



“Through the looking glass”

I am not a glass man. At least I never was until I became executive director of the Glass Manufacturing Industry Council last October. The GMIC is the trade association that bridges all sectors of glass production: flat, container, fiberglass and specialty. Until then, much like Alice in Lewis Carroll’s “Through the Looking Glass,” I took the glass objects in my world for granted. That is until, also like Alice, I fell through the mirror into a strange and wonderful world.

It’s a deceptively big enterprise. The U.S. glass industry employs more than 120,000 people and ships \$28 billion of glass annually. But, it’s more than just statistics that makes the glass industry so fascinating. My education began on my third day on the job when I attended the 71st annual Glass Problems Conference. I was immediately taken by the enthusiasm and vision of the attendees. “Glass gets under your skin,” they said. And they were right. When Peter Garforth spoke about “District Energy Systems,” which are financially beneficial collaborations between cities and manufacturers, where waste flue energy is also used to heat local communities, I began to see that the impact of the industry went well beyond just the products it produced.

Glass manufacturing is a story of continuing engineering innovation. At the Corning Inc. headquarters is a history wall. It begins with the manufacturer of bulb-shaped glass for Thomas Edison’s incandescent lamp. It continues through the development of television picture tubes, fiber optic cables,

to LCD screens. In my office sits two nearly identical 24-inch cones of glass. One is translucent amber and one is opaque white. It turns out that they are both from the exact same formulation of Pyroceram glass. The only difference is that an accidental overheating of the glass in the renown lab of Corning’s S. Donald Stookey (see page 12) fully crystallized one cone, making it very strong, heat resistant and transparent to radio waves. In fact, the white cone sitting on my credenza is actually the nose cone of a military missile.

Last November, I set out to visit GMIC members to understand their needs and aspirations. The first time I toured a glass plant, I was floored. It seemed like Dante’s inferno as tons of molten glass raced past me at break-neck speeds through the intricate choreography of melting, forming and finishing. As I met GMIC member companies’ management and discussed their long-range objectives, there wasn’t one company that didn’t put sustainability in their top priorities, with aggressive targets to reduce energy use by as much as 50 percent.

The industry is as resilient as glass itself. Glass has the unique property of being able to be melted and reused with no limits. Emhart Glass Research demonstrated this property by reusing the same glass in its research furnace continuously for 14 months. Leveraging this advantage, GMIC is presenting a symposium on glass recycling at the ACeRS GOMD conference May 19, 2011, which sets the stage for significant improvement in the glass recycling movement in the United States. On other fronts, the Usable Glass Strength Coalition is about to sign an historic agreement between manu-

facturers, universities, suppliers and users to collaborate on precompetitive research into the fundamentals of glass strength. Also, the GMIC Waste Heat Management Team is planning a pilot project to test for the optimum system of reusing waste heat from the melting of glass.

I am enthusiastic about GMIC’s mission to assist the glass manufacturing industry improve the quality of our lives. As you read this article, you are probably within arm’s reach of an item made of glass. Items, such as computer screens, eyeglasses and windows that were once new innovations, today we take for granted. I can only imagine how strange and wonderful the world will be, as glass innovations take us through the looking glass into tomorrow. ■

Robert Weisenburger Lipetz, MBA, is the executive director of the Glass Manufacturing Industry Council. He has a successful track record of growing professional associations, like the Society of Chest Pain Centers, which he took from a start-up to its present position as one of the most influential organizations in its field. A graduate of Ohio State University’s Fisher School of Business, Lipetz resides in Columbus, Ohio.

Robert Weisenburger Lipetz, MBA
Executive Director
Glass Manufacturing Industry Council
600 N. Cleveland Ave., Suite 210
Westerville, OH 43082
tel 614-818-94233
fax 614-818-9485
cell 614-906-4350
rwlipetz@gmic.org
www.gmic.org