

INSIDE WISCONSIN

Farm tech helps the bottom line, too

Brent Haglund literally gets his hands dirty when he describes how technology and science-driven practices are helping farmers and other landowners.

Haglund, an ecologist who heads the Madison-based Sand County Foundation, showed up at a recent meeting of the Wisconsin Cleantech Network with buckets of soil to demonstrate how no-till agriculture can help farmers and ranchers conserve their valuable land – and make more money.

The no-till buckets showed deeper root systems and held together firmly when removed, while soil from tilled lands was more easily fragmented and lacked root density.

“These are advantages to no-till you can see,” Haglund told the crowd, “but there are many that don’t immediately meet the eye.”

No-till farming is a way to grow crops or pasture from year to year without disturbing the soil through tillage. It increases the amount of water that infiltrates into the soil and boosts organic matter retention and cycling of nutrients in the soil. In places prone to flooding or wind damage, no-till greatly reduces soil erosion and loss of nutrients. No-till also increases the amount and variety of life in the soil, including organisms that suppress disease. Farmers save time through reduced tilling and there’s less wear and tear on equipment, which also use less fuel.

The main benefit of no-till is improved soil biological fertility, which makes the land more resilient over time while making farms and ranches more efficient.

“More farmers today are focused on net profit per acre than yield per acre, which is why no-till can be attractive,” Haglund said. “They are committing to conserving their own land, showing a better bottom line and saving time for themselves.”

There’s nothing new about no-till but its advantages have been made increasingly clear through science. As Haglund noted, many of the same farmers and ranchers who have switched to no-till are early adopters of other tools – some as common as portable electronic devices – to track and better control use of fertilizer, water and pesticides.

“Farm technology is more than just the do-dads and the drones,”

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TOM STILL

EXECUTIVE Q&A | MICHELLE CZOSEK

CEO has eye for strategy others need

She leads, works with other associations

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If there is a broad interest in a topic, chances are there is an organization for it.

It could be for a profession, a trade, a hobby or a group of like-minded people. An online search shows associations exist for everything from apple grow-

ers and beer brewers to yoga instructions and zookeepers.

But just because group members have a shared interest in, say, Christmas trees, that doesn’t guarantee they have the skills to effectively run such an organization. How many people can organize a 600-person meeting one week and coordinate trade publications the next, while also handling public relations and planning and implementing pro-



Czosek

grams to help educate members?

That’s where Michelle Czosek comes in. The new president/CEO of Wisconsin Society of Association Executives has nearly 25 years’ experience managing professional and trade associations, including the North American Building Material Distribution Association, International Association for Human Resource Information Management, Information

User Association, International Women in Boating and The Harmonie Group.

In her role as account executive at AMPED – Association Management Partners and Executive Directors – Czosek, 48, serves not only as the president and CEO of WSAE, but also as the associate director for the Society of Wetland Scientists, an international organization of more than 3,100 members dedicated

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FORTIFIED HOMES | CONSTRUCTION STYLE CAN STRENGTHEN HOMES, PREVENT LOSS

Building to avoid disaster

Couple want to get word out about advanced-protection steps they’re taking

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Five years into Bill Eberle’s 31-year career as a disaster claims adjuster for Madison-based American Family Insurance, he worked a big area storm and saw such damage that it made him question how homes are put together.

It was in late April 1984, and a tornado had just ripped through Wisconsin southeast of Wales in Waukesha County – killing one person, injuring 14 and wreaking widespread property damage and destruction.

He’d never seen anything like it.

“I was a young adjuster with the company, and new to that degree of devastation,” Eberle, now 56, recalled. “Seeing how that type of storm can so severely affect people’s lives was a life-changing experience for me.”

As part of the work associated with that storm, Eberle handled the claim of one man who suffered a severe head injury when he was struck by a falling beam when his house collapsed on him and his family. Recovery and rehabilitation of the man’s injuries took years, Eberle said, and helped plant the seed for questions that would go on to motivate Eberle’s career.

“Why were some homes, like this one, completely destroyed, while neighboring homes had only minor damage?” Eberle said. “He and his family were lucky to survive. How many people die each year in tornadoes or severe windstorms who don’t have to?”

Today, in the town of Bristol near Sun Prairie, Eberle and his wife, Jean Folts-Eberle, are building a house that promises to withstand most of the storm damage Eberle has seen over the



Photos by JOHN HART – State Journal

Randy Marten, owner of Marten Building & Design, right, discusses some of the enhanced building techniques to be used as he oversees construction of the home of Bill Eberle, left, and his wife, Jean Folts-Eberle, at the site near Sun Prairie in late July.



Construction components that will be incorporated into the Fortified Home building process include, from left, modified bitumen tape used to seal roof joints, tighter-holding ring shank nails and metal hurricane ties. The impact-resistant products and techniques are being used in the construction of a home in the nearby town of Bristol.

years through improved construction techniques and building materials, the couple said. And they want everyone to know about it.

“We are excited about getting the word out and increasing awareness of this style of construction,” Eberle said. “It’s pretty simple and affordable, so

it’s surprising that more builders aren’t doing it.”

“We believe in an ounce of prevention,” Jean Folts-Eberle said, rather than a pound of cure.

If all goes as planned, the Eberles’ 2,050-square-foot ranch home, going up in the 2900 block of Grandview Circle, will be the first house in Wisconsin to provide advanced protection against high winds and hail, as certified by the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety’s new Fortified Home program.

The industry-leading non-profit in Tampa, Florida, is funded by insurers and studies decades of storm data to find ways to make homes and businesses more impact-resistant to natural and man-made hazards alike.

The program’s approach works on the theory that spending a little more upfront to build in protections – or to retrofit an

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CAREER CORNER

Steps to take in preparing for a video job interview

SYBIL PRESSPRICH
Special to the State Journal

Once a hallmark of science fiction novels and comic strips, videoconferencing is now more accessible than ever. Preschoolers chat with faraway grandparents. Teens use Face-Time to hang out with friends. And employers use videoconfer-

encing to interview job applicants.

In one survey, 63 percent of human resources (HR) managers said their company often conducts employment interviews via video – a 14 percent increase from the previous year. Most respondents predicted increased use of the technology.

Hiring managers know that

videoconferencing is more effective than phone interviews. Even when interviewing candidates across town, employers may still rely on video interviews. If the business is interviewing applicants from a distance, they will want to interact with everyone in the same manner, for the sake of fairness.

Your first challenges involve technology and logistics. Be sure you know which software the interviewer is using, and obtain an up-to-date version for yourself. Choose a user name that conveys a professional image, and clarify who will initiate the call. Double-check the time –including the time zone. Select a loca-

tion with fast, reliable Internet access. Be sure the camera and microphone work well. Perhaps the most important thing you can do is to conduct at least one practice call with a friend.

Next, think about the impression you want to make. Start by

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Czosek

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to fostering sound wetland science, education and management. Czosek will also represent the National Air Filtration Association as its executive director beginning in September.

After college, in 1990, she stumbled into a job as membership assistant for the National Building Distribution Association in Deerfield, Illinois.

“I answered a job for a membership assistant. I didn’t have any idea what the association world was about,” she said. And as positions quickly opened at the association, Czosek took on new duties, which helped broaden her skills early in her career. That association was taken over by Smith, Bucklin and Associates in Chicago two years later. She worked there until 2000. At that point, with a young child, she took a job that allowed her to work from home, which she did until she became an associate director of WSAE in 2013.

Q: Who is the typical WSAE member?

A: WSAE is an association for association executives. We have 500 members. They are people who work in association management or the hospitality industry. Our members are association execs. We have convention and visitor’s bureau members. We have hotels. Anyone who supplies anything to our industry.

Q: What types of services does WSAE provide to your members?

A: When someone becomes a member, they have access to all kinds of educational events, networking opportunities, publications, access to their peers, etc. We have an annual event called our Innovation Summit, which is our largest event. That’s about 150 attendees, and we discuss innovations in association management, how they can do things more efficiently for their organizations, talk about any new technologies, anything they need to stay on top of. We also have a spring outing every year, which is our golf outing. In the past, that has been just a golf outing and no educational component, but next year we’ll move to having an educational component. We offer a lot of webinars. We have a CEO roundtable in Milwaukee that meets every other month that is strictly for association CEOs only. We also have our publication, which is called VantagePoint. That’s our full-color magazine that comes out quarterly. We have a membership directory, newsletter and online community. It’s called Our Connected

MICHELLE CZOSEK
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Family: Two daughters
Education: Bachelor’s degree in political science, University of Illinois; Certified Association Executive credential, the American Society of Association Executives CAE Commission.
Position: President/CEO of The Wisconsin Society of Association Executives, which has more than 500 members dedicated to the profession of association management. Account Executive at AMPED - Association Management Partners & Executive Directors, a Madison-based association management company.
Website: www.wsae.org.

Community, where you can go in and post questions to other members, post articles. We’re also active in social media.

Q: What are the challenges of working with director boards?

A: I think the biggest challenge is, honestly, making time for everything.

Q: What is a typical day like?

A: A typical day is switching back and forth between the clients. Definitely being able to go from managing this group of association executives, who do what I do every day, to talking to people about wetland science, which is not my area of expertise. My knowledge and skills are in association management. I do know things about wetland science, but obviously we rely on our volunteers to provide content for our magazines and the meetings. We manage the operations of the organization.

Q: They know what they are interested in, but you help them put it in a framework and move it forward.

A: Right, because their expertise wouldn’t be in planning an annual convention for 700 people.

Q: If people want to go into this field, what are some of the things you think would help prepare them?

A: What helped prepare me for this role is just having broad experience in all the different areas of association management. I think that was really just luck because people left, I’d get offered a position and be able to step into a role. I think a business mind helps because sometimes the people that you are working with aren’t really business-focused. With the wetland scientists, we have scientists – people in the government, academic or consultant arena – who aren’t always thinking about the business aspect of it. Also, thinking about long-term strategy and the ability to see the big

picture is important as well as financial management.

Q: Anything else?

A: It’s a great field to go into if you like people. You have to have really good people skills because a lot of it is relationship building, especially when you are working with a board of directors where maybe a third is turning over every year and you have new people and personalities coming in.

Q: What are the challenges of working with director boards?

A: Making sure that they are being strategic and not operational is one of the biggest challenges. That just depends on the board that you’re working with. With WSAE, they all do what I do for a living so they are very strategic. When you work with some other groups they may be getting into some very operational things that may be handled by staff. So we make sure they are using their time in the best way possible.

Q: You mentioned previously about getting CEOs together. Is the idea of learning from people in similar jobs one of the main reasons for that?

A: I think one of the main reasons, in general, that people join any organization is because they can talk to people who are doing the same thing they do for a living and they can talk about the challenges they’re having and, hopefully, find solutions to some of the things they are facing. That’s why I’m really excited about WSAE and leading the organization because I am working with people who do what I do for a living every day. Whether I am at an organizational event or talking to one of our members on the phone, I feel like I’m always learning things that can help me do the job better and can help advance the organization.

Q: What else should people know?

A: Associations, in general, are such a good place to network, to learn and have that sense of community that people look for. For me, I would encourage people to join associations related to their career or interests. I’d also encourage young people to consider association management as a career. You don’t go to college and see association management typically as an area of study. People aren’t typically talking about it, but it is a huge field with a lot of opportunity. If you’re in marketing, if you’re in finance, if you’re a writer, every field is covered in association management, so there is so much opportunity there for a career.



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