

# Making an impact

## Executive director encourages membership involvement

By Cassie Olson

As the hands-on leaders of the industry, the Minnesota Custom Applicators Association (MNCAA) has been providing technical advice and education to members, government agencies and private industries for over 30 years. Rick Martens, executive director of MNCAA, has been a part of the association since it was created in the mid-1980s. Martens encourages custom applicators to consider MNCAA membership and their active involvement.

“It is good to know who else is out there, how many custom applicators there are and to help each other out,” Martens said. “The association allows us to touch base with others in our industry.”

Martens’ father, Gary Martens, and Jack Schmitt of Monticello, Minn., were inspired with the idea for a custom applicators organization while attending an Ag Days trade show at the St. Cloud mall. They were promoting their business and the topic of spreading manure arose. After their initial discussion, small meetings of people within the industry began to pop up around the state.

Meanwhile, Minnesota’s 7020 rule for land application of manure and pollutants was being written. Martens said the group of applicators saw the opportunity to be more than just a social organization, but also make an impact on the industry.

“They began to think that maybe this group had to be more than social; maybe they could help shape what we as applicators do as well,” Martens said. “That was the beginning of the association.”

The association met informally for several years before holding official annual meetings. The association officially chartered as a non-profit organization in 2003.

MNCAA membership has fluctuated over the years depending on current events in the custom applicators industry and in legislature. Currently, the association has 50 company memberships and several associate members from other outfits who support the custom applicator industry including implement dealers, manure sample testing labs and equipment dealers.

“With a dedicated group of people serving on the board of directors over the years, we have remained a strong organization,” Martens said. “Really, it is a benefit for the members. There is no other way to describe it. If we do not have a voice for ourselves, who will be our voice?”

Joining MNCAA comes with many benefits. The association has a well-established working relationship with the Minnesota Department of Ag, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and University of Minnesota Extension. These organizations help MNCAA leaders keep an eye on legislative issues that may impact manure application. Additionally, the association offers training for commercial applicators’ licensing.

Furthermore, MNCAA has a strong connection with the Minnesota Association of County Feedlot Officers (MACFO). As the organization representing counties participating in a cooperative agreement with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and county governments, MACFO



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**Rick Martens, executive director of Minnesota Custom Applicators Association, leads training at last year’s CAWT recertification workshop.**

and MNCAA work together to assure individual communities have regulations to meet individual situations.

“They see what is going on in the community and what works best in that area, not necessarily for the whole state, which makes them a good advocate,” Martens said. “They are our boots on the ground for the counties just as we are boots on the ground for the association.”

Combined, the benefits and affiliate organizations make not only MNCAA strong, but the whole custom applicators industry, as well.

“Without an organization, we stand alone. When we have an organization, we have more people which means more influence,” Martens said.

Martens himself has been a commercial manure applicator for over 30 years. He has served on the MNCAA Board of Directors in numerous roles and is currently serving as executive director. Martens said what he most enjoys is the ability to meet people with the same challenges, passions and goals as he has.

“I enjoy getting together with other applicators both in their accomplishments and their frustrations. It is good to have people to talk when something goes wrong; having someone to back you up and help you through,” Martens said. “It’s a unique industry; ... you have to talk to somebody who is familiar with it.”

Martens encourages custom applicators not already involved in MNCAA to consider becoming a member. He also encourages active participation in educational and legislative opportunities.

“You need to be a voice in your industry,” Martens said. “If you don’t stand up, who will?”

There are several ways applicators can become a member. The MNCAA website, [www.mncamanure.com](http://www.mncamanure.com), has a copy of the membership application as well as information on the organization. Individuals can also become members by attending Commercial Animal Waste Technician (CAWT) training or the MNCAA annual meeting which is held on the third Thursday of February.