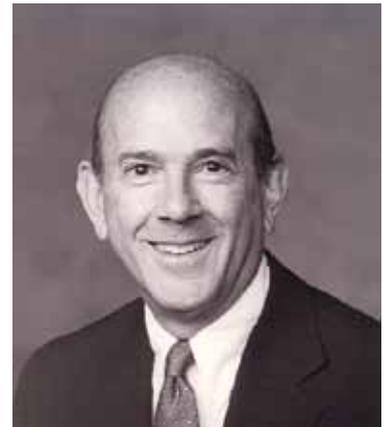
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