

Community Voices

IPAA Is Helping Its Members Speak Out

By Danny Boyd
Special Correspondent

WASHINGTON—With its industry participation quadrupling and public opinion shifting in favor of more domestic energy production, the Independent Petroleum Association of America's Community Voices program is poised to wield stronger influence with Congress and the public about the need to develop more domestic oil and gas reserves as part of a comprehensive national energy policy, the program coordinator says.

Nicole Daigle, IPAA's director of public affairs and communications, reports that the grass-roots Community Voices program has grown from about 60 industry participants since its revival in 2006 to more than 240 members who are talking up the role of independent producers to policymakers, community groups and media around the country.

The robust growth in IPAA membership involvement, coupled with high gasoline prices and the U.S. public's growing awareness of the country's acute

dependence on imported oil, are providing the program with an unprecedented opportunity to make a major impact on public opinion in local communities around the country, Daigle says.

"The more people see energy issues in the news, the more concerned they become, and we are set to capitalize on this concern and get out the message about why the independent producer is important, where we as a country can go from this point, and what we as independents can do to help the country become more energy independent," she says.

The Community Voices program was created about 15 years ago, Daigle recalls, but it had been dormant for a decade when in 2006, then IPAA Chairman Michael Linn urged that the program be renewed. Daigle says the program's primary goal remains the same: to empower association members to speak with a unified voice in their communities as part of a grass-roots effort to enable local residents to see a local face for the domestic oil and gas industry.

Through media interviews, speeches to

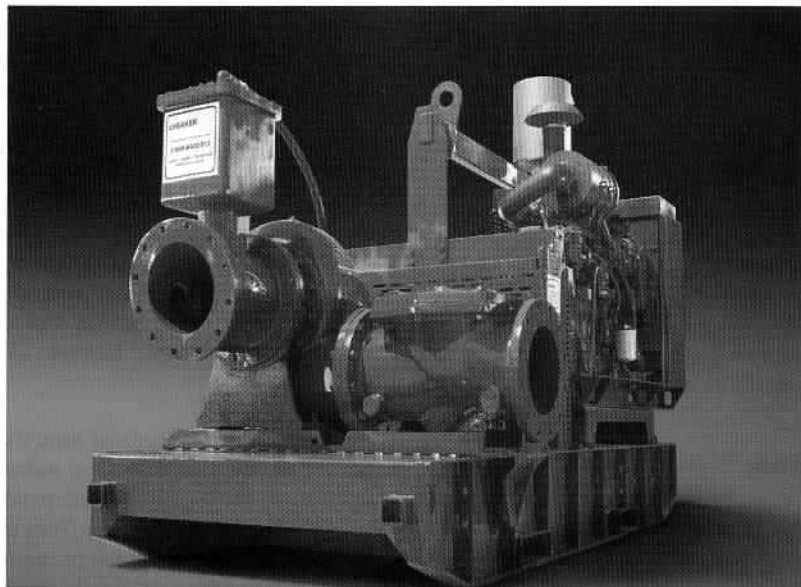
community groups, visits with policymakers, and interaction with neighbors and friends, participants explain how independents play a vital role in providing the energy consumed in communities around the country every day, Daigle says.

"The Community Voices program allows us to tell our story, that we are the U.S. oil and gas industry that primarily produces domestic resources," she outlines. "We want to let people know that we include small entrepreneurs striving just like they are to live the American dream. Independent producers are the backbone of the domestic industry. When we hear conversations about energy crises and challenges, we want people to know that independents play a significant role in finding solutions."

Supporting Local Voices

Once a year, IPAA promotes participating in Community Voices through a communication to the association's general membership, and talks up the program at various IPAA events throughout the year, Daigle says.

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"Every now and then people who have heard about it will bring it up in conversation themselves," she observes.

Daigle explains that as program coordinator, she supports Community Voices participants by supplying talking points on industry issues, and also drafts speeches, op-ed pieces, and letters to the editor. The IPAA communications staff also helps schedule and coordinate one-on-one media interviews and speeches before community groups, and is available to provide basic training for media interviews and lobbying strategies, she says.

A year ago, the program began sending participants a monthly e-newsletter,

Daigle says. The newsletter alerts members about opportunities to lobby policymakers and contains talking points about oil and gas issues in the news, she adds.

"When we identify issues for participants to address in the media, we all are saying the same thing," Daigle notes. "It is spreading the right messages and making sure participants are informed. So many times we see false arguments and erroneous information circulating on Capitol Hill and among consumers, so we arm people to counter these false arguments."

Daigle points to the August issue of the e-newsletter as an example of how participants are called to action to address issues at crucial times. The August publication urged members to ask their congressmen to support a long-term, comprehensive energy policy at a time when House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Ca., was continuing to deny Republican leaders' calls to bring members back to Washington for a vote on offshore drilling. The newsletter included links to a series of talking points on the five hottest oil and gas issues on Capitol Hill and in the media, and how they mischaracterized the domestic industry, she says.

The talking points addressed issues related to offshore drilling, federal lands under lease, the impact of the futures market on gasoline prices, and the potential impact of releasing oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, Daigle says. Through a hyperlink, an IPAA-produced "fact check" document also was available for participants to address in detail what IPAA considered to be phony arguments being used in Congress to allege companies were failing to develop federal acreage, she notes.

September's e-newsletter followed by calling on participants to interact with their federal representatives about energy policy as re-election campaigns were in full swing and politicians were in their districts stumping for votes, she says. Each newsletter includes information on media coverage of Community Voices participants from the previous month as well as association officers addressing industry issues, she points out.

Convincing Statistics

Bill Daugherty, president and chief executive officer of NGAS Resources in Lexington, Ky., says industry statistics provided through Community Voices have been an invaluable tool in helping him point out locally that independents produce 82 percent of U.S. natural gas and 68 percent of domestic oil, while typically reinvesting up to 150 percent of their earnings in new exploration and pro-

duction.

"When people hear those kinds of facts and figures, they are totally shocked," Daugherty recounts. "People don't realize how we outspend our cash flows, and how in many cases independents are companies with 20 employees, not 20,000. The public is surprised at the amount of oil and gas we produce for this country."

Daugherty says IPAA's talking points helped him prepare for a televised debate on the presidential candidates' stances on national energy policy. "The IPAA provided me with a lot of useful information that I was able to pull that into the debate," Daugherty says. "There was another instance in which I spoke to a local Kiwanis Club, where members asked to be informed about the American oil and gas industry. I built my talk around IPAA's research."

Daigle explains that the Community Voices program also works with participants to set up site tours so media can see first-hand how the industry operates and get their technical questions answered by operators. One recent example she cites is a tour of production projects in the San Juan Basin.

Daigle says she also helped a *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter who wanted to interview and observe an independent producer. Don Sparks, chairman of Discovery Operating in Midland, Tx., accommodated the request and says Community Voices provided him with key talking points and other crucial information to counter the reporter's erroneous assumptions about the domestic oil and gas industry.

"It's a good program, and we need as much information as we can get," Sparks insists. "The problem for our industry in general is that there are too many areas where our voices go unheard."

Among the fallacies harbored by media is the notion that the industry can respond to tight energy supplies by ratcheting up drilling in very short time, Sparks notes. "Our biggest job is to try to correct the national media's inaccurate statements about what is going on and government misinformation," he says.

Provide Expertise

In yet another example of how Community Voices works with local industry, Daigle says she helped the Independent Oil & Gas Association of New York draft a response to an op-ed piece in the *New York Daily News* that contained erroneous information about hydraulic fracturing in the Marcellus Shale. "We see this misinformation and try to set the record straight," she says.

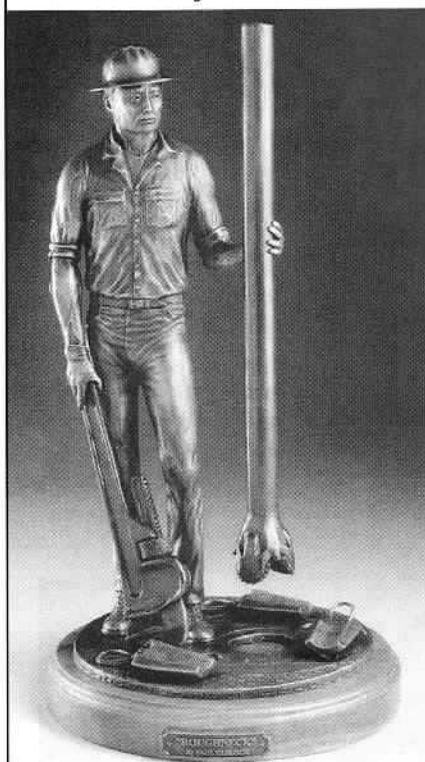
Robert Stroud with Stroud Production in Shreveport, La., says Community

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Voices equipped him with in-depth information about offshore oil and gas exploration in preparation for a television interview. Although Stroud Production's properties are solely on land, talking points supplied by Community Voices gave Stroud the confidence to address the issues as an expert.

"It really is fantastic," he enthuses. "The Community Voices staff does a great job addressing any current issue. Although our production is onshore, I got on the telephone after the television station called, and IPAA staff primed me and made me look really smart. They had all the data and all the information. It's wonderful for people in the oil and gas industry to have a resource such as Community Voices."

Stroud describes how he was able to point out to the reporter that offshore spills could be traced chiefly to oil being imported in tankers. Community Voices also has helped him prepare op-ed pieces to rebut misinformation in the media, he says.

"It's good information and helps you get your facts right," Stroud assures. "The (IPAA staff) make it so simple. Because there is so much misinformation about the oil and gas industry, we need a clear message and IPAA's Community Voices does a great job. The staff supply great talking points, and

can supply editorials and other information you can customize for use locally."

Measuring Success

Daigle says she is doing an audit of IPAA members to determine how to improve communications with Community Voices participants, who are inundated with information in their businesses and personal lives. Although the ongoing success of Community Voices is difficult to measure, an increasing number of participants and a shift in public opinion are providing greater opportunities for independent producers to have a significant voice in shaping the nation's energy future, she says.

"A great measurement that shows us how successful grass-roots communications can be is the shift in national opinion about oil and gas production in the United States," Daigle reiterates. "Our industry has gone from having a very unfavorable public perception, similar to that of the tobacco industry, to having an improved image. It's amazing to see now how many people are now in favor of developing domestic energy resources. Before it was a hot issue, not many people wanted to discuss or even learn about domestic oil and gas.

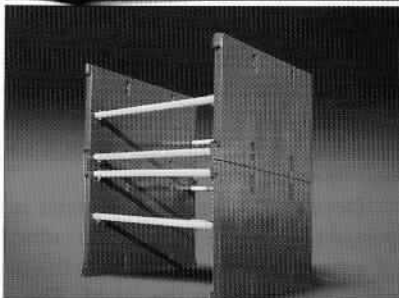
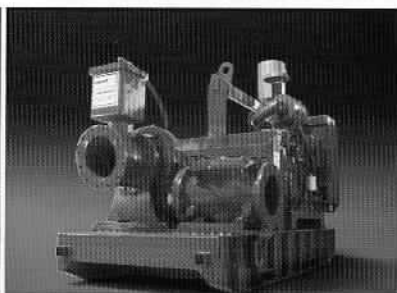
"Historically, I don't think our industry has done the best job of communicating what we do," Daigle goes on. "There is so much misinformation in the public, the media and among members of Congress. We now can take advantage of being able to tell people what our industry is all about, and Community Voices makes a big impact on members' ability to tell that story."

The industry collectively and individuals within it must persist in pushing to inform and educate the American public about the need for a healthy independent oil and gas segment and the vital role independents should play in formulating a cohesive national energy policy that relies on a variety of energy sources, Daigle maintains.

"We support a long-term, comprehensive energy policy, not one that produces only more American oil and natural gas, but one that includes additional energy from wind, solar, nuclear, clean coal technology and other alternative fuels," she allows. "We also support greater energy efficiency. We understand that we need everything."

IPAA members who are interested in learning more about Community Voices can contact Daigle by calling 800-433-2851 or by e-mail at ndaigle@ipaa.org. □

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