



# THE FUTURE OF THE



## An Interview with *Aaron Schulenburg*

As announced during NACE 2007, the Database Enhancement Gateway has taken a major step forward in its mission to help promote accuracy in the estimating databases with the official announcement that they have contracted Aaron Schulenburg to fulfill the need for dedicated administration of the initiative. In this capacity, Schulenburg will assist the DEG in addressing and resolving database-related issues with the three major Information Providers, while also administering all aspects of the DEG functionality and online presence.

After relocating to Maryland from Arizona in 2005, Schulenburg has maintained an active presence on both the local and national collision scenes. In addition to his work with WMABA, Schulenburg sits on the Board for the National Auto Body Council (NABC) and is a regular participant in SCRS, the CIC Estimating Committee and the MOTOR/CCC Industry Forum Panel. In his first interview since being contracted by the DEG, Schulenburg discusses how he will work alongside the existing DEG Joint Operating Committee to fulfill the DEG's many goals for the advancement of collision repair data accuracy.

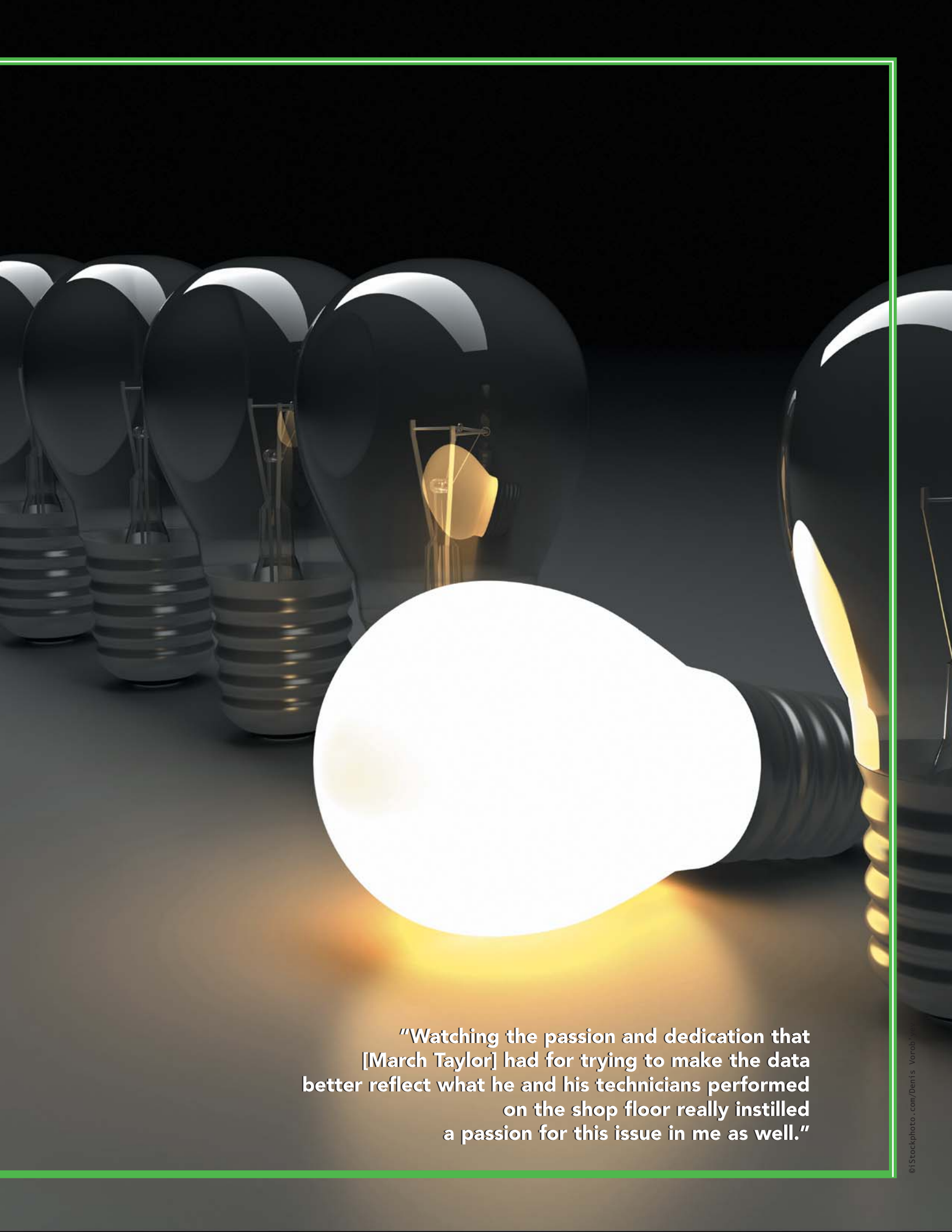
### **What attracted you to pursuing an administrative role with the DEG?**

I have been involved on a volunteer level of submitting database inquiries for several years now. I was introduced to [www.CICLink.com](http://www.CICLink.com) through an estimating course I took, and had the pleasure of getting acquainted with March Taylor, who was operating the volunteer site. Watching the passion and dedication that he had for trying to make the data better reflect what he and his technicians performed on the shop floor really instilled a passion for this issue in me as well. He and I worked together on many inquiries, as did several others across the country. When the DEG was formed, I viewed it as an

opportunity to work alongside a group that was dedicated to take what he had started and bring it to the next level. The labor we charge, as well as the accuracy of the databases, are such important elements to the overall success of a collision repair business and ones that, as an estimator, I felt was still within our ability to affect. After March's passing, it became all that more important for me so that I could try to carry on his work and the spirit in which he approached it. It was always about doing the right thing for the right reason and trying to get the information providers to understand those reasons on behalf of the repair industry.

### **As a repair professional, what did you see as some of the major issues involving database accuracy, and how will you work with the DEG in addressing these matters?**

The Information Providers all refer to their database as a guide. It is a starting point to help establish a flat rate for repair operations. There is nothing that can take the place of first-hand experience. As any IP will explain, it would be completely impossible to do labor time studies on every year, make and model vehicle and still provide a cost-effective product. Because of that, many of the labor values are based on historical data from previous model years, or are determined with limited information from the vehicle manufacturers. One of the biggest issues we face on newer model vehicles is when there are structural design changes and different required repair operations that are inadvertently omitted and aren't considered in the labor time listed in the guide. Through personal experience of submitting the inquiries to the Information Provider with comprehensive feedback on repair requirements, operations, materials, etc... I have seen the times revisited and, in some instances, corrected appropriately. However, as a full-time shop employee, the process could be cumbersome and would often take follow up to come to conclusion. I think most don't have



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that kind of time or energy to expend and therefore the feedback from repairers to the IP is limited. That's where the DEG is a valuable tool. It offers a standardized format to submit the inquiry, and then it becomes our responsibility within the DEG to follow it to conclusion.

### **What is the greatest lesson you've learned from your time as an association member that you will apply to your work with the DEG?**

Emotion cannot dictate our actions to achieve a desired goal. A reasonable approach of dealing with facts for the right reason will always provide a better environment to have discussions and ultimately will foster better results.

### **What can repairers expect out of the new DEG website? What does this new entity provide them that they can't find anywhere else?**

There are many benefits the collision repair community can expect, but I think it is important to also point out that the DEG website is not a tool for only repairers to use. Our goal of improving the data to more accurately reflect repair requirements benefits all parties involved. Repairers will hopefully have more complete and accurate information to work with, allowing them to generate a better "blueprint" of the repair process. This can directly correlate to a faster cycle time and a more efficient repair process, which benefits the paying party whether that is an insurer or a collision repair consumer. The IPs benefit as well, with inquiries that are streamlined to help them in the process of responding to their consumer base. The reality is that getting a well-formulated inquiry will make their process more efficient and eliminate some of the legwork, as they currently have to understand the inquiry prior to researching it. As I mentioned before, the website itself also offers a standardized, easy-to-use format that walks the shop through the inquiry process. The website allows all inquiries that come through to be tracked and then publicly accounted for. Furthermore, it will illustrate the Information Provider(s) that is responsive to the industry's needs. It should also eliminate a shop's lone voice being ignored when a question or concern is raised.

### **What kind of feedback will users receive from the DEG after they send in an inquiry to the site?**

This will continue to evolve after we begin receiving database inquiries. Currently, the system is set up to provide an emailed confirmation of the following milestones:

- \* Inquiry received by DEG Administrator
- \* Inquiry submitted by DEG Administrator to Information Provider (IP)
- \* IP or DEG Administrator requests additional information
- \* Response/resolution received from IP

### **How will the DEG work with the pre-existing CIC Database Taskforce in achieving your common goals?**

While both the DEG and the Database Taskforce have similar objectives, they operate independently. They provide

two separate values to the collision industry that when combined, provide tremendous value. The Taskforce has always focused on the macro issues of the database and how these issues affect the overall industry. The DEG is focused more on micro issues pertinent to specific inquiries. Working in unison, there is a focus on all aspects of the estimating platforms and databases allowing our industry to have an audible voice for those who develop the products that we use.

### **How have the major IPs responded to the DEG's preliminary efforts?**

So far we have received a positive response from two of the three providers, and none of them have indicated that they will not accept inquiries from the DEG. Change can be difficult at times, as can an added level of focus on the end product a company has developed. I think those that have openly agreed to participate in the program understand the value of the DEG. We are interested in improving the quality of their program and providing a source of input from their largest consumer.

### **How would you respond to an IP who may be a bit apprehensive if approached by the DEG with a recommended change to their software?**

As with anything in life, there are two sides to a story, and often labor times can be a subjective issue. I think approaching the issue with logic and levelheaded thinking for the right reason should eliminate much of the apprehension. Ultimately, the DEG does not have any authority over the IPs; however, the public nature of the program allows collision repairers to make up their own minds in regard to which provider(s) is most willing to work towards solutions.

### **In addition to submitting database inquiries, what can individual collision repairers do to assist the DEG in ensuring database accuracy?**

Participation in the DEG is the largest element a repairer can provide to ensure its success. When something doesn't seem right, utilize this website and the tools that come along with it. If a repairer sees a strong value in the DEG, they can pass that along to their business partners. While the initial funding of the program was made available by ASA, AASP and SCRS, we will be looking at different revenue streams including sponsorship so that the DEG can maintain and grow as a free service to the collision repairer industry.

### **On a personal level, what are your biggest hopes for your new role in the industry?**

I hope to help make this groundbreaking project a success that can influence positive change in our industry. But, I think on a personal level, I hope the most to be able to carry on the spirit of my friend March, and help to continue his vision of data that better reflects real world experiences when repairing the vehicle. If I can do justice to what he started, I will be fine with that.