

AMCA Pioneers: Bob Shedd & Paul Jensen

As the AMCA celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2014, AMCA Pioneers highlights some of the volunteers who have helped build the Club from an idea in the minds of four founders in 1954 to a 10,000-member organization today.

Opening a New Chapter

Every organization goes through transitions as it grows. For the AMCA, the '70s represented one of those crucial times, as the Club adapted to a new era. And two of the people at the heart of that transition were Bob Shedd and Paul Jensen.

The AMCA started in 1954 as a small organization based mostly in the Northeast. For years, Club membership was in the hundreds, and annual meets attracted a handful of enthusiasts who delighted in firing up and riding their old bikes.

Shedd and Jensen were among those enthusiasts captivated by antique motorcycles. Shedd bought his first bike in 1947 after getting out of the Army. But he got involved in antique bikes in 1961 after purchasing a Harley UL model that was a couple of decades old.

"Once I had that bike," he says, "I bought a sidecar to attach to it. And then I started buying parts all over the place. I kept buying until my garage was so full of parts that you had to climb over stuff to get in it.

"Soon," he adds, "people were coming to my garage to buy stuff. I had all kinds of stuff, so I met the guys from the local Indian club. And even though I still had that Harley, they invited me to join them."

Jensen says he had been an antique-car collector. But then came the motorcycle explosion of the late '60s, and he got interested in two-wheelers.

"I decided that wherever I had an antique car, I could fit about six motorcycles. So I got rid of the cars and got into bikes."

Shedd and Jensen, both from the Midwest, were typical of AMCA members at the time. After starting in the Northeast, the Club was increasingly attracting members from other parts of the country. And it made sense to establish Chapters to bring members together on a local level.

The first Chapters started up in Missouri, followed by Pennsylvania, New York and Illinois. By the middle of the decade, the Club had eight Chapters. And that, the board decided, was enough.

So when Jensen, Shedd, Richard Schultz, Connie Schlemmer and others in Iowa and Nebraska wanted to form a Chapter of their own, they were told that the Club was at its limit.

"They said, 'We have eight Chapters and there will never be more than eight Chapters,'" Jensen recalls. "They said if we wanted to form a Chapter, we could become a part of the Blackhawk Chapter (which had been established in Illinois).

"So they became Blackhawk East, and we became Blackhawk West," Jensen says. "My wife made up flags for the two. She had a Blackhawk East flag with an arrow pointing one way, and a Blackhawk West flag, with an arrow pointing the other way. I still have our original flag."

Each year, Jensen notes, the two halves of the Blackhawk Chapter would get together for one joint meeting. But other than that, they went their separate ways.

The Blackhawk East Chapter had established a National Meet in Davenport, Iowa. And the Blackhawk West Chapter was thinking about hosting a meet, too. There was just one problem: finances.

"Blackhawk East had lots of money," Jensen says, "and we had nothing. So Rich (Schultz) went to the Board and said, 'If we're part of the Blackhawk Chapter, then we ought to have half that money.'"

That request triggered a major discussion. And in the end, the Club faced a choice—keep the two groups together and have them share their resources, or let them split apart and allow more than eight AMCA Chapters. In the end, says Jensen, "They decided we could have more than eight Chapters after all, and we became the ninth."



All Paul Jensen (from left), Richard Schultz and Bob Shedd wanted to do in the 1970s was establish a new AMCA Chapter in Iowa and Nebraska. In the process, they expanded the Club's Chapter system for riders everywhere.

The Blackhawk group had taken its name from a leader of the Sauk Indians, based in the area where the Chapter was formed. And the new group followed that lead, becoming the Omaha Chapter, not in honor of the city, but of the Omaha tribe.

"We had members from South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas," says Jensen, "and the Omaha tribe roamed that whole area."

The Chapter would host meets in various locations. But it eventually established its National Meet in Fremont, Nebraska, only about 30 miles from Omaha, making the Chapter name even more appropriate.

But the real significance of the Omaha group was that it ended the idea that the AMCA could only support eight Chapters. Once Omaha was founded, Chapter growth began again. Today, the AMCA has 57 Chapters across the U.S. and in other countries. And it's looking to establish more, wherever there are AMCA members who don't have a local group to call their own.

"When I look at that list of Chapters," Jensen says, "I think that if it wasn't for Rich Schultz wanting half of the Blackhawk treasury, we'd probably still be at eight. We were the ones who made that happen."