

KEN ACKERMAN

Founding father continues to serve the organization.

Back in the mid-1970s, **Ken Ackerman**, president of consulting firm The Ackerman Company in Columbus, Ohio, was a man on a mission. In searching for a professional organization focused exclusively on warehousing, he and a few other professionals were coming up dry and they recognized a gap. Combining efforts, a group of 17 met to figure out a solution. At a second meeting a few months later, they picked a name and hung up a shingle. Forty years later, the Warehousing Education and Research Council is bigger than those original members ever could have imagined.



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“We modeled it after CSCMP (back then the Council of Logistics Management) and limited the subject matter to warehousing,” Ackerman says. “We wanted an organization that could provide educational opportunities to industry professionals.” While much has changed in the ensuing four decades, one thing has remained the same: That original mission.

The founding members got things running right away. “Within a year, we held our first conference, which I chaired,” says Ackerman. “We were happy to have attendance in the low hundreds that first year.”

WERC’s first group of officers included **Bruce Abels** as president; **Lyman Coombs** and **Jim Robeson** as vice presidents, **Bob Angel** as secretary, and **Burr Hupp** as treasurer. Hupp’s offices in Chicago served as headquarters.

To join WERC back in 1977, members paid \$50. For that money, they got the conference and not much else. But that was short-lived—before long the founding members established local chapters, a newsletter, research papers, seminars and workshops.

Ackerman has devoted his entire career to warehousing. Prior to launching his own firm, he was a chief executive at Distribution Centers, Inc., now a part of Exel Logistics.

He spent some time in the management consulting division of Coopers & Lybrand before staking his own claim with The Ackerman Company.

He is also a published author of books and numerous articles. They include *Warehousing Profitability*, *Lean Warehousing*, *Auditing Warehouse Performance*, and *Warehousing Tips*. He publishes his own monthly subscription newsletter, *Warehousing Forum*, and has written subject-matter pieces for *Harvard Business Review* and the *New York Times*. In addition, Ackerman has conducted training seminars and served as a speaker at conferences throughout the world.

The times keep changing

During his long tenure with WERC, Ackerman has been witness to a rapidly evolving industry, and he points to technology as being one of the biggest game changers. “E-commerce was probably a predictable development,” he says, “but I don’t know that we could have expected just how big it would get.”

Technology has also led to the expansion of warehousing staffs, says Ackerman. “It used to be that you could staff a large DC with just a few employees,” he says. “Now staffs for buildings of 100,000 square feet or more number into the hundreds.”

On the topic of employees, Ackerman says that make up has changed some. “When we began, before deregulation, unions played a big role,” he says. “Today, unions are a very small part of DC operations.”

All along this path to change, Ackerman says WERC has been evolving as well. “We grew to have a few hundred members by about 1980,” he says. “By around 1985, that number was over 1,000.”

When asked what has been the biggest value and legacy of WERC, Ackerman doesn’t hesitate with his response: “The prosperity of WERC goes back to the value it provides its members,” he says. “We have always wanted to give members a chance to

share information and the opportunity to learn from one another. That’s something that continues to this day.”

Ackerman, who likes to ride under the radar, hasn’t held an official officer position with WERC, but his contributions are numerous. From helping launch the organization to overseeing the first conference to serving as a regular speaker/educator at the annual conference, his mark on WERC is indelible. In 2002, he became a lifetime member. Fifteen years later, he remains an integral part of the organization and an invaluable resource as it continues to grow and evolve. 🌟

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