

The effectiveness of an industry's or company's spokesmen is commensurate with their ability to communicate the practices, policies, and prospects of their organizations. Among these spokesmen, the company publication editor ranks high in importance.

In 1922, the Association of Railroad Editors (ARE), Washington, DC, was formed. Its members edited employe publications of railroad and railway supply companies and the industry's trade papers.

With 1.6 million workers in the industry, the organization thrived for several decades. Then, as passenger service declined, there was a sharp reduction in the number of employes (500,000 in 1977). As a result, many company publications were cut back or suspended and ARE's membership was severely curtailed. Its strength waned and what was left of it became, in the words of W. W. Thompson, Secretary-Treasurer of ARE and Publications Editor of The Association of American Railroads, "a near-dead 'social club' sort of organization." By 1972, it was obvious that, if the organization were to continue to exist, new ways would have to be found for serving the rapidly changing industry -- one where, because of the railroads' ailing economy, employe morale had drastically deteriorated.

The first suggestion of a new direction for ARE came from realization, on the part of the editor group, that railway management and labor leaders were endeavoring to establish better relations so as to better resolve the railroads' problems. ARE members felt they could make a constructive contribution to that effort by including in its membership their counterparts from railway labor.

The group next undertook to make major changes in the programs of its annual conferences at which attenders characteristically had heard chiefly from their colleagues. The new agendas were designed to feature presentations by top transportation authorities (including ones in such competing fields as those represented by the American Trucking As-

sociations and Water Transportation Associations). Also appearing have been leaders in government, labor, marketing, and public relations. Since ARE publications now have a combined circulation of more than 2½ million, it has had little difficulty in attracting distinguished, news-making management speakers.

For example, at its three-day conference last fall, among those appearing on the program were: John P. Fishwick, President and CEO, Norfolk and Western Railroad; John C. Ashton, Vice President and Corporate Secretary, Burlington Northern Railway; Arthur D. Lewis, President, National Association of Motor Bus Owners; Eugene K. Garfield, President, Auto-Train Corp.; Royce Kershaw Jr., President, Kershaw Manufacturing Co.; John M. Sullivan, Administrator, Federal Railroad Administration; Fred J. Kroll, International President, Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks; Ruben Levin, Editor, Labor Newspaper; Richard H. Steiner, Vice President-Marketing, Conrail; and, from PR -- Richard E. Briggs, Vice President-Economics and PA, Association of American Railroads; Jean G. Cormier, Vice President-PR, Canadian National Railways; Edwin E. Edel, Vice President-PA, Amtrak; and William F. Geeslin, Assistant Vice President for PR & Adv., Southern Railway.

Subjects customarily discussed at the annual conference are those in the news or having to do with the most significant developments within the railroading industry -- legislation, capital improvements, maintenance of facilities, research, and major projects undertaken jointly by high-level labor-management committees to improve operational efficiency. . . At the last conference, featured speakers explored future prospects for bus owners, auto-trains, and Eastern railroads; railroad marketing and roadway renovation; and developing trends in community and employe relations.

An outstanding feature of the ARE annual conference is presentation of awards. These go to editors for a variety of achievements, including: editorial work in the areas of labor-management under-



standing and excellence of news coverage, photography, and design. . . An additional award has now been introduced. Sponsored by the Association of American Railroads, it is given for "communicating to employees news, views, and comments supporting industry-wide goals, positions, and objectives."

To maintain year-round interest in ARE, "PROOF," described as "the editors' family newsletter," is distributed monthly. Through its four pages, members get news about job changes, retirements, and establishment of new company publications in the field. Also covered are industry trends and comments by PR authorities.

A new addition to ARE activities is a Washington Workshop. Its aim is to acquaint ARE members with information sources in the government agencies involved in the transportation field. During the all-day program, held for the first time on February 28, 1976, a luncheon, jointly sponsored by the Association of American Railroads and the highly respected "Labor Newspaper," Washington, DC, was held. Appearing at that Workshop were six key information officers from government agencies.

ARE activities have attracted considerable interest from the public press. A three-member Press Committee (composed of Thompson, ARE's Vice President, and a representative from Association of American Railroads) invites the media to all conference meetings. Press tables are set up for luncheons and the closing banquet. A "studio" for filming or taping special interviews of speakers and officers is made available to TV and radio newsmen. There has been excellent coverage by the trade, business, and industry magazines (Business Week, Journal of Commerce), and newspapers and Thompson reports "a particularly good response from TV."

The program which has rejuvenated ARE is operated on a "shoestring" budget; dues from its 109 members (they are in the U.S.A., Canada, and Mexico) and registration fees at meetings are the sole sources of income. But results are evident on many fronts. . . New types of members are being attracted. (In addition to company publication editors, the roster now lists executives from personnel, re-

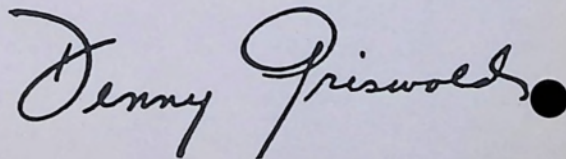
search, PR, information, employee communications, and community relations -- and many are at the vice presidential level. . . Titles, salary increases, and larger responsibilities reflect the new attitude of management toward the industry's company publication editors. . . The combining of labor and management publications "under one tent" is leading to better labor/management understanding. Labor Newspaper's Levin, regarded as dean of the labor editors, feels that ARE has helped advance the cause of friendlier labor-management relations. He adds that, "so far as I know, this is the only industrial editors' organization in the country that represents both labor and management publications."

Association of American Railroads' Briggs feels that ARE's contributions are clearly evident in: better performance and unified attention to the industry as a whole; improved employee morale and labor-management relationships at the rank-and-file levels; and "rallying grassroots support for legislative measures either sought or fought by the railroads."

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For Your PR NEWS Idea Library, write to: M. B. Dolinger, Ass't Vice Pres.-PR, Chessie System, Inc., Terminal Tower, Cleveland, OH 44101, for "First Quarterly Report, 1978," with frank and full accounting by Chairman & President Hays T. Watkins of a loss during the period (a lengthy, 110-day coal strike) and featuring a photo of empty coal cars which dramatically "tell Chessie's story" and account for the deficit. . . John J. Bell, Sr. Vice Pres., Bank of America, Box 37000, San Francisco, CA, 94137, for "Some Straight Talk on South Africa," copy of article from the bank's employee magazine; it reports on an interview with President Tom Clausen and is attached to the proxy statement sent in advance of the annual meeting.

Proud to Serve PR,



Editor