
Pilots and Repairers: Sharing a Common Interest

Contributed by Ron Pyle
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For many years now, ASA, through its industry events, has presented some of the most compelling, dynamic and yes, heroic figures in America to its members and guests. If you're in the position of trying to top those acts each year, as we are, you can understand how difficult it can be.

Association: n. An organization of persons having a common interest.

This definition of "association" certainly describes the Automotive Service Association (ASA), whose purpose is to serve those persons having a common interest in the business of servicing and repairing automobiles.

As we go about the business of serving this group of people - our members - we have the distinct honor and privilege of "associating" with them in all kinds of venues and activities, and we come to know them well. What I can tell you without reservation is that our members place a high value on integrity, as defined here: "firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values."

For many years now, ASA, through its industry events, has presented some of the most compelling, dynamic and yes, heroic figures in America to its members and guests. Colin Powell, George Herbert Walker Bush, Rudy Guiliani and Chris Gardner, just to name a few, have related their life experiences and the lessons they have learned to enraptured audiences of shop owners, who often remark afterward, "Wow, that was an amazing speech," or "I feel so privileged to have seen (fill in the blank)."

We've had sports heroes such as Troy Aikman, Kyle Petty and Jeff Gordon. We've been entertained by the Beach Boys, Wynona Judd, Bill Cosby and Jay Leno. Topping those acts each year is, as I am sure you can understand, challenging. As we were deliberating earlier in the year about who would be a good keynote speaker, someone mentioned a particular name, and the room immediately became charged with momentary excitement. Then someone else said, "Good luck with that!" or something equally dismissive, because after all, wouldn't the demand for this gentleman be overwhelming?

Imagine our surprise, when we learned a short time later that "someone knew someone" and Capt. Chesley (Sully) Sullenberger had been confirmed to deliver the 2009 Automotive Service and Repair Week (ASRW) opening General Session keynote speech. This was beyond our wildest imagination, and it was only made possible because of our "association."

What I find even more remarkable, however, is how much common interest Sullenberger and our shop owner/members share. Consider this commentary from an appearance on the CBS "Early Show" with Harry Smith, where Sully was appearing to support the publication of his new book, "Highest Duty: My Search for What Really Matters."

Sullenberger related how, because of the failing economy, he lost 40 percent of his salary over the years - which contributed to some financial strain prior to the Hudson landing.

"We were facing a lot of those struggles that everybody faces these days," Sullenberger said.

His wife, Lorrie, added, "People come up to Sully and say you're a hero, but really we're like everyone else in America ... We're really very ordinary and normal. He was just in an extraordinary circumstance."

Smith pointed out that pilots bring their own lunches into the cockpit because they aren't supplied a meal anymore.

How are all of these economic changes impacting the atmosphere of air travel, and what will it cost passengers?

Sullenberger said that's a question to consider as the industry goes forward.

"If we as a society do not value this profession sufficiently, will we be able to attract the best and the brightest - the people doing it now - or will it be somebody else? I think that economics and safety ultimately are linked," he said.

Personally, I was stunned to read that last sentence, and it immediately occurred to me that the plight of pilots and professional repairers is very similar in many respects. So we should all be asking the question, "What does our current 'atmosphere' of automotive service repair cost the motoring consumer?"

When do we reach the point where safety is compromised because cost becomes the most important consideration in the repair? I believe the distinguished captain is correct when he says, "economics and safety ultimately are linked."

I invite you to take advantage of a rare opportunity to hear Captain Sullenberger, a gentleman who certainly shares our values, speak Nov. 5, 2009, in Las Vegas. If you haven't already registered to attend the International Autobody Congress and Exposition (NACE) (www.NACEexpo.com) or the Congress of Automotive Repair and Service (CARS) (www.CARSevent.com) or the Auto Glass Replacement Safety Standards Council (AGRSS) events, give it serious consideration today. It's less expensive to travel to Las Vegas than it has been in years, and the odds are better than ever you will enjoy the experience and benefit from the "association" for years to come!

Editor's Note: For more information about Sullenberger's keynote address and other Automotive Service & Repair Week (ASRW) events, please visit ASRWnow.com, the official online publication of ASRW.