

## ABANA President's Message

December, 2007

It's too bad that all organizations seem to have organizational problems, but apparently there are no exceptions. The larger an organization becomes the more services and information are demanded from its membership, and the more difficult it is to furnish services and information to meet the needs of every individual member.

...Recently one member wrote the Secretary-Treasurer expressing concern over the increased cost of our organization and added, "As my partner put it, ABANA ought to be careful as the blacksmiths can get along without ABANA, but ABANA can't go on without the blacksmiths."

That member is absolutely right. Maybe, however, he is overlooking an important point about our organization. ABANA is BLACKSMITHS."

These are the words of Alex Bealer, quoted from the June, 1977 issue of The Anvil's Ring. At that time ABANA had a whole 648 members. Elsewhere in that issue members learned of plans for the next ABANA conference to be held in Purchase, New York. The program was to include, in addition to demonstrators you'd still recognize, a lecture on the psychology of the creative mind, a tour of the ironwork of the Metropolitan Museum, and a design lecture. Also, members back then could read about the upcoming first Southeastern Regional Conference (open to ABANA members only) and a report on the first Quad State Roundup.

My point in bringing this all to your attention is that ABANA, since its earliest days, has sounded very much like it does now. On the one hand, that could lead people to conclude that we haven't gotten anywhere in those last 30 years, and maybe that is what some will say. On the other hand, it makes me think that we have always had to satisfy a diverse group with divergent needs, interests and tastes which converges around the one thing that binds us: a set of skills that involve using heat and pressure to change the cross-section of a piece of metal. The fact that we continue to have lively debates about our aims and goals is also a tribute to our success.

We want you to join in the debate. So far, more than 1000 people have taken the membership survey. If you haven't taken it yet, click the link on the ABANA web site, or contact your local affiliate. While you're visiting the ABANA web site, check out all the other changes there. We are listening and working to communicate more effectively. Soon, everyone will be able to go to the web site and see the comments from the surveys (cleansed of personal information, of course). We want everyone interested to be able to see what sorts of things their peers have told us. You can now sign onto ABANA's e-mail list server and get regular updates about ABANA and

news from the blacksmithing community through your e-mail. We know that poor communication has been one of the biggest beefs with the ABANA Board in the recent past, and the Board's shortcomings in communicating to the membership have allowed rumors to perpetuate and things to seem worse than they are. We are getting better, but communication is a means to an end as well as a service.

The Board is working on all fronts to find and offer services that meet the needs of all the different constituent groups that make ABANA, and prepare ABANA for the future. However, even the hardest working board can't solve the problems we now face. At its best, and since its inception, ABANA has served primarily to facilitate communication between blacksmiths, and not just between blacksmiths and their organization. It seems to me that the reason all organizations have problems as they grow isn't just that the needs of the membership broaden, but also because fewer members in larger organizations participate. ABANA IS BLACKSMITHS, and we lose something we can't afford to lose whenever one of us stops feeling invested in the group.

In my first message as president (Hammer's Blow, Fall 2007 issue), I asked all of you to give us a chance; now I am asking you to do your part. Make ABANA yours by investing a little of yourself in it. Consider what you want ABANA to be, and participate. Take the survey. Send an item for the calendar. Send a picture. If you learn something or see something you like, tell us about it. Tell us what you don't like. If you can, volunteer -- it doesn't have to take much. If you can't volunteer, maybe tell a friend about ABANA. Give an ABANA gift membership to someone who cares about blacksmithing, or even to someone who cares about you!

What will preserve and propel ABANA into the future isn't the work any board does, it will be all of us finding the means to keep sharing and spreading the joy of forging hot metal. That is why we're here, that is what we have together, and that is ABANA.

**Chris Winterstein ABANA President**