

10

minutes *with*



William J. Kroll

Chairman and CEO, MATHESON.

Thanks for taking 10 minutes out with gasworld. What have we interrupted in your schedule today?

Actually, my Christmas holiday vacation! I'm sneaking this in so nobody sees me working while we are away with family in Chicago.

What's the best thing about working for MATHESON?

The ability to make a difference to all the stakeholders. Essentially that means having the ability to make life better for the employees and create profit for the shareholders. We are a nimble corporation that has the ability to enable people to drive our business, while living within our value system, to which we all subscribe.

All of us, as teammates, know we have both the ability and responsibility to bring customer value, and simultaneously grow our business. After all, we are the growth engine and driving entity for TNSC growth as a global corporation. We as a team are excited about TNSC's desire for growth and their investment in MATHESON, and we are appreciative of the trust they place in us to make this happen, each and every day.

What's the last stamp in your passport?

NRT, Narita International, Tokyo, Japan – right before Christmas. I was there as a Board member of TNSC and for our own MATHESON Board meeting. Throw in Semicon Japan, a meeting with the TNSC Corporate Internal Auditors and some dear friends in Japan, and I had a full but rewarding schedule on many levels.

Come to think of it, my last international trip before this was to Tokyo in November for the annual IOMA meeting and for some TNSC corporate strategy sessions.

What's the single biggest threat to the gases business, in your view?

The fragility of the global economic markets is an overhang that is causing a degree of fear and uncertainty and dampening the desire of CEO's to take the risks they know are needed to drive economic growth. GDP statistics are less than encouraging in the major manufacturing economies, and economies that have experienced high single or double digit growth in the past are now experiencing reduced figures.

Our gases and welding distributor business, to a large extent, is driven by manufacturing and not service oriented sectors. Add to this the fact that in the US where, we as MATHESON, have greater than 50% of our business, there is a growing dearth of qualified engineers and skilled labour to take manufacturing jobs or fill the high-tech positions that are available. The decreasing test scores of US students matched with decreasing enrollment of students in math, science and engineering curricula does not speak well for a growing and robust manufacturing economy – one that can also provide the technology solutions for environmental sustainability, along with improving healthcare for its population. Even if a solution to this is fast-tracked, we will still need a 15-20 year timeline for any noticeable effect.

In a period where the US economy and world economies are at the intersection of rapid changes in technology and sustainability requirements, it will take a well-trained and creative labour force to survive and thrive.

What's the single most exciting thing?

I really believe that every threat is an opportunity in disguise. If you go back to the above, you can examine those issues and consider what you need to do to make them an opportunity for your business. With the continuing support of our parent company to make MATHESON a growth engine for the TNSC Group, we will continue to invest in high-tech and environmental opportunities in the US such as EOR, biofuels, solar and semiconductor, shale gas, medical applications, food processing and advanced manufacturing techniques using metal fabrication.

We will also expand our footprint outside the US into other growth economies as we have done in India, Korea and China.

You have recently been named Chairman of the Board of the CGA – what do you hope to bring to the table during your chairmanship?

I'm pleased to take this on as the CGA reaches its 100th Anniversary in 2013. As you may know, I also have assumed the

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role of President of IOMA, so job one for both will be to drive the harmonisation of gas safety standards for our global gas industry. This certainly involves a strong cooperative relationship with the four main standards organisations, notably the CGA, EIGA, AIGA & JIMGA.

On more of a US home front for the CGA, I plan to continue the progress we have made in working with GAWDA in the US with respect to safety standards programmes and an award system for GAWDA. The CGA is embarking on a more active US government relations/lobbying role to make sure the CGA helps guide legislation that would be consistent with CGA-member-recommended safety and manufacturing standards.

What's next?

We have made significant announcements on ASU's here in the US in Tampa, Florida and in North Dakota, along with another ASU in Pune, India. We have just commissioned a state-of-the-art electronic and specialty gas plant in the US that we are ramping up. Also, our new JV helium plant in Wyoming in conjunction with our partner, Air Products, will be on line in Q1 2012. With all this going on, making these plants fully functional and operating to high performance expectations is job one in my mind. □

10 MINUTES MORE...

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