

Meeting of the Minds

GPD Celebrates 25th Anniversary with a Focus on Innovation

by Ellen Rogers



Above: Arto Metsanen, Glaston CEO, spoke during the opening ceremonies. Bottom right: Metsanen also participated in a panel discussion with Jean-Paul Hautekeer from DOW Corning (left) and Jonathan Cohen (center) from Kuraray.

When it takes two years to bring an event together, you can bet it will be a good one. That's the case, at least, when it comes to Glass Performance Days (GPD), the biennial conference that brings the global glass industry to Tampere, Finland. The 2017 event, which took place June 28-30, marked GPD's 25th anniversary. More than 650 participants attended the conference—up 20 percent—which featured a new look in a new venue, the Tahti Arena. The setting brought all participants together into one large open space, combining both education and networking.

“We were well aware that we took a

risk in [changing] the traditional GPD after 25 years. Now we know that this was a risk worth taking,” said Jorma Vitkala, chair of the GPD organizing committee. “The open feedback we received, and still continue to collect, was very favorable and most notably in the area of promoting expert networking and the establishment of lasting contacts and business relations. Preparations are already underway for [2019]....”

Vitkala adds, “Without outstanding speakers and session chairs, we cannot expect to have an outstanding program and a first-class event. In this respect all our expectations were successfully met.”

A focus on new technologies and innovations was a big part of this year's event. Arto Metsanen, CEO of Glaston Corp., said during the opening that these new developments will transform the glass industry and new applications for glass will be developed.

The opening also included a previously recorded discussion with Scott Thomsen, managing partner at Innoscovery and former president of the Guardian Industries Global Glass Group. He talked about the critical need for innovation in the glass industry, pointing out that the last step change in the glass industry was the invention of the float glass process. As an example, he said



Photos: GPD



Getting Social

In addition to the high level of presentations and education, GPD is also famous for its social and networking activities, many of which take place surrounded by the beauty of the city of Tampere, Finland. This year's event included a welcoming get-together party on the opening night, followed by a lavish conference dinner on the second night. The evening included food, drinks and entertainment. On the final night, participants enjoyed the farewell party. The celebration, which is known to last until dawn, included performances from fire dancers, games, music and much more.

Top left: GPD includes a number of social activities, including an elaborate farewell party. Top right: This year's event included a performance by fire dancers.

mobile phones are on a 12- to 18-month cycle of innovation, while the glass industry is on a seven- to eight-year cycle. "If the current players don't innovate someone else will do it," he said.

Several other opening presenters also looked at changes taking place that relate to the importance of innovation and how this impacts the glass industry.

Bernard Savaete, founder of BJS Differences, talked about major industry changes the industry has seen over the past 25 years. In 1992 there were 150 global float lines; today there are more than 500. Back then, there were 25 float lines in China and today there are more than 250. There were also only 322 Chi-

nese patents and today there are more than 7,000.

Looking ahead, Savaete suggested the flat glass industry should invest more in areas such as research and development, marketing, BIPV glazing, logistics and transportation, energy and efficiencies and development for a new melter or alternative glazing.

He also shared that macro trends will continue to influence the industry. These include:

- Increases in global population and urbanization;
- Development of the building and construction industry;
- Continued focus on CO2 emissions;

- Increased connectivity and new functionalities; and
- Driverless cars.

Worldwide Awareness

As an international event, GPD draws participants from around the world, sharing viewpoints on what they see as some of the most significant global trends.

"Larger glass as a structural element has driven the need for structural interlayers to maintain overall unit thickness for larger loads, or allow it to be thinner for similar loads," said Michael Ondrus, architectural market develop-

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ment manager, Americas, with Eastman Chemical Co., adding that interest in sound dampening as a result of continued urbanization is also driving the need for acoustic interlayers.

Jonathan Cohen, global business director with Kuraray Glass Laminating Solutions, said he also sees growth in structural glazing with larger glass panels and thinner glass using structural interlayers.

“This trend creates more projects with a need for higher edge stability performance, long-term warranties and more work on sealant compatibility with interlayers,” he said, adding that they, too, see strong growth in acoustic glazing as well as in ultra-clear glass and ultra-clear interlayers.

Steps Toward New Innovations

This year GPD included several new features, including a Step Change program, intended to bring new technologies and startup companies together with established businesses to try and increase the clock change rate of innovation. During “pitching competitions,” 22 companies each gave a three-minute presentation on their business idea, hoping to convince the jury of its viability.

Brite Solar was named the winner. The company was founded in 2009 in Thermi, Greece, and develops transparent solar cells for power-producing glass. Next Energy, based in Santa Barbara, Calif., was the second-place winner. The company has developed a transparent energy-harvesting window technology that it says can turn glass facades into producers of low-cost, on-site renewable energy for buildings. Austria-based Lightglass received third place. The company has developed glass that can be both a light source as well as a carrier of electronic modules. ■

the author



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