Hi, I’m Bud VanSickle the new Executive Director of the Lightning Protection Institute. As we begin a new era for the organization, I thought it might be interesting to share how I got here. This is my chance to tell the story in my words, before everyone in the industry who knows me tells the “truth.”

I was born and raised in the business. My father began his career in lightning protection with Robbins in 1949, shortly after his graduation from Iowa State University. I graduated from Maryville High and started at Texas A&M in 1971, spending one year in EE, then changing my major to Industrial Distribution (50% engineering classes/50% business courses with emphasis in marketing). I continued doing lightning rod work on breaks, with part-time summer jobs spent on the production floor and helping in the drafting department.

One summer I worked in Abilene, TX, I helped install systems on three commercial-style buildings for college campuses. Two days before we finished, a tar pot exploded causing second degree burns on my arm and leg—leaving scars that are still visible. Another summer, I was the drafting department for Bonded Lightning Protection of Rockville, MD. Working for a company with a dozen or so installers in the greater Washington, D.C. area was a new experience. Another summer, I spent a week installing for a 30’ x 60’ house in the “town” of Turner, about 10 miles from the Canadian border in east-central Montana. My father called me into his office one day and said, “We put a courtesy bid on a house and for some reason the customer accepted it. It’ll take two days to drive out there, maybe a day to do the job, and two days to drive back. You’re the lowest paid person here, so if we send you, we won’t lose too much money.” It’s always important to know your true worth.

In 1973, my father left Robbins, to start A-C Lightning Security, Inc. Manufacturers with 10 local investors. I graduated from A&M the spring of 1975, and went to work in the Houston, TX sales office of the Crouse-Hinds Co. We marketed our line of cast products, including our “explosion-proof” electrical equipment, mainly to the petrochemical industry to the tune of about $35 million per year. I worked three years of inside phone sales, answering technical questions, and two years in outside sales traveling from Lake Charles, LA to San Antonio. In 1980, I left to join A-C Lightning as Vice-President.

A-C Lightning was a full line manufacturer of lightning protection equipment with a successful history in the ‘80’s and ‘90’s. We did no installing and outsourced the foundry work. We worked with some strong installation-only companies and sold through manufacturers reps. Our forte was system design, including full quotation and drafting services for clients. We grew sales at an average rate of 10-12% per year for about 20 years with outstanding profitability. In 1987 we purchased all the lightning protection assets of the Carl Bajohr Co., known as the product leader in the new construction market for heavy-duty industrial stacks. In 1993, I succeeded my father as President. At its peak we employed 29 people, normally just less than half in the office and the balance in production.

I don’t believe that A-C Lightning ever created any advantage in the marketplace.
Lightning Safety Awareness Week

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will celebrate the fourth annual “National Lightning Safety Awareness Week” on June 20-26, 2004. According to the NOAA, safeguarding U.S. residents by promoting awareness helps lower lightning death and injury rates associated with one of nature’s deadliest hazards. The theme of this year’s multimedia campaign, “Lightning Kills, Play it Safe,” includes public service announcements, press releases and safety programs which LPI members can access and distribute with their company’s promotional materials. This is a great opportunity for members to capitalize on the national campaign by attempting to secure local publicity with hometown newspapers and local television stations. For more information about the national campaign, visit the NOAA website at: www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov. Or to get tips and ideas on how you can gain publicity on a local level, contact Kim Graziano by email at Llpco@aol.com.

LPI Celebrates 50th Anniversary

In anticipation of its 50th Anniversary year in 2005, LPI is formulating plans to capitalize on our historical presence in the lightning protection industry. We will keep our members posted over the next few months, as we hash out opportunities and ways that we can gain recognition and exposure for the institution and its members. In the meantime, you may want to communicate what your membership in LPI means to your business and media contacts, with the following reminder:

The LPI is a nationwide not-for-profit organization founded in 1955 to promote lightning protection education, awareness and safety. LPI membership is comprised of manufacturers, contractors, scientists, architects, engineers and safety directors—all who are interested in promoting lightning safety and improving the science of lightning protection.

Insurance Discounts for Lightning Protection

Effective in March 2004, American International Group Insurance (AIG) will offer a 2% credit off base insurance rates for homeowners who purchase a U.L. Master Label Lightning Protection System, installed by a LPI certified installer. According to Krista Komo, AIG Risk Management Services, “Discounted systems must include the lightning rod system for the structure, surge arresters for the electrical entrance and surge suppressors for the residence’s electronic devices.”

The discount comes on the heels of staggering statistics from the insurance industry, cited in the August 4, 2003 issue of National Underwriter Magazine. According to Property Claims Services, a unit of the Jersey City, N.J.-based Insurance Services Office, severe thunderstorms caused an estimated $4.9 billion in insured loss claims during the second quarter in 2003—the second highest for a second-quarter period in the last nine years.

LPI Media Report

Heading into our 50th anniversary year, the future looks brighter than ever for the lightning protection industry. Education, support from the scientific and insurance communities, lobbying efforts, networking and public awareness campaigns continue to drive exposure for lightning protection. Support for lightning protection is stronger than ever—evident by recent requirements and mandates now seen on federal, state and local levels. Studies from scientists, engineers and safety experts have helped increase support for the promotion of technically valid safety standards for lightning protection. All of this helps drive our industry in a positive direction.

As LPI’s new Marketing Communications Consultant I hope to develop media relations, and step up communication efforts to gain exposure for the LPI and our industry. We have a wealth of news and information to share, and it will be my job to make sure our message is heard! Over the course of the year, I’ll develop press releases, articles, newsletters, etc. to communicate industry news and goals to the public, media and our members. I welcome your thoughts, ideas and suggestions on industry topics or issues that concern you.

Once again, LPI will designate June as “Lightning Safety Awareness Month” which provides an effective platform to promote our message. I urge all of you to take advantage of this national campaign and seek opportunities for exposure and publicity, which might be available with your local media outlets. Call me at 804-314-8955 or send me an email at Llpco@aol.com. If I can be of assistance or answer questions. I’ll be happy to discuss ways that you can secure media exposure for your company.

As we enter the lightning season and begin plans for our 50th anniversary year, I’m counting on increased member participation and hope to hear from many of you throughout the year. Thank you for your support and dedication to the betterment of our industry. As always, member support is crucial to our continued cause.

Sincerely,

Kim Graziano
LPI Marketing Communications Consultant

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Source: National Underwriter Magazine
Conference 2004 Summary

Over 100 industry members flocked to our nation’s oldest city of St. Augustine for the March 2004 joint LPI/ULPA conference. In spite of the packed agenda, some of you found time to take advantage of the surroundings and enjoy a round of golf, shopping or a bit of sight-seeing in the nearby historic region.

As in past years, discussions with Underwriters Laboratories figured largely in this year’s meeting. Members were introduced to Karl Keip, UL’s new Lightning Protection Program Coordinator, who recently replaced Paris Hudspeth. Space was reserved on the agenda on both the Thursday and Friday of the conference for presentations and group discussions with UL. Richard Bouchard, UL’s Technical Advisor and Leon Pryzybyla, Field Services Manager for UL’s Lightning Protection Program, were also on hand throughout the conference to present information and answer questions. Information presented by UL included:

- Short and Long-term Changes to the UL Master Label Certificate Program
- Future Goals Planned for the Lightning Protection Program
- Clarification on Practical Application Guidelines (PAG)
- UL’s Pending Change from PAG to Practical Application “Resources” (PAR)
- Administrative Issue with regard to Follow-Up Inspection Instructions (FUI’s)
- UL’s use of Bulletins to propose new requirements or revisions.

- Clarification on Site Specific Letters
- Changes pending for Letter of Findings (new 5-year expiration and revised format to resemble look of Certificate).
- Plans underway for UL’s Quality Program (possible changes could include imposed minimums for yearly inspections, possible discounts for installers, reductions of inspections.)
- Future use of digital cameras to verify and resolve on-site installation issues which may help reduce variations
- Website links for field representatives to forward information on topics of concern
- Upcoming UL-96A Lightning Protection Standards Review Classes for Installers

UL reminded LPI members that once a standard is revised, items under review are either transferred into the revision of the standard, dismissed or re-issued. LPI members who did not attend the March conference may want to contact UL to receive copies of the newest UL literature which was distributed to conference attendees.

NFPA 780 Update

Mitch Guthrie, chairman of the NFPA 780 Technical Committee updated LPI members on changes underway for the 2004 edition of NFPA 780. Changes discussed by Guthrie at the 2004 Conference:

- Updates to Reference Section
- Changes to Surge Suppression Section
- Elimination of Misleading Wording Throughout Text (i.e. Faraday Cage)
- Additions/Changes to Sections on Conductors & Grounding
- Use of Preferred Definitions
- Deletion of Unnecessary Figures

Guthrie also discussed NFPA standard issues which are pending consideration, some of which include: modification of Annex items, maintenance issues, air terminal placement and surge suppression, as well as upcoming revisions to the IEC 62305 Document.

The NFPA 780 revisions are pending approval at the May 2004 meeting and should go to press in July for public availability in October, 2004. Target date for implementation of IEC revisions is set for 2005.

Other speakers who contributed interesting and informative presentations at the March conference included: John Tobias, consulting engineer from the U.S. Government and surge suppression advisor to NFPA 780’s Technical Committee, Dr. Vladimir Rakov of the University of Florida’s Lightning Research Center, Henry Lange from the St. Augustine Chapter of SCORE and Bud VanSickle, who discussed revisions in the works for the LPI 175 Standard. Next year’s conference has been set to take place in Las Vegas. Details on dates and accommodations will be forwarded to members in upcoming correspondence, as they become available.

Mitch Guthrie
with the location of our facility, our production methods, or product features. We were successful because we had tremendous respect for our competition, which helped us work with them instead of against them for the good of the whole industry. Our biggest advantage though, was our people. Our staff was second to none, and A-C Lightning was proof-positive that nothing succeeds like service.

Enrico, Inc. made a fair offer for the purchase of all the A-C Lightning stock in 1999, and I recommended it be accepted by the shareholders, who were generally well past retirement age by that time. I stayed on for 2 1/2 years during the transition period, and in May of 2002, we decided I should leave. I signed a two-year non-compete agreement for certain considerations, which is expiring at this time. For the past two years, I have been helping with the startup of a real estate company in St. Joseph, MO as the designated broker. Pinnacle Realty is a part of the United Country Real Estate system. We specialize in historic structures and country homes with acreage, farm ground and hunting land.

I also have three boys (one now in college, one in high school, and one who will be in the 3rd grade this fall).

The Board of Directors at LPI approached me to do some contracted technical writing, and see if I had an interest in returning to the industry. The Board later related their desire to retain someone with experience in products and system that could run the organization to better assist membership and the public. It was the Board’s feeling that a quality staff with experience in the industry, would be better able to promote lightning protection and lightning safety. I’ve agreed to accept management of the organization, bringing what I have to offer back to this industry through LPI.

Now that I’m 50, my experience in the industry and elsewhere should help me accomplish the goals of the LPI. While I’m at it, I’ll keep in mind that, my wife, Pam still thinks I have a lot left to learn.

Anyway, I hope to see many of you soon; or at least I hope we’ll be talking. Please let us know if there is something we can do to help.

Sincerely,

Bud VarSickle

Bud’s Industry Affiliations

Business & Community Affiliations
- Park & Recreation Board Member, Chairman of the Planning Committee 2000 & 2001, Board President, 2002
- Maryville Industrial Development Corp. Board Member, 1994-2000, Secretary 1997-2003
- Chamber of Commerce, Legislative Trip Coordinator, 2000 & 2001
- Missouri State Chamber of Commerce Board of Director, 1995-2002
- Chairman of the Community Betterment Organization
- Committee Chair & Originator for “Leadership Maryville” Program, now in its 15th year
- District Chairman for Boy Scouts
- Coach for youth soccer, basketball, youth baseball and youth basketball
- Community Chorus, American Barber Boys & Methodist Church Chorus
- Member, St. Joseph Sertoma Club & Maryville Elks Lodge

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