

A man with grey hair, wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket, a white shirt, and a yellow tie with small blue and red polka dots, is smiling and looking to the right. He has his hands in his pockets. The background is a dark, textured, brownish-gold surface.

A  
MAN  
*of*

WINNING

**Jack Henderson's abilities to connect with people on a personal level and communicate in effective ways are some of his principal tools for success—as a businessman, as a past chair of NAED, and now as the recipient of the Association's highest honor.**

**by Carol Katarsky**  
*photograph by Stan Kaady*

**I**T'S HARD TO IMAGINE THAT ANYONE IN THE INDUSTRY HAS ENJOYED HIS OR HER CAREER MORE THAN JACK HENDERSON, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF OKLAHOMA CITY-BASED HUNZICKER BROTHERS AND THIS YEAR'S ARTHUR W. HOOPER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD WINNER. HENDERSON'S MODUS OPERANDI IS TO ALWAYS FIND WAYS TO MAKE THE WORK INTERESTING SO IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE WORK. "HE'S JUST A FUN GUY TO BE WITH," SAID BURT SCHRAGA, CEO OF BELL ELECTRIC, SANTA CLARA, CALIF. "HE'S SO ENGAGING AND ALWAYS SO ENGAGED IN WHATEVER HE'S DOING." THAT ATTITUDE HAS SERVED HIM WELL PERSONALLY AND ALSO SERVED AS THE ANCHOR FOR MANY OF THE INITIATIVES HE HAS LED AT HUNZICKER AND THROUGH HIS INVOLVEMENT WITH NAED.

Henderson's longevity and success within the industry would have been hard to predict at the beginning of his career. He admits his tenure with Hunzicker—the only company he's ever worked for—began almost by accident.

"When I first came to Hunzicker, I had no money. I was about to get married, and I needed a job," he recalled. "I didn't understand anything about the industry, but it sounded fine and it paid more than the bank trainee program I had intended to go into."

His first position at Hunzicker was working as the office manager—a job that left him feeling somewhat isolated from the rest of the business. "It's not

until you get out and talk to people that you start to understand the industry because you get to see the vendor, supplier, and user perspectives," he explained.

But over time, Henderson took on additional responsibilities and worked in several other positions at the company. In the process, he developed a highly attuned sense of what makes a distributor run effectively—and still uses every bit of that knowledge from every department. (Henderson happily reports that, when needed, he can still skillfully load and drive one of the company's trucks. "It always gives the guys in the warehouse a little surprise," he said.)

Mike Lockard, president and CEO of Hunzicker Brothers, agreed that Henderson has no lack of energy or engagement with the day-to-day running of the business. "He is very passionate about the business and our employees," Lockard said. "Besides his longevity in the business and our company, he remembers just about every-

WAYS





## NATIONAL MEETING

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thing. He looks good for being 100 years old, don't you think?" he joked. "But seriously, he is in his 45th year with our company and still brings a youthful exuberance to the office every day."

"The thing about Jack is, he's never at his desk. If you try to call him, he's going to be in the warehouse or out talking to a customer. He does things that you can't do from behind a desk," said Charles "Chuck" Nelson, executive chairman of Hunzicker Brothers. "He'll come in early, take orders, or load a truck if that's what it takes to get the job done. Everyone in the company knows he won't ask them to do something he wouldn't do himself. That's just his work ethic—everyone at Hunzicker knows that no one in the company works harder than he does."

With a solid grounding in the electrical distribution business—and with a little push from a mentor—Henderson was soon on his way to far deeper industry involvement. After an economic downturn in the 1980s, Hunzicker temporarily stopped attending NAED meetings. When it was time to get involved again, Henderson was tapped to go as the company's representative.

"Mr. Hunzicker was the one who first told me to go to NAED. I barely knew what NAED was at that point," Henderson explained. "I think he saw some potential in me and wanted to give me the opportunity to meet with other people in the industry and learn a lot more."

Henderson's first meeting was eye-opening as to the possibilities the industry held for him personally as well as for his company. But while he saw the benefit of being more engaged with the industry at large, he couldn't have imagined where that idea would eventually take him. "When I attended that first meeting so many years ago, never in a thousand years would I have guessed that I would be asked to be the chair," he confessed.

#### INCREASED INVOLVEMENT

From that rather low-key start, Henderson took to NAED with incredible verve, and he credits his activity within the Association for much of his success. "Jack has served in various positions within NAED in a manner that can only be described as being 'all in,'" noted Lockard.

For Henderson, the benefits were clear: This was a place he could make personal connections and also learn more about the industry to make better-informed decisions for the company. "To be a successful manager in a mid-sized distributor, you have to know all aspects of the business," he said. "That's one way NAED is so helpful—when you run into a problem or something you don't know as much about, they have tools available at your desktop that you can use to get up to speed."

He's been a fixture at meetings for decades, and in addition to his term as chair, he has previously served as the western regional vice president and helped form the Government Affairs Committee and served as its founding chair.

"Through NAED, and especially during my time as chair, I got to spend a lot more time with, and got to know better, people all over the country whom I had previously only known by name," he added. "I also got to attend the Canadian and European conferences to see the impact of our industry throughout the world and get the perspectives of people doing the same kinds of work in other countries."

In his time as chair, he took the involvement a step further as a driving force behind the development of the Association's Government Affairs Committee. "Being able to help increase the involvement of NAED members and associates in Washington stands out as one of the things I'm proudest of from my time in NAED and especially as chair," he said. "I don't dismiss people who are skeptical of how much it helps. It can be hard to quantify. But I think that voicing our perspective still matters. And it's a chance to explain to policymakers what we do. Distribution in general is still not well understood by most people outside of it."

His efforts on behalf of the channel haven't gone unnoticed or unappreciated. "I believe Jack represents NAED, and the channel in general, extremely

#### IN PRAISE OF JACK

"He's a very good leader, in part because he's a great listener. When he's talking to you, you have 100% of his attention."—**Burt Schraga**, CEO, Bell Electric

"He seems to connect with everyone he deals with—as a supplier, it makes me want to work even harder to help ensure success in our dealings with him. Jack has my admiration and respect, and he deserves every bit of the success he and Hunzicker Brothers have earned."—**Galen Hollar**, president, Burrus & Matthews

"Jack has always exemplified to me the total professional; his continued contribution to NAED over the years also demonstrates the giving back that is so important to the long-term evolution and growth of the organization. Most of all, I count my friendship and working with Jack as part of the many initiatives within NAED as two of the greatest benefits I have personally realized from being part of NAED."—**Clarence Martin**, CEO/CFO, State Electric

"Jack is just a very nice person. He is willing to get his hands dirty. He is collaborative in his business style and very approachable. He is excitable in that he is very passionate about his business, his employees, and his willingness to help customers and suppliers alike."—**Bob Murphy**, executive vice president, marketing and sales, Hubbell



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well," said Galen Hollar, president of Burrus & Matthews. "He has given generously of his time and has dedicated himself to serving the Association and to making our industry better."

"He is a great people person and very much on his game in every aspect of his business," added Clarence Martin, CEO and CFO of State Electric, headquartered in Huntington, W.Va. "When Jack contributes on an issue, it is always appropriate and insightful and helps gain consensus, especially when there are disparate opinions. He's honest and forthright with his opinions, but he is also always a gentleman in the process."

Those qualities as a leader are exactly why he was selected as this year's Hooper recipient. "Jack embodies the qualities of an Arthur W. Hooper Award winner," said Bob Murphy, executive vice president, marketing and sales, for Hubbell. "He is dedicated, involved, and passionate about accomplishing goals, and he does it in a fashion where you can't help but want him to be successful. He is not only a great friend of mine and of Hubbell's, but also a contributor to our industry and a leader within NAED. As past chair of NAED, he sacrificed his time and effort away from Hunzicker Brothers to help all of us succeed within NAED."

Looking back on his career to date, Henderson was quick to give credit to the many people along the way he has worked with in one capacity or another. "So many people have contributed to my career," he acknowledged. "I owe a debt of gratitude to the whole group—staffers, suppliers, and distributor members. I've been the beneficiary of all of them, and they've all contributed to my success. They're due the credit. And of course, my wife, Belinda, has been there with me all the way as well."

The award is in many ways recognition of dual effort by Henderson and his wife. "Jack did a great job representing NAED and representing the industry overall, especially during his time as

chair," noted Schraga. "And not only did he make every meeting, his wife Belinda did as well." Murphy agreed that she is a significant part of the secret to his success. "Jack is very passionate about his business, his employees, and his willingness to help customers and suppliers alike," he said. "However, his best asset is Belinda, who is with Jack every step of the way in his business endeavors."

The award is meaningful to both of them, Henderson acknowledged. "My wife cried when I told her I had won this award," he said. "It's extremely humbling and gratifying. When I look at the previous winners, all I can think is, 'How do they think I deserve this?' I feel inadequate compared to them. I guess I paid my dues over 45 years, but it's still humbling. It means a lot to me. But I also hope it's not a sign to get out," he added with a laugh.

#### LOOKING FORWARD

The award certainly is not a hint to move on—Henderson's insights are still valued and he has more he'd like to do. He continues to extol the value of continuing to learn—not just to work better today, but also to be ready for what the future holds.

"When I was younger, Mr. Hunzicker told me to learn something new every day," Henderson said. "Now, I preach that we have to learn more than one new thing every day if we want to keep up with the technology and the changes in the industry."

That's hard to do when people often feel they are working 24/7, but Henderson is adamant about finding time for education—in whatever form it can be found. "We're all busy enough already, but you have to force yourself to incorporate education into your day," he advised. "A lot of it is simply learned by doing. Just immerse yourself in the problem and work on it until you find a solution. For me, another way to do that is also to make sure I'm still managing hands on. I spend time every day talk-

#### PAST WINNERS

1992

**J. Kirby Risk,**  
Kirby Risk Supply,  
Lafayette, Ind.  
(posthumously)

1993

**Edward Anixter,**  
Englewood Electric  
Supply, Chicago

1995

**Ronald Kinney,**  
All-Phase Electric  
Supply, Benton  
Harbor, Mich.

1997

**John Waltersdorf,**  
Tristate Electrical  
Supply,  
Hagerstown, Md.

1998

**Malcolm Watson,**  
Watson Electric  
Supply, Dallas

1999

**Stanley Weiss,**  
WESCO Distribution,  
Pittsburgh

2000

**Chuck Steiner,**  
Branch Group,  
Davidsonville, Md.

2001

**Zev Rosen,**  
Good Friend  
Electrical Supplies,  
Toms River, N.J.

2002

**William Schirring,**  
Springfield Electric  
Supply,  
Springfield, Ill.

2003

**Richard Butler,**  
Butler Supply,  
Fenton, Mo.

2004

**Ted Treadway,**  
Treadway Electric,  
Little Rock, Ark.

2005

**David Crum,**  
Crum Electric  
Supply, Casper,  
Wyo.

2006

**Robert Lemman,**  
North Coast  
Electric, Seattle

2007

**R. Lee Hite,**  
The Hite Company,  
Altoona, Pa.

2008

**Charles Collat Sr.,**  
Mayer Electric  
Supply,  
Birmingham, Ala.

2009

**Bill Elliott,**  
Elliott Electric  
Supply,  
Nacogdoches,  
Texas

2010

**J. Michael Barker,**  
Springfield Electric  
Supply,  
Springfield, Ill.

2011

**John Duda,**  
Butler Supply,  
Fenton, Mo.

2012

**Thomas Cloud,**  
United Electric  
Supply, Wilmington,  
Del.

2013

**Robert Reynolds Jr.,**  
Graybar, St. Louis

2014

**Tammy Miller,**  
Border States  
Electric, Fargo, N.D.

ing to frontline employees to get their perspectives.”

One of the reasons he emphasizes ongoing education and training is the need for greater efficiency. “One of the biggest issues the industry is facing is consolidation,” he warned. “When manufacturers combine, they can leverage that new product mix and force a choice on the distributors’ part between suppliers they’ve been loyal to. The same is true with distributors, with the bigger guys buying the smaller ones. The annual dollar value of sales needed to be viable is going up every year.”

He added that while keeping up with technology is important, better-trained employees are the key to making sure the company can keep up with its competitors. “You’ll get different views on this, but I think the key to a successful distributor is the people. Our sales team

has a combined 281 years of experience,” he said. “We keep people here for a long time, and I take a lot of pride in that. We have very low turnover because we keep everyone involved and drive everyone to improve their performance. We also make sure they get ongoing education and training. Virtually all of our employees do a certain number of hours of professional training every year.”

He said that commitment to development would also be a vital way to attract the next generation of employees into the industry.

“NAED spends so much time figuring out how to attract the next generation of people to the industry as a whole and to our companies,” Henderson said. “We need to get the message out there that in this industry, you can not only be successful and provide for your family

without an advanced degree, but also find a company that will continue to invest in your success.” He cited career fairs, technical school programs, and even general consumer education as key methods for the industry to promote itself—and to ensure that the future leaders don’t all arrive by accident as he did, no matter how well it worked out in his case.

“My family and my company have been my life for the past 45 years—my wife keeps telling me I need to get a hobby,” he joked. “But in 45 years, I never thought, ‘I don’t want to go to work.’ And yet I always looked forward to going home to my family at the end of the day too.” ■

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