

Burnett: Embracing change will help ensure STA's growth

As president of the Southern Textile Association (STA) for 2010-11, Brad Burnett was never one to let the organization rest on its longevity and laurels, storied as they are.

No, "status quo" was never good enough for the Burnett as led the esteemed group this past year. His vision for STA was deeply instilled in him by George Abbott – his mentor, Inman Mills colleague and STA president in 2006-07. That vision: STA's future is just as important as its past -- or perhaps more so.

During STA's 103rd Annual Meeting at Hilton Head Island, S.C., in June, Burnett explained this vision in his President's Address, appropriately titled, "Remembering our Past, Embracing our Future." He acknowledged that the tenets for STA's growth had been created and set forth by leadership during the textile industry's recent period of upheaval. He then explained what he sees as the course and direction of the association, in what he called the "four objectives for sustainability."

They are:

1. **Solidify STA's viability** through partnerships with companies producing emerging technologies and with new leadership from textile and related companies in order to increase active and participative membership to a comfortable level of funding and support.
2. **Enhance value to membership** by strengthening divisional and organizational meetings in order to promote efforts to build value in relationships and enrich membership through collaboration, shared knowledge and support for both suppliers and its manufacturing member base.
3. **Reduce volatility** by adjusting what may be considered barriers to participation and inclusion in STA, such as in bylaws to promote equal standing and leadership opportunities among manufacturing and supplier membership.
4. **Increase visibility** through numerous online and social media avenues and through cross-promotional efforts with the media and sister organizations.

Indeed, these objectives – new blood with fresh ideas, value add, more diverse leadership and participation and expanded promotion – are crucial to STA's surviving and thriving in the coming years, Burnett said. And during his tenure, he tirelessly worked to put these ideas into action, and as a result STA's membership grew – an impressive achievement in this economic climate.

"We have to engage and embrace the grand future of the U.S. textile industry ... and understand our importance to the economic stability of our families, our region and our nation," said Burnett, one of a long line of Inman Mills executives to hold the top spot in STA. "The future for STA from my vantage point looks quite promising and we will continue to 'do what we have to do' as we move on to the next phase of our organization and our businesses."

During his address (*see full text at southerntextile.org > Recent Events*), Burnett encouraged members to "duplicate" themselves by participating in a program called "**Each one – Reach one.**" The challenge is for each member to recruit at least one new member as well as to urge their active participation in the association.

Before leaving the dais, Burnett imparted an inspiring message to the group – in the process perhaps becoming STA's first "singing president." (Note: Lisa Siggins, who held the president's gavel during STA's centennial annual meeting in 2008, didn't sing at that event but did let her daughter Ariail do the vocal honors.) In his deep baritone voice, Burnett sang four lines of the

song “Blessing” and called them “profoundly thought-provoking in the way I view opportunities that come my way.”

To wit:

*What if your blessings come in raindrops
What if your healing comes through tears
What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know you're near
And what if trials of this life, are just your mercies in disguise?*

Also during the meeting, Randy Blackson of Glen Raven, Inc., Anderson, S.C., was elected president of the STA. Burnett was elevated to chairman of the Board of Governors.

Fiber Buyers meet jointly

For the third straight year, STA met jointly with the Fiber Buyers group made up of members of the National Council of Textile Organizations (NCTO), the Georgia Traditional Manufacturers Association (GTMA) and the South Carolina Manufacturers Alliance (SCMA). Such a partnership is the result of STA’s new way of thinking, to which Burnett had referred in his address, and draws on the mutual synergies of these related groups.

The gathering, as usual, offered a mix of business and pleasure and of course was family friendly. Two business sessions offered a nice balance between economic/manufacturing issues and inspiration through humor.

Among speakers:

- **Anthony Tancredi**, president of Allentown Cotton Co. and Louis Dreyfus Commodities, returned for the third straight year to the Joint STA/Fiber Buyers meeting and presented his always-entertaining view of the world cotton market.
- **Cass Johnson**, president of the NCTO, said, “we can all take comfort in the fact that the industry had one of its better years” as retailers have reassessed their global sourcing strategies, before offering updates on numerous trade and legislative issues that likely will impact the industry.
- **Scott Paul**, executive director of the union-backed Alliance for American Manufacturing (AAM), assured the audience he’s “not looking to organize any factories,” but instead aimed to drive home a message “as American as apple pie” – that American manufacturing matters. He then discussed a number of trends in manufacturing and how important it is to our children’s future.
- **Walter Todd**, principal and chief investment officer at Greenwood Capital, gave his take on the market after the “decade from hell” for stocks.
- **William Barnet III**, CEO of The Barnet Co. and Barnet Development Co. and former mayor of Spartanburg, S.C., gave an insightful, inspiring talk on “Cathedral Thinking in a Time of Doubt” in which he imparted lessons learned about the interface between public office and the private sector.
- **Rep. Brooks Coleman Jr.** (R-Ga.), gave a high-energy motivational speech that was part preacher, part teacher, part politician and wholly entertaining.
- **John Maguire**, senior vice president of Washington Operations for the National Cotton Council, offered an update on his group’s work this year.

In addition, Dan Nation, president of Parkdale International, was presented the David Clark Award, which honors past STA presidents who continue to contribute distinguished leadership and service to the association for 10 or more years following their presidency.

— *Devin Steele*

(To view photos from STA's annual meetings, please visit and "Like" its Facebook page.)

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