

# **Car Washings Greatest Resource! You!**

**By Fred Grauer, Executive Vice President  
Ryko Manufacturing Company**

Today's access to information is incredible. Just think how truly blessed we are as a nation that at a click of a button or a phone call we can gather huge amounts of data on any subject you can imagine. Between associations, government programs, and any particular trade or industry publications we can accomplish our due diligence with speed and accuracy.

But for a moment role back the clock. It is 1948. The war just ended. The economy was shifting from guns to butter. GI's were returning to an environment ripe for entrepreneurship. But where and how to build a new business was an enormous black hole! There simply was no information. The risks were unknown, but economic need drove these entrepreneurs to create new opportunities.

Having faced the challenge of starting from scratch, a small group of car wash pioneers got together and pooled their experiences. This cooperation and need for more business knowledge inspired a vision. There was no internet, no SBA, no professional group of advisories to assist these car washers in establishing a successful business. Their solution was to ban together, share information, and basically form an association.

Today that dream and vision has evolved into the International Car washing Association (ICA), the voice of the professional car washer. Imagine how those early pioneers would feel to see that in the 50 year plus history their industry has grown from several hundred car washes to around 100,000 and gross receipts from less than a hundred million to more than 35 billion.

As the industry has grown so also has the supporting periphery of suppliers, manufacturers, consultants, investors, and associations.

But if you were to look at the car wash industry from afar and ask, who, what, where, and how, where would we go?

Fortunately the ICA has become the focal point and main resource for us car wash folks. Besides producing a terrific exposition that show cases all the latest in technology it has become a huge resource of information that is disseminated through an excellent educational format that addresses current issues.

You probably are asking yourself if the ICA is still true to its roots. The answer is yes the governing board make up is a majority of car washers with the balance represented by suppliers to the industry. As the make up is primarily operators the focus remains operator oriented. For the supplier side the ICA has access to the best and brightest,

who make their demands known so that we as an industry are assured of balanced representation.

But none of the growth that our industry has seen would have been possible without the volunteering of those car wash people who shared the legacy by participating in local, regional and national associations. Not only has their participation enabled us to prosper as an industry but the knowledge gleaned from their experiences has enabled those that come behind us to develop their businesses in an expeditious and successful way.

But what about the car wash industry outside of the association? What about those people, like those early pioneers who want to enter our industry? The fact is that the car wash industry is not glamorous, or sexy, it's just plain old hard work and a substantial capital investment. And yes there is risk. And of course there are people within the industry that are more than willing to help you invest your money. And like any industry there are those that are more talented and knowledgeable than other. So what does an investor go? How do they minimize the risk?

A couple of years ago one manufacturer decided to make a very ballsy move; they decided that the best customer was an educated customer. They also realized that the quality of information available to the industry varied greatly depending on whose agenda was being served. So they decided to offer nation wide seminars that were strictly business oriented. The only reference to the sponsor was to mention who was paying the bill. No hidden agenda. The goal was to educate as many people as possible so that if they decided to enter our industry they entered with their eyes open. Has it worked? From those whom have participated there have been rave reviews.

The ICA, always anxious to be on the forefront, have taken note of the commitment that this one manufacturer has made and decided that they too needed to create a new investor orientation seminar. As it was for Mark VII, this is a gutsy move. So at this years ICA exposition the directors and educational team is devoting an entire day to the new investor. Although the final format has not been decided you can rest assured that the ICA will present an all inclusive program. It will be an eight hour, intensive presentation about those items that most people entering a new field are curious about. There is conversation about asking current car wash family members to share their experiences. This may sound a little odd at first, but car washing is a family business and without the support of family members it makes it pretty tough on those who have the day to day responsibility. And who better to share those experiences than those who have been there and done that.

Bottom line the car wash business is maturing every day. The old days of uneducated suppliers, typical of any new industry, are fast disappearing. Car washing is a profession to be proud of. We may not be glamorous but we're honest and know how to work and play hard. It all centers on you, those of you who contribute to our industry and society every day 24/7.

What is the greatest resource the industry has? It's you the professional car wash person. And yes this includes all those who ultimately make it possible for us to provide "clean cars, quickly, and safely, in a clean, safe pleasant environment" for every motorist who enters our facilities.