2022 Marks 75 Years, Growth for the Arkansas Forestry Association

2022 was a significant year in the life of the Arkansas Forestry Association. AFA celebrated its 75th anniversary – a milestone that was the focus of the association’s 77th annual meeting, October 11-13, 2022. If those numbers are confusing, AFA operated as the Arkansas Wood Products Association before it became the Arkansas Forestry Association, and held two annual meetings before 1947. Support for the informative and fun-filled meeting was outstanding with more than 250 attendees and 61 sponsors/exhibitors helping make our Diamond anniversary a celebration to remember.

The past year also saw AFA implement a long-range plan to ensure the continued growth and relevance of the association over the next decade. A committee of AFA leaders worked for more than six months identifying five key result areas and the strategies, tools and action steps that will be implemented. Public policy advocacy on behalf of our members will continue to be AFA’s top priority, followed by a new area of emphasis – workforce development.

We will also strive to grow the impact of the AFA Education Foundation, grow the resources it takes to provide the valuable programs and resources our members deserve, and invest in the human and physical resources of the association. With your help, AFA will be more relevant and effective than it’s ever been.

2023 Arkansas Legislative Session Underway

The session convened on Monday, January 9 with the swearing in of members of the Arkansas House and Senate, followed on Tuesday by the historic inauguration of the state’s 47th and first female Governor, Sarah Huckabee Sanders. Describing herself as a “bold conservative reformer” Governor Sanders quickly moved into action, signing seven executive orders on day one including a freeze on state government hiring and regulations, and preventing the “political indoctrination” of Arkansas schoolchildren. Sanders, 40, who is the daughter of former Governor Mike Huckabee, is also the youngest person to ever serve as Governor of the state.

Republicans still hold a super-majority of the seats in both the House of Representatives and Senate. Rep. Matthew Shepherd, R-El Dorado, was elected for an unprecedented third term as Speaker of the House, and Bart Hester – R, Cave Springs, was previously elected by his Senate colleagues to serve as President of the Senate. Upon his election, Speaker Shepherd announced the roster of Committee Chairs as well as the members of each House committee.

Senator Ron Caldwell – R, Wynne, will again chair the Senate Agriculture, Forestry & Economic Development Committee, while Rep. Jack Fortner – R, Yellville, will serve as the chair of the House Agriculture Committee. For a complete list of committee chairs and members, you can visit the General Assembly website at www.arkleg.state.ar.us and click on “Committees”.

The AFA Board of Directors approved the Long-Range plan at its spring meeting in May. Work began immediately, with emphasis on government relations and workforce development. Some of the highlights include growing the AFA advocacy team by contracting with Justin Allen of the Wright Lindsey and Jennings firm to provide government affairs and public policy services.

Week one of Governor Sanders’ first regular session provided her the opportunity to reiterate her priorities during an address to a joint session of the House and Senate. During the joint session, the Governor called on legislators to deliver to her a comprehensive bill to overhaul the state’s education system. She also urged members to deliver another historic tax cut to give Arkansans the pay raise they need and bring jobs to the state.

Sanders touted Arkansas as a state that will tolerate crime no longer. “We will shut down the crime wave that has plagued our cities and teach our children that the badge is a symbol of justice, the police are a force for good, and our officers are heroes worthy of our highest respect,” the Governor said.

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75 Years, Growth for AFA, con’t.

lobbying services, building relationships and identifying issues with the newly formed Legislative Forestry Caucus; doing the same with staff members of the Arkansas Congressional delegation, and taking proactive steps to advocate for the logging sector by asking Governor Asa Hutchinson to re-implement an emergency declaration that would temporarily increase the weight limit to 90,000 pounds on state highways and county roads.

On the workforce development front, approval of the long-range plan allowed AFA to become a formal partner with Be Pro Proud, an initiative led by the Associated Industries of Arkansas that is leading the movement to bring a new generation of pride, progress, and professionals to Arkansas’s skilled workforce. AFA’s goal is to create a coalition of timber and forest products industry workforce development partners who will participate in and benefit from the program that reaches more than 12,000 students each year through school and community mobile workshops that showcase a multitude of technical careers and the skills needed to fill them. In addition to Be Pro Proud, AFA’s Education Foundation director Rob Beadel is utilizing the new Project Learning Tree Green Jobs curriculum and the Foundation’s ForestryWorks partnerships to promote career opportunities in the timber and forest products sector.

In 2022, AFA became a formal partner with Be Pro Proud. There were plenty of new initiatives in 2022, but we also continued to grow some already established programs and services this past year. By-the-way, that’s also part of our long-range plan – continuous improvement of our existing programs.

Many of our programs center on telling the forestry story to a variety of publics. Our “Voices of Forestry” podcast now totals more than 36 episodes with a growing audience across the country and around the world.

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We educated Women Owning Woodlands members each month through successful WOW zooms, while Rob offered landowners a monthly zoom workshop to help them better manage their timberland.

In addition, AFA, Tree Farm and AFAEF again teamed up with KATV Channel 7’s Good Morning Arkansas crew to produce three segments on the positive impact working forests have on our state. This year the Wooly brough the reporter out into the field for a more hands-on experience. We showcased the importance of forest management and family forest owners’ roles at the Matson tree farm, demonstrated forestry’s contributions to clean water during a session of our Teacher Conservation Tour, and enjoyed an ‘on-air’ 75th Anniversary celebration during the AFA annual meeting.

Director of Forestry Education Rob Beadel (right) speaks with a KATV cameraman.

Now to this year. Long-range plan implementation will be an obvious priority; in the areas where we’ve already made progress plus expansion into growing the foundation, membership and value we provide to the timber and forest products community. The 94th Arkansas General Assembly convened in early January. AFA will be working to advance issues of importance to our members by working closely with the members of the Forestry Caucus, while also starting an initiative to strengthen the AFA Forest Express Political Action Committee.

By the end of 2023, we want to be firmly entrenched in our workforce development partnerships with AFA members actively engaged in recruiting the next generation of workers. We plan to continue telling the forestry story through workshops, tours, special events, social media, the news media and more. The forestry story is your story and it’s a great one to spread that the AFA team gets to be your voice.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

2023 Officers
President - Tammy Waters, Domtar
Vice President - Greg Hay, ArborGen
Secretary - Tom Crowder, Bragg Land Company
Treasurer - Jason Gibson, Weyerhaeuser

Executive Committee
Steve Anthony, Anthony Timberlands
Dru Buford, Georgia-Pacific
Ray Dillon, Dillon Consulting
Robert Gray, PotlatchDeltic
Tim Hahn, West Fraser
Ryan Hendrix, Green Bay Packaging
Mark Karnes, The Ross Foundation
Allen Morgan, Hunter-Wasson Inc.
Pete Prutzman, Kingwood Forestry Services
Bobby Taylor, Shelby Taylor Trucking
Frank Wilson, Wilson Bros. Lumber

Growing a Family Farm for Over 200 Years

O n Bradley County Road 8 North stands a homemade green sign with four others attached to it. Each is a little different, but they all tell the story of the Reaves family, which started in the late 1700’s.

William Reaves started his successful plantation in Wayne County, North Carolina with five of his 10 children, Matthew, Joseph, Reuben, Lovett, and Fannie Jane. Eventually Lovett Reaves, Sr. visited what we now know as Bradley County, Arkansas. He found fertile, rich land suitable for farming. Wishing to bring his family to this new area, he traveled back to Alabama to prepare. He unfortunately died in 1835 before he could see his wish fulfilled. Lovett’s widow, Eleanor Jane, also known as “Milley,” along with five of her 10 children, Matthew, Joseph, Reuben, Lovett, and Fannie Jane traveled with other families and settled in the Warren, Arkansas area near the Saline River in 1836.

The Reaves family story isn’t over just yet. It may have taken over 200 years to get to where they are today, but they plan to keep this forest a family forest for many more years to come.