

FEARLESS EDITOR RETIRES

Tom Wadsworth writes new chapter in his story

By Vicki Jones, Editor

On January 1, 2019, Tom Wadsworth officially retired from the editor position at Door + Access Systems Newsmagazine. In his near 20-year tenure with the magazine, this former minister turned radio anchorman turned trailblazing journalist has written hundreds of stories, given dozens of presentations, conducted countless interviews, and uncovered many industry concerns.

And, in his own words, Wadsworth has been part of the “power to influence positive change” for our industry.

According to DASMA executive director John Addington, “His groundbreaking work, thorough research, and gutsy investigative

reporting has elevated our magazine and raised the bar for all publications in the industry. We are extremely grateful that Wadsworth will continue with D+AS as a senior correspondent. This will ensure that his impactful words will continue to reach our readers.

“Following in the footsteps of Wadsworth is a tall order, but we are confident our new editor has the abilities and experience to continue to drive the magazine to further success,” Addington said.

Under Wadsworth’s direction and with the support of DASMA’s members and its board of directors, the magazine has been extremely successful. Since Wadsworth became editor in 1999, D+AS has grown in circulation from 12,500 to 20,000. The magazine has doubled

in size from 40 pages to 80 pages. Since 2007, our biennial readership survey has confirmed that D+AS has become the most-read magazine in the industry.

This growth is largely attributed to Wadsworth. His fearless reporting on controversial topics has ranged from evaluating the value of the annual IDAExpo to his most recent cover story exposing the questionable practices of one franchise owner. No matter what the topic, Wadsworth has been a powerful voice for manufacturers, dealers, and customers for almost two decades. The “Letters to the editor” in this issue are evidence of this (pp. 42-48).

In addition to making history, Wadsworth has produced timelines of history for over 50



companies as editor at D+AS. His 2014 story, “The First Complete History of the American Garage Door Industry,” is the only article of its kind, and one that we all will be referencing for years to come.

Wadsworth’s relentless determination to uncover and report the truth stems from family history in the industry and his genuine desire to protect customers, installers, and salespeople. His father started in the garage door industry in 1948, and his two brothers each had 30-year careers in the industry.

His innate passion and concern for the integrity of our industry spawned the most popular and, in some cases, controversial stories published in the magazine’s 28-year history.

Case in point: Wadsworth rattled the industry when he coined the term “Bad Bob” and shined a spotlight on a growing nationwide problem. In the “Worst Garage Door Company in the Nation” article (fall 2015), Wadsworth awakened us all to an insidious and underreported issue and earned him a prestigious national award. (See Q&A on p. 56.)

These stories also cemented his reputation as one of the most noteworthy and influential writers in our industry. Ann Marie Cunningham, advertising manager of D+AS, said, “I know that Tom has played a significant part in increasing the integrity of the garage door and gate operator industry. When I speak with manufacturers and dealers, they often

credit Tom for positive change and for truly trying to weed out the Bad Bobs, one bad dealer at a time.”

D+AS proofreader/copyeditor Debby Baron said, “I have watched D+AS become the leading publication in the industry—and Tom become an award-winning and fearless journalist who does what it takes to get the story. The Bad Bobs and rip-off artists in our industry are now looking over their shoulders because of Tom Wadsworth.”

Q&A with Tom Wadsworth

We thought our readers would enjoy hearing about Wadsworth’s reflections and plans for the future. In this introspective conversation, he and I reflect on the next phase and the most notable highlights of his career (so far!).

Can you provide some background information on your experience in the industry and your experience as an editor?

My first job in the industry was around 1971 when I worked at Raynor as a janitor. I also ran the rip saw, helping to make wood garage doors. Later, I bundled commercial steel door sections, preparing them for loading onto trucks.

I later earned a bachelor’s degree in biblical studies and, after three years in seminary, a master’s degree in theology. After 10 years serving in pulpit ministry, I worked several years in radio as a news anchor and talk show host.

I returned to Raynor in 1989 as its corporate communications manager. In 1999, I left Raynor and started Wadsworth Communications. Since then, my major client has been DASMA, and I have served as its communications director and editor of the magazine.

Can you provide an overview of your experience as a speaker in the U.S. and abroad?

Public speaking used to scare me to death until I learned the craft from my classes in seminary and years of weekly pulpit work. Over the last 20 years, I’ve spoken at many corporate and industry events from coast to coast and a few times in Canada and China.

In general, I try to apply lessons I’ve learned from my experience. For garage door

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industry events, my topics have often focused on marketing, advertising, sales, the history of the industry, and of course, the Bad Bob problem.

What committees have you helped establish? Which ones will you continue to serve on?

In 2005, seeing how carriage house doors influenced the status of the garage door, I began to push the idea that garage doors are “the new front door to the American home.” That led to a joint DASMA-IDA effort to establish a national public relations campaign promoting sales of upscale garage doors. That effort eventually became the GarageWowNow committee.

I hope that I will continue to enjoy contact with door dealers and manufacturers throughout the industry.

In 2016, I floated the idea of a joint DASMA-IDA Task Force on Industry Reputation. By then, both DASMA and IDA were fed up with the problem of Bad Bob garage door repair companies that ripped off consumers.

The industry’s support of these two efforts has been inspiring, and I believe that both committees have improved the industry for all of us. I hope to continue to help both efforts.

After writing and reporting about the issues that affect our industry for nearly 20 years, what would you consider the most newsworthy topics you’ve addressed?

#1: Bad Bob. The most newsworthy topic is Bad Bob; i.e., the problem of garage door repair companies that intentionally take advantage of customers. This problem started in Florida in the late 1990s, and it spread from coast to coast like a disease.

Today, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of garage door technicians who simply don’t know any other way to do business. If we hadn’t written about this problem, I fear that no one else would have, and the problem would be much worse.

#2: Curb appeal. I think the second most newsworthy topic is the new and powerful impact that upscale garage doors can have on the value of a home. For decades, the garage door was primarily a commodity, something to fill the hole in the front of the garage. But that

has changed, and we’re all beneficiaries of that transformation.

Thanks to GarageWowNow and manufacturers’ marketing efforts, more and more Americans are now willing to spend more and upgrade their garage doors.

In my mind, the crowning achievement came in January 2018. That’s when an upscale garage door became the #1 most cost-effective home improvement project in Remodeling magazine’s annual Cost vs. Value Report. That’s big news for all of us.

You have published many groundbreaking articles exposing the Bad Bobs in our industry. Why has this topic been so important to you?

My dad, Bill Wadsworth, worked honorably in this industry for 42 years (1948-1990). Like thousands of door dealers and manufacturers, he was devoted to excellence and taking care of customers every day, making an honest living in an honorable profession.

Bad Bob is making all of us look like degenerates who care only about money and not about the people we serve. Frankly, that makes my blood boil. It is not acceptable, and as long as I have the ability, I will fight it.

What has been the most challenging part of publishing those Bad Bob stories?

The most challenging part is navigating the legal waters of publishing incriminating details about specific companies and specific people. We’ve faced several threats, battles, and opposition along the way. But thanks to good journalistic practices and steady guidance from John Addington, Naomi Angel, and the DASMA leadership, we’ve survived and even thrived.

What is the most important thing you’ve learned while doing this job?

The most important lesson is that the news media—of any industry—have substantial power to influence positive change. But with that power comes awesome responsibility: to do hard research, to present both sides of the story, and to make sure that we’re driving toward a better industry for all of us.

Of all the awards and recognition you’ve received throughout your career, which acknowledgement means the most to you and why?

In 2016, when the American Society of Business Publication Editors gave me their Stephen Barr Award (for our article “GDS: The Worst Garage Door Company in the

Nation”), I was completely blown away. Since the ASBPE includes editors from many of the nation’s top business publications, this award was particularly special.

It also meant a lot because it validated what we were doing. I’ve never taken a single course in journalism, but from my experience, I’ve learned the crucial importance of doing diligent research, using qualified sources, and being fair to all sides of an issue.

You will still be actively involved with D+AS magazine as the senior correspondent. What will you miss most about running the magazine?

Honestly, I won’t miss the stress of producing the magazine. Since I’m staying on as a writer, I hope that I will continue to enjoy contact with door dealers and manufacturers throughout the industry. And, I hope that my writing will continue to be a positive influence for a better industry.

Can you provide some information on your Ph.D. program and your plans?

When I finished my master’s in theology in 1977, I planned to pursue a Ph.D. in New Testament. But we started a family, bills were piling up, and life got in the way. Now that I’m 66 and our three kids are all married and thriving, I’m ready to return. I started the program in 2016, and I hope to complete it by 2021.



In 1977, I stumbled on some significant biblical truths. My conclusions, if verified by the research, have the potential to revolutionize the very purpose and experience of “going to church.”

It’s a little different from writing about Bad Bob, but it requires the same kind of solid research and willingness to tackle volatile issues. Thanks to my experience with the magazine, I think I’m ready for the challenge.

Editor’s note: We asked Tom to give us his assessment of the top 10 articles that he’s published with D+AS. Refer to “The Top 10 Greatest Hits” list on pp. 60-64.

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Reflections from the team

Editor's note: *It's rare and impressive for the same group to work together for so many years. Their collaborative effort to produce excellent work is evident in every issue. The team's tributes make it obvious that Wadsworth is a huge reason for their bond and the magazine's consistent success.*

Ann Marie Cunningham, advertising manager

"I have strengthened my personal skills under Tom's leadership because of his overriding desire for perfection in the magazine. I use what he's taught me in everything I do. In Tom's world, there is no place for "average" work, and because of his goals and high expectations, I believe our entire magazine staff has elevated their skills."

Debby Baron, proofreader/copyeditor

"I found in Tom a kindred spirit—another "word nerd" and stickler for accuracy—which not too many people find exciting! We enjoy a good grammar or punctuation debate as much as some would enjoy a good baseball game. I will always admire and respect his stewardship of a publication that everyone on the team is proud to be part of."

Eric Baron, design director

"As a designer, I appreciate Tom's attention to detail and his specific instructions for each issue of the magazine. It made the design process and production much easier and more streamlined."

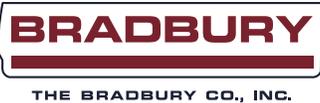
"D+AS has grown tremendously in readership and prestige as a direct result of his reporting, writing, and leadership skills. Whether it is the look and feel of the magazine or the slant and tone of an article, Tom is on a mission to keep Door + Access Systems looking and sounding fresh and relevant."

Michelle White, designer

"Tom's thoroughness rubs off on everyone who works with him. He strives for perfection and makes others want to do the same."

"He is a smart leader and a witty man with many entertaining stories. He was determined to make Door + Access Systems the industry's best resource, and he succeeded." ■

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