

Consider putting one of this organization's meetings on your 2008 calendar

There are many user groups serving the gas-turbine-based generation sector of the electric power industry—most focus on the GT. The COMBINED CYCLE Journal regularly covers these independent user organizations: 501G, 501F, 7F, 7EA, 501D5/D5A, W251, Frame 6, V, Western Turbine (including LM2500, LM5000, LM6000, LMS100), and the Combustion Turbine Operations Task Force (including FT8, Frame 5, Alstom 11D-N, and others).

But there's much more to a combined-cycle plant than GTs. Yet there's only one independent organization, the HRSG User's Group, covering heat-recovery steam generators, steam systems, steam turbine/generators, balance-of-plant equipment, water treatment, etc.

Likewise, there's only one independent user group known to the editors that serves the controls sector: the Ovation/WDPF Users' Group (OUG). Keeping up to date on this technology is particularly important given that your plant probably will upgrade or change-out control systems at least once, most probably twice, and maybe even three times, during its lifetime.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the OUG and the other groups mentioned above is that it includes among its members representatives from other types of powerplants (coal-fired, nuclear, etc), as well as from municipal and private water-treatment facilities. The organization just celebrated its 20th anniversary at the annual conference, held each August in Pittsburgh. There also are mid-year regional meetings—one in the East, one in the West—in February.

History. The seeds for the organization were sowed in the mid 1980s by several users who had responsibilities in their respective organiza-



1. John Berra, president, Emerson Process Management, speaks to the power and capabilities of tomorrow's control systems



2. Bob Yeager, president, EPM Power & Water Solutions, is an active participant in user discussions

tions for implementing Westinghouse Electric Corp's relatively new (at that time) WDPF control system. Recall that WDPF stands for Westinghouse Digital Processing Family.

Lee Cogansparger, PE, of Rochester (NY)-based Eastman Kodak Co, recalled that the first meeting of the WDPF User's Group in 1988 attracted 52 users from 33 different companies.

Primary purpose of the conference was to provide a forum for discussion of specific application questions and of system enhancements developed by group members. Also, to identify and submit to Westinghouse suggestions for enhancements that would benefit members. Formal bylaws, penned by a user committee shortly after the 1988 conference, were ratified by the membership at the second annual meeting.

Meeting attendance doubled in the second year but remained in the low 100s annually until shortly after Emerson Electric Co purchased the Westinghouse Process Control Div in 1998. As WDPF users with superannuated systems migrated to Emerson's Ovation®, meeting coverage expanded and the group's name was changed to the current Ovation/WDPF Users' Group. Attendance has increased markedly and now exceeds 250, putting this user meeting on a par with those conducted by the Western Turbine, 7F, and HRSG user groups.

Long-term loyalty and active participation are defining characteristics of the OUG, as they are for most other organizations serving GT-based powerplants. Cogansparger, for example, has missed only three meetings in two decades. And the group's last four presidents (service term is one year)—Joel Erwin of Dynegy Midwest Generation, Jim Bell of Duke Energy, Gary Alexander of Excel Energy, and Scott Woodby of Midland Cogeneration Venture—remain on the executive board, two as committee chairs. The current president is Alex Brumfield of The Southern Company.

Where the OUG differs from most other user groups you may be familiar with is that Emerson Process Management Power & Water Solutions (EPM) is an active participant in all aspects of the meeting except

one user-only session. This is somewhat similar to the way the V Users work with Siemens and the GT24 owners work with Alstom. Keep in mind that OUG is managed and run exclusively by its members; EPM provides financial, personnel, and product support as necessary.

Some veteran GT user-group members who prefer the OEM's participation confined to a half day, or a day at most, might be surprised to see how well a collaborative vendor management team can work productively with customers and not inhibit interactions and conversations among users. It starts at the top, as the saying goes.

John Berra, president of Emerson



3. Continuing involvement in Ovation/WDPF Users' Group activities by past presidents Joel Erwin (left) and Jim Bell (right) attests to the organization's vitality

Process Management, is an active and meaningful participant in OUG meetings. He is particularly adept at explaining how technologies a few years from commercialization will dramatically improve the capabilities of control systems as you now know them. Berra began his career as an instrument and electrical engineer for Monsanto, so he knows of what he speaks. One development not far off: Wireless communications systems and batteries that promise to reduce the installation cost of making a measurement by as much as 90%.

More importantly perhaps, Berra is a gracious host who speaks of users as the industry's "unsung heroes" and addresses them with the respect they have earned. Other top executives in this industry could learn from his example.

That Emerson Process Management Power & Water Solutions President Robert L Yeager is of the same ilk is not surprising. Knowledgeable, highly energetic, and a superior communicator, he is on a first-name basis with a majority of the users his organization interfaces with. One reason is his passion for tracking unit trips worldwide and for personally calling users to learn why they occurred. He wants to know the root cause of each

trip and if Ovation was involved. One of Yeager's goals is to reduce human error to the extent possible, thereby improving personnel safety as well as plant availability and reliability.

OUG's top-10 product enhancements program offers a good example of how the close collaboration between users and EPM benefits all. Here's how it works: Suggestions for product enhancements are made throughout the year via the user group's website and are posted for all members to review (www.emerson-process-powerwater.com/usersgroup.cfm). Electronic voting is open for two weeks following the annual conference in August and the top-10 suggestions are announced.

The list is forwarded to EPM, which assigns so-called "design credits" to each enhancement suggestion prior to the fall OUG executive board meeting. The design credits are allotted based on the effort that would be required to develop/implement a given enhancement. Important point: EPM implements at no cost to the user group all enhancements that can be accommodated within the company's annual design-credit budget.

At the executive board meeting, the group's leadership determines which of the enhancements Emerson will implement during the coming 12-18 months. Its decision is based on a review of design credits assessed for each enhancement, EPM's annual design-credit budget, as well as the broad impact/advantages of each enhancement to OUG members at large.

Working together as a unified body, users gain a stronger voice in EPM programs and product development. The OUG executive board meets with Emerson personnel on a regular basis throughout the year to discuss new programs, products, and procedures prior to their release. Such close collaboration over the years has produced numerous benefits, including: the password-protected users-only website, availability of user manuals in electronic form, enhanced training programs, product performance enhancements, and a clearly defined product notification process.

Other committees. The vitality of the OUG is evident from the depth of ongoing user involvement in the organization's robust committee structure. This is not a group that comes together annually "just because. . . ." Rather, it is one with lots of "worker bees" actively engaged in OUG initiatives. Committees in addition to the one responsible for

How to join the Ovation/WDPF Users' Group

Any individual employed by an organization that owns and/or operates a system supplied by Emerson Process Management (EPM) Power & Water Solutions qualifies for full membership in the Ovation/WDPF Users' Group (OUG). Access www.emersonprocess-powerwater.com/usersgroup.cfm for details.

If you do not qualify for full membership but are interested in attending the group's meetings as an affiliate member, sponsorship by a full member is required. This sponsorship must be renewed on a per-conference basis. Note that affiliate membership is limited to attendance at the sponsored conference/meeting. It does not include access to the users-only website and other benefits of full membership. All applications for affiliate membership must be reviewed and approved both by the OUG executive board and EPM.

the top-10 product enhancements program include these:

- Security. One of its goals is to provide feedback to the OUG of known and potential security problems.
- Product support and migration. It continually monitors technical developments and industry trends to identify potential obsolescence issues and migration opportunities before they become user issues.
- Emerging technology. Identify and present to EPM the new-technology needs of users; also, offer ideas for improving current technologies.
- Internet. Continually improve the utility of, and content available through, the users' website. The website may be the most robust of any user group's. Here's a look at a portion of its content:
 - User manuals.
 - Tools for developing plant-level process automation strategies.
 - Downloadable software patches and Foundation Fieldbus device updates.
 - Discussion board and chat rooms that allow users to share information.
 - Descriptions of new products and software.
 - Spare-parts shopping cart.
 - Technical support request form. C CJ