CELEBRATING
the world's largest plastics technical society
1942 -2017 and counting!
Passion, Determination & a Focused Mission Helped Propel SPE on its Path 75 Years Ago

It hasn’t been easy, but the world’s leading plastics technical society has endured, and remains true to its founders’ original goals

By Robert Grace

SPE, you’ve come a long way, baby.

The 60 engineers who banded together in Detroit in January 1942 – in the midst of World War II – to form a nonprofit organization to advance the knowledge of plastics could not have known that we’d be celebrating their initiative 75 years later, or that the result of their efforts would be the largest plastics technical society in the world.

But that is exactly the case. And the group’s rocky road in its early years and subsequent development often mirrored the challenges being felt by the country and the broader industry. It’s a fascinating story that we are pleased to recap briefly here, with a focus on the group’s tumultuous first decade, along with some subsequent milestones.

The 1940s – in the beginning

- 1942 – SPE was formed, and Fred O. Conley was elected president
- 1943 – the first ANTEC (in Detroit) and first RETEC (in Chicago) were held
- 1946 – the second ANTEC was a big success
- 1947 – the third ANTEC flopped and the society nearly went bankrupt
- 1948 – SPE stabilized financially and moved forward

Originally named the Society of Plastic Sales Engineers Inc., the group that would become the Society of Plastics Engineers filed its Articles of Incorporation on Jan. 6, 1942, in Michigan, with the stated purpose of “cooperating, aiding, and effecting any commercial or industrial betterment pertaining to the designing, styling, standardizing and promotion of the use of Plastics by the distribution of descriptive matter or personal contact, or in convention in any manner that may be educational.”

The group – which consisted of individual members, and initially charged $5 in annual dues – was the brainchild of Fred O. Conley, a mechanical engineer and manufacturers’ agent, who was

Fred O. Conley, SPE’s founder and president. SPE archives photo
elected the group’s first president.

Conley, born in Michigan on March 28, 1889, formed his own company in 1919 and subsequently gained plastics experience while selling for a Chicago-based molder from roughly 1931-47. During that time, he also designed and developed a small, plastic radio cabinet, as well as a plastic dome light for the automotive industry.

After spearheading the launch of the SPSE in early 1942, Conley assessed within a few months that the group’s current structure was not viable, so he initiated the dissolution of the SPSE, which he then reorganized into a new entity – the nonprofit Society of Plastics Engineers Inc. The state of Michigan granted SPE a charter, and SPSE officially became SPE on Aug. 19, 1942.

Conley was again elected president of the newly formed body, proceeded to personally draft SPE’s constitution and bylaws, and largely financed the group in its early days from his own funds. After he had organized the Detroit Section, he set about organizing a section in Chicago, followed by one in Cleveland, in 1943. In May 1942, he also founded SPE’s first publication, called The Commentator, which he edited and published himself as a mimeographed bulletin, with the help of his wife. Soon renamed the SPE Commentator, the publication proved to be an early forerunner to Plastics Engineering magazine.

Conley – who died in 1981 at age 92 – was clearly a force to be reckoned with. His biography states: “... he was cussed, condemned and accused of being a dictator by some members; although always respectful of the Board of Directors, he went resolutely forward on his power-directed course. He brought the office of the Presidency of S.P.E. Inc. to a plateau of power and prestige and kept it there as long as he was in office.”

World War II dominated virtually all companies’ activities at the time that SPE was founded. On May 22, 1942, in Detroit Conley gave a speech in which he noted the “compelling demand” of the war, and said: "We must devote ourselves to the sole task of doing a bang-up selling job and to do our part to convert the plastics industry to full-scale war production to the extent that materials are available, and as soon as new uses are found for plastics in war production.”

**The very first ANTEC**

By the end of 1942, SPE had doubled membership to more than 120. In October 1943, SPE organized its first Annual Technical Conference (ANTEC) in Detroit, attracting 59 exhibitors and 1,775 registered visitors. That same year, the Chicago Section also held SPE’s first Regional Technical Conference (RETEC), with 300 attendees hearing six presentations on dielectric preheating. The RETEC’s papers were published in a large, 24-page, bound volume and copies were sold worldwide for $1 a piece.

War-related restrictions on travel meant that SPE held no meetings in 1944 or 1945, but the society did begin publishing its quarterly SPE News Bulletin in 1945.

Once the war concluded in September 1945, the society’s members were keen to expand into new products and markets. Innovation thrived, with plastics finding use in diverse applications ranging from molded acrylic automotive tailights and polyethylene drinking tumblers to nylon zippers and fiber-reinforced plastic boats.

SPE’s second ANTEC meeting, in 1946, was very well-received, drawing 2,000 attendees for three days of technical sessions, and some 11,000 visitors to a five-day exhibition, resulting in more than $18,000 in net profit. The group hired a full-time executive secretary. By year’s end, SPE had 16 sections and 1,500 members, according to then-president George W. Clark.

**A disastrous 1947**

But that heady success quickly turned sour the next year. Little more than a third of the expected 150 exhibitors booked space at ANTEC 1947 in Chicago, a brutal winter storm kept visitors from attending, and the society was plunged into debt. A historical accounting by J. Harry DuBois – SPE’s president in 1948 – declared, “So, the trip from rags to riches to...
rags again was made in one year. The national office was cancelled and an economy diet was prescribed.”

SPE in 1947 moved its headquarters from Birmingham, Mich., into a corner of the Cleveland, Ohio, custom molding plant of the incoming president, Thomas E. Orr of Plastics Engineering Inc., who managed the society’s affairs with his own staff. At roughly the same time, and adding to the stress, SPE’s leaders also were clashing with the Society of the Plastics Industry Inc. – a competitive trade association that predated SPE by five years, having been founded in 1937 (see sidebar, Page XX).

Jesse H. Day recalled those challenging times in a colorful account he compiled in 1961. SPE’s Executive Committee had asked Day in 1948 to become the society’s part-time executive secretary while he was earning a post-graduate degree in chemistry at the Case Institute of Technology in Cleveland. Day – who would become chairman of Case’s Department of Chemistry – also was the unpaid editor of SPE News-Bulletin.

Day’s wife, Bess R. Day, attended a 1948 SPE council meeting in place of her ill husband, and ended up taking the executive secretary’s duties on herself full time – a key role she played for the next four years. (This also led to SPE headquarters shifting with the Days for a few years to Athens in southeastern Ohio when Jesse Day took a job as a chemistry professor at Ohio University. He continued to edit the society magazine until 1957, when he became chairman of O.U.’s Chemistry Department.)

A document titled “Report of the National Office” spelled out how dire things had become: “On February 1, 1948, when I went to work for the Society of Plastics Engineers, Inc., the office was located in a part of the plant of Thomas E. Orr and consisted of a desk, two broken typewriters, an Elliott Addressing Machine and two file cabinets. There was no filing system. The bookkeeping records were so complicated that even a professional auditor had trouble keeping the records. The Society owed notes for $2,500.00 and the back account was $1,300.00 overdrawn.”

The society needed to get its financial house in order if it hoped to survive. With guidance from Bess Day, the group tackled the accounting system, which took about a year to get down to 40 accounts from about 700, and it took until 1950 to get the filing system fully organized.

**Turning the corner as a society**

SPE President J.H. DuBois told a gathering of members in January 1949 in Philadelphia, that for the society “1948 was a year of stabilization, consolidation of gains, humble seek-
ing of good will, liquidation of debts and diet of bread and water. Your officers have spent no money this year. Your National Office was moved into the living room of your Executive Secretary, Bess Day, to balance your budget. Your National Directors have made an all-out effort to correct the weaknesses of the past, to establish friendly relations and a working agreement with the other Societies. We believe in plastics and the future of S.P.E."

With his trademark flamboyant rhetoric, DuBois continued: “The past is a pretty dead duck. We had some lush years–but so did everyone else. When we were rich, we let George do it; had grandiose ideas and lost our shirts. Now that we are poor, our members have gone to work as individuals. Our strength is in individuals–the workers in the sections. We are strong when we serve the local interests well with fine technical programs and a serious effort to help the industry. We are weak when we stoop to petty local politics. Divided responsibility always leads to failure.

“Our existence depends on the quality of the monthly program. Your best man must be your program director,” DuBois exhorted, urging group leaders to aim high and get the best local and national speakers for every meeting. “...Your local Section Officers must get religion, old-time fighting gospel religion–the urge to make a convert of every man on the street to the principles of sound plastics engineering and uniformly good job by all in the industry. The industry needs S.P.E. (Some won’t admit it yet.) S.P.E. can do the big promotional job for industry. ...Let’s all go home and put up a big solid front and relentless drive for better plastics engineering.”

The 1950s

• 1952 – Bess R. Day, aka “Mrs. SPE,” stepped down as executive secretary (and two years later was awarded an honorary lifetime membership)
• 1952 – SPE established new headquarters in rented space in Stamford, Conn.
• 1954 – Lowell (Mass.) Technological Institute launched a four-year undergraduate program in plastics engineering
• 1956 – The 12th ANTEC meeting drew a record 2,500+ attendees
• 1957 – The group awarded its first President’s Cup, to Frank Martin
• 1959 – SPE created its first Professional Activity Groups, a precursor to SPE Divisions

SPE had survived its near-death experience. Or, as one passage in the society’s archives, notes: “SPE had proved too tough to die. The long climb upward began at an accelerating pace. This was 1950.”

Jesse Day’s report that year stated, “The National Office today consists of two desks, one large table, too [sic] good typewriters, the Elliott Addressing Machine, four large filing cabinets, sundry filing drawers, a well-organized archive file and other miscellaneous equipment. There is a bank balance of $4,650.48 and no debts. Two people work in the office full-time, with a part-time assistant.” Meantime, over an eight-year period, membership had grown “from the original 350, or so, to 2,024 as of December 31, 1950.”

And so the society forged ahead, sometimes in fits and starts, but steadily forward as it refined and reinforced its overall mission to advance plastics engineering as a profession and plastics as an attractive, viable industry. Following are just a few notable highlights in the ensuing decades:

The 1960s

• 1961 – SPE founds the Plastics Institute of America, with the aim of increasing attention on science and technology
• 1962 – SPE presents its first International Award, to polymer scientist Dr. Herman F. Mark, at the 18th
ANTEC, in Pittsburgh
- 1963 – Dr. Giulio Natta receives SPE's International Award for his polymer catalyst development work, the year before he wins the Nobel Prize in Chemistry
- 1964 – SPE begins offering limited-registration educational seminars at ANTEC
- 1965 – A total of 3,651 people attended 10 RETECs during the year
- 1966 – With six technical papers presented in French (and simultaneous translation offered in English), ANTEC became an international event.
- 1967 – SPE celebrates its 25th anniversary and ANTEC attendance tops 3,500

The 1970s
- 1970 – SPE forms its first nine Technical Divisions, with the Color & Appearance Division being the first division formally approved
- 1970 – Ralph Noble, a Canadian, becomes the first non-U.S. citizen to become SPE president
- 1970 – SPE and SPI jointly form the Plastics Education Foundation to develop vocational training courses and materials
- 1972 – The Plastics Hall of Fame was established
- 1973 – The SPE Journal was renamed Plastics Engineering magazine
- 1976 – The National Plastics Center – the brainchild of SPE's Pioneer Valley Section – was established in Leominster, Mass.
- 1977 – SPE membership hit an all-time high of 19,251
- 1979 – The 37th ANTEC, in New Orleans, drew record attendance of 3,652, and had some 200 papers presented in 56 sessions
- 1979 – The society launched the Journal of Vinyl Technology

The 1980s
- 1980 – SPE moves its headquarters to Brookfield, Conn.
- 1980 – The society began publishing the technical journal Polymer Composites
- 1982 – On its 40th anniversary, the society initiates the

SPE Presidents: 1942 - 2017

Current President: Raed Al Zubi - 2017

Fred Conley - 1942
William M. Phillips - 1943
Charles C. Henry - 1944
William B. Hoey - 1945
George Clark - 1946
Thomas E. Orr - 1947
J. Harry Dubois - 1948
Mario J. Petretti - 1949
C. Todd Clark - 1950
Islyn Thomas - 1951
William O. Bracken - 1952
Walter F. Oelmann - 1953
John W. LaBelle - 1954
Frank W. Reinhart - 1955
Peter M. Simmons - 1956
Jerome M. Formo - 1957
R. Kenneth Gossett - 1958
Fred C. Sutro, Jr. - 1959
George W. Martin - 1960
Frank W. Reynolds - 1961
James R. Lampman - 1962
Jack G. Fuller - 1963
Guy A. Martinelli - 1964
George P. Kovach - 1965
Robert W. Sherman - 1966
Bernard G. Achhammer - 1967
Jim P. Fong - 1968
George L. Graf, Jr. - 1969
Ralph A. Noble - 1970
Irwin L. Podell - 1971
Ronald J. Cleveringa - 1972
Theodore S. Stoughton - 1973
John H. Myers - 1974
Harold A. Holz - 1975
George E. Pickering - 1976
Lawrence J. Brouman - 1977
Jack L. Isaacs - 1978
Joseph Magliolo, Jr. - 1979
George P. Schmitt - 1980
James E. “Bo” Chinnors, Jr. - 1981
Thomas W. Haas - 1982
Robert J. Schaffhauser - 1983
William C. Kuhlke - 1984
Richard G. Johnson - 1985
Greg R. Thom - 1986
John R. Kretzschmar - 1987
Bruce A. Petersen - 1988
Vivian E. Malpass - 1989
Leonard H. Drexler - 1990
George W. Thorne - 1991
Henry J. Wojtaszek - 1992
Lance M. Narder - 1993
Bonnie J. Bachman - 1994
David R. Harper - 1995
Jay L. Gardiner - 1996
Norman E. Fowler - 1997
Norman S. Behn - 1998
William A. Humphrey - 1999
James H. Brackeen - 2000
Terence J. Browitt - 2001
Claudius Feger - 2002
Donna S. Davis - 2003
Karen L. Winkler - 2004
Len Czuba - 2005
Timothy W. Womer - 2006
Vicki Flaris - 2007
William J. J. O'Connell - 2008
Paul G. Andersen - 2009
Ken J. Braney - 2010
Russell C. Broome - 2011
James S. Griffing - 2012
Jon D. Ratzlaff - 2013
Vijay Boolani - 2014
Dick Cameron - 2015
Scott Owens - 2016
Fred O. Conley Award, and presents it to Dr. Ioannis V. Yannas

- 1983 – SPE takes over the Plastics Education Foundation;
- 1983 – Jacques de Craene becomes SPE's first VP of International Affairs
- 1984 – SPE introduces the Fellow of the Society member status, to recognize those who have made outstanding industry contributions; through 2017, 325 Fellows have been named
- 1988 – A record number of 25 RETECs were organized

The 1990s

- 1990 – The Plastics Hall of Fame posthumously inducted Fred O. Conley and four others
- 1992 – SPE celebrated its 50th anniversary
- 1992 – The society introduces its Honored Service Members program; as of today, 325 have been so recognized
- 1994 – The Plastics Institute of America moved its headquarters from New Jersey to the campus of the University of Massachusetts Lowell
- 1996 – SPE Foundation forms as a nonprofit organization to fund student scholarships and help with workforce development
- 1997(?) – SPE launches its PlastiVan hands-on, traveling science fair program to help educate students and the public about plastics

The 2000s

- 2007 – Plastics Engineering and Plastics Engineering Europe were combined into a single magazine
- 2009 – SPE strikes an agreement with the Society of the Plastics Industry allowing SPE to organize a technical conference at SPI's big, triennial NPE 2009 trade show in Chicago
- 2011 – SPE organizes Eurotec 2011 in Barcelona, its first major event in Spain
- 2012 – With an eye to the future, the society creates its Next Generation Advisory Board (NGAB) to help counsel and cater to students and young professionals
- 2012 – Belgian national Wim de Vos named SPE CEO, and SPE opens its Europe and Middle East office in Ronse, Belgium
- 2012 – ANTEC Mumbai was the largest plastics technical conference ever held in India, with more than 450 delegates attending 178 technical presentations over two days
- 2013 – SPE headquarters organized its first conference in China, with the Molding & Medical Plastics divisions hosting an event in Shanghai
- 2014 – The first Plastics Race scavenger hunt held at ANTEC in Las Vegas
- 2014 – SPE held ANTEC Dubai, its first annual technical conference in the Middle East
- 2014 – The SPE Beijing Section in China gains official status
- 2015 – SPE launches its online discussion forum, The Chain, at ANTEC 2015

2015 – SPE Executive Council approves the group’s Middle East and ASEAN sections
2017 – SPE revamps its long-standing organizational structure and installs a new governance model, with a smaller Executive Board and several new, functional VP roles
2017 – Chicago-based association professional Patrick Farrey succeeds de Vos as CEO
Aug. 24, 2017 – SPE will celebrate its 75th anniversary with an event called “The Future Is Plastics” in Detroit, which is its birthplace and still home to its largest single chapter.

75 years and counting …

Today, the Bethel, Conn.-based SPE counts more than 22,500 individuals from 84 countries as members. Despite shrinking from some 37,000 members 25 years ago, it remains the largest, most well-known plastics professional society in the world, and now includes a total of 89 units, in the form of technical divisions, geographical sections and special interest groups.

The society has remained true to its primary mission from the very beginning 75 years ago, to represent all types of professionals involved in the plastics field – from students to retired professionals. Its goal still is today to provide and promote scientific and engineering knowledge related to plastics around the world.
Publications Have Played a Vital Role in SPE's History

SPE’s founders clearly understood the importance of communication, and hence placed a high value on the society’s journals and magazines.

By Robert Grace

Two things in particular struck me when I spent a couple of days recently poring through SPE’s dog-eared archives at the society’s headquarters in western Connecticut:

• One was that back in the 1940s the group’s founders acutely understood the importance of creating a historical record, and of documenting their actions, challenges and accomplishments. They went to great pains to do just that. The result is some amazingly detailed, crisply written – and often entertainingly colorful – accounts of various meetings, incidents or decisions that helped to shape the direction and future path of the society.

• The other was the extremely high value that SPE’s leaders attached to the society’s journals, newsletters and magazines throughout the decades.

As a life-long business journalist, this warms my heart. While the stated function of the society – back then, as it is now – was to support and advance the profession of plastics engineering and the industry as a whole, it was clear the founding fathers understood very well the vital role of clearly communicating the group’s mission and efforts to the masses, with great regularity.

SPE’s founder and first president, Fred O. Conley, wasted no time in May 1942 in launching the society’s first publication, The Commentator, which he edited and published himself as a mimeographed bulletin.

The society began publishing its quarterly SPE News-Bulletin in 1945. The following year, that publication morphed into a magazine called SPE News. Its inaugural issue, in June 1946, bore a message from SPE President George W. Clark, dedicating the magazine to the more than 1,300 members, and stressing, “It is your magazine, fellow members, and its voice will be your voice ... representing the activities and developments of each Section, each Professional Activity Group, and each individual.”

One particularly amusing incident occurred a few years later, when the group renamed SPE News as Plastics Engineering, and splashed the new name on a bright orange, all-text cover of the April 1949 issue. That new name stuck – for exactly one issue.

The next month’s May 1949 issue bore a solid green cover with the publication name SPE Journal emblazoned across the front. Inside on the contents page, editor Dr. Jesse H. Day, writing from his office at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, offered the following explanation:

“The cover and name on last
month’s magazine were liked and appreciated by most members, and your editor wishes they could be kept. But it seems we got our tail caught in the copyright screen door – someone else owns the name we chose. So for the moment we are without a title, but the next issue ought to see us all set.”

The council hastily voted 17-3 in favor of a new publication name and, in mid-1949, the SPE Journal was born. It had a good run, for the next 24 years. In that publication’s own pages in June 1967 – on the occasion of SPE’s 25th anniversary – former SPE President J. Harry DuBois wrote: “SPE history would be remiss if it did not include a word of praise for those who could not let the magazine die or be killed.

“Certainly,” he continued, “the SPE Journal has contributed and will continue greatly to the cross-fertilization of our technology and the growth of the industry. The link that it provides as a bond between sections and men has been a stabilizing influence and a leadership challenge. Since the basic goal of any engineering society is the communication of ideas, this is an all-important activity.”

Other writings in the society’s archives went into excruciating detail about the publications, such as:

- **SPE Journal** in January 1951 published a new column, by A. Reynolds Morse – who later introduced injection molding to Van Dorn Co. and founded Injection Molding Service Co. in Cleveland. Called “Injection Molderscope,” the column ran in 63 consecutive issues (till January 1957).
- By 1952, SPE had struck agreements with “with every foreign magazine for exchange of publications and for mutual reprint and abstract rights. Immediately, a large number of **SPE Journal** articles began to appear in journals all over the world.”
- **SPE Journal**’s single-copy price was 30 cents in January 1957, rose to 50 cents in March, and to 65 cents in June.
- That June 1957 issue was 152 pages – the largest ever to that point.
- **SPE Journal** hired its first full-time editor, Charles Rhine, in May 1958, and paid him $750 a month. Two months later, the publication hired its first advertising manager, Lee Noe.
- Other passages note changes in the cover design, the binding style, article index, staffing, and the types of content included in the publication’s pages. All is meticulously documented.

Then, in August 1973 – no doubt after consulting with SPE’s copyright lawyer – the society changed the name of **SPE Journal** to Plastics Engineering. Editor George Smoluk and advertising director H.J. Reid explained the move in a column to readers:

“This renaming is taking place for a very good reason – to better reflect the publication’s editorial thrust of highlighting the most significant engineering and technical developments in the plastics field.” Together with a complete graphic redesign, the magazine touted a new monthly injection molding feature, and an every-other-month extrusion feature, plus “more articles of processing, on applications, on the economic and management aspects of plastics.”

The **SPE Journal** ruled from mid-1949 till August 1973, when the society was finally able to adopt the name it wanted – Plastics Engineering.

And so this month **Plastics Engineering** itself celebrates 44 years under its current name, and in its current mission of keeping members and the industry informed. As with all publications, it has at times been a bumpy road, filled with financial stress and editorial challenges. But SPE’s founding fathers would be pleased to see that this magazine perseveres, and continues to carry the torch that they lit 75 years ago.
Politics and turf wars provided just another early challenge to the fledgling Society of Plastics Engineers trade association in the years shortly after its founding in 1942.

The Society of the Plastics Industry Inc. – which last year rebranded itself as the Plastics Industry Association, or simply PLASTICS – was formed in 1937, five years before SPE was born, and some at SPI didn’t take too kindly to the new kid on the block. SPI’s members were companies, not individuals, and SPE staked its position from the beginning on its organization being a voice for individual plastics engineers and professionals.

SPI, however, felt that SPE was encroaching on its territory and made it known that they felt there was no need for another plastics association in the United States. SPI felt SPE was detracting from SPI’s National Plastics Exposition, which began in April 1946 with a 164-exhibit trade fair in New York City. And SPE felt SPI was treading on its turf when it organized technical plastics meetings.

A series of articles in SPE News documented the resulting discussions between the organizations. The two groups first met on the topic on April 25, 1946, in New York City to state their positions. In late 1946, the Plastic Materials Manufacturers Association (PMMA) offered, for the good of the industry, to serve as an intermediary in the negotiations, “with the object of developing a coordinated and unified engineering program between SPI and SPE, and of joining the two organizations into one.”

Special committees from both bodies convened again that October in Chicago. SPI urged a merger of the two groups, under which SPE would become an engineering department of SPI, under the latter’s control. A key sticking

J. Harry DuBois (left) succeeded Thomas E. Orr as society president in 1948. SPE archive photo
point to SPE's leaders was that individual engineers would have no voting rights under the proposed SPI plan.

SPE President Thomas E. Orr, wrote a lengthy article in the November 1947 issue of SPE News, pointedly titled “SPI vs. SPE – The Case for SPE.” In it he recapped the discussions between the two groups over the past year, and made an argument for SPE remaining independent. Here were some of the key points he made:

- “SPE is an association of individual engineers. … Each member votes.”
- “SPI is a corporation. The control is not vested in the individual but is retained by approximately 600 company memberships.”
- “If SPE and PMMA became departmental functions of SPI, then SPI would dominate the entire plastic field. Is this desirable? There is a friendly competition between SPE and SPI in programs. … Competition is the mainspring of business life.”
- “In no other industry does the Trade Association attempt to dominate the Engineering Society. Experience has deemed that this is unwise.”
- And, in summary, Orr wrote: “The National Council and Advisory Board of SPE have the deep feeling that the independence and integrity of the engineer and of SPE should be maintained for the future development and good of Plastics.”

And so, the 5-year-old SPE placed its stake in the ground, and proclaimed its intention to carry on as an independent association of individuals.

An unsigned document in SPE's archives, titled “History of SPE – 1947,” states, “Exactly what went on is not a matter of public record nor the agreements reached except that it is known that SPE agreed not to have any more exhibits and SPI agreed to stay out of the technical meetings field.”

Despite some bumps in the road, the two groups learned to co-exist, and even to partner to some degree. They came to an agreement for SPE to organize its annual technical program at the massive, triennial NPE 2009 trade show in Chicago – an arrangement that continues to this day, with ANTEC Orlando 2018 due to be collocated with NPE 2018 in Orlando, Fla., next May.

The associations’ two leaders are keen to point out how the groups collaborate now in a variety of ways, including:

- PLASTICS underwrites the cost of dues for U.S. student-members of SPE;
- SPE underwrites the cost for PLASTICS' brand-owner members' SPE membership dues;
- PLASTICS and SPE support each other's technical conferences, including PLASTICS' recently successful "Re|Focus Sustainability & Recycling Summit" and SPE's August 2017 "Injection Molding Innovations Conference," where each provided subject matter expert speakers for the other;
- PLASTICS' CEO William Carteaux is a member of the SPE Foundation's board.

The forward-thinking Thomas Orr certainly was right about one thing when he stated in his November 1947 column, “It is a fallacy to think there is room for only one organization in a growing field as large as plastics.” The industry's two largest groups have, without a doubt, proven that to be the case.