

THE NEW FACE OF THE DEG:

A Conversation with Bud Center, Jr.

by Joel Gausten



The times are changing for the Database Enhancement Gateway.

After a highly successful first year, the DEG Joint Operating Committee issued a formal announcement in March advising that Bud Center Jr. accepted the role as the new DEG administrator. Bringing more than 24 years of automotive industry experience to the organization, Center has been hired as an independent contractor to administer the DEG project, which will include the review and correspondence to all inquiries submitted to www.degweb.org. He replaced outgoing DEG Administrator Aaron Schulenburg, who left to accept the executive director position for SCRS. The Joint Operating Committee (JOC) is comprised of members of the Alliance of Automotive Service Providers (AASP), the Automotive Service Association (ASA) and the Society of Collision Repair Specialists (SCRS). Bud will report directly to the Joint Operating Committee.

"It is truly an honor to have been selected as the new DEG administrator," offered Center at the time of his hiring. "It will be an exciting challenge to continue building on the exceptional history of the DEG built on the hard work and dedication of individuals like March Taylor, Aaron Schulenburg and the Joint Operating Committee. While I plan to continue to be actively involved in other industry projects and organizations, my dedication and commitment to the DEG will be a full-time endeavor."

For the members of the Joint Operating Committee, the selection of Center was a win-win for both the DEG and the industry it serves.

"Bud Center is an excellent choice for the DEG Administrator position," says JOC member Barry Dorn. "Bud is a highly respected individual with a wealth of knowledge and experience in the collision repair industry. He will do a great job."

Center started his career in the automotive industry more than 24 years ago as a technician, then spent several years on the insur-

ance side of the collision repair industry before joining CCC, where he played a key role in implementing and managing their Collision Center Connection program. Bud has spent the last 10 years working for a large collision repair consolidator, with the last eight years being in a District Manager position responsible for multiple service centers.



Bud Center Jr.

"I believe that continuing to improve estimate quality and accuracy is one of the largest opportunities we have in the collision repair industry today," offered Center in a DEG press release. "The DEG is a tremendous asset for end-users to help them improve the quality and accuracy of their estimates. I am excited about this opportunity, and believe my experience will allow me to pick up the important work that has already been started to ensure the continued growth and expansion of the DEG."

As anyone who's followed recent developments in the IP/collision industry relationship surely knows, Center enters his new position at a time of great controversy and upheaval. With the validity of certain IP procedures being questioned throughout the autobody field like never before, the DEG remains firm in its commitment to provide accurate data to the thousands of shop technicians who depend on this information for survival.

Hammer & Dolly recently caught up with Center to get his views on the DEG's mission and its place in an always-evolving industry.

Hammer & Dolly: *How do you feel your past industry experience has enabled you to guide the DEG?*

Bud Center Jr.: I've been in the automotive industry for more than 24 years and have spent some time on both sides of the industry – insurance and collision. I have a unique understanding of how improving the accuracy of collision repair data will benefit both sides. I have written and overseen literally thousands of estimates in that time, and feel that experience helps me tremendously in this role.

H&D: *How would you describe the current relationship the DEG shares with the major IPs?*

BC: I believe the current relationship status is very strong with each of the IPs, due in part to the efforts of the Joint Operating Committee and the work they have done with each of the IPs. In a very short time, I believe that I have also been able to develop a great working relationship with each of them and they have all been excellent to work with.

H&D: *What are some areas that could be improved as the DEG initiative moves forward?*

BC: As I said, I believe the DEG is working very well with each of the IPs, but in the frame of constant improvement, I'm sure we'll continue working closely to refine our processes to improve the speed and efficiency of the overall inquiry process.

H&D: *The DEG has been in existence for well over a year now. Are there any common misconceptions about the DEG that still remain?*

BC: I feel that the DEG has worked hard to minimize any misconceptions. While there is always room for improvement, we believe the proof is in the result. All someone has to do is review the website for the list of inquiries – and the results posted from them – to clearly understand that the main goal and objective is to promote the accuracy of the various databases. I believe most DEG users have a very strong understanding of our mission. I believe our largest opportunity is to continue to broaden industry awareness of the DEG and the important work we are doing together.

It is through efforts such as this article, as well as a host of other activities we participate in such as association meetings, etc., that help us to keep our mission clear to all concerns.

H&D: *What are some of the common errors that individuals sometimes make when submitting a DEG inquiry, and how can they avoid making these mistakes in the future?*

BC: I don't know that I would classify them as mistakes, but I would say the number one thing anyone submitting database inquiries should remember is there is no such thing as too much information. The more information the DEG and IPs have, the easier it will be for everyone to fully understand the issue, which will help improve the overall speed and efficiency of the inquiry process.

H&D: *What is the best advice you'd offer someone making a DEG inquiry for the first time?*

BC: Jump in feet first and start submitting inquiries. Anytime a user finds inaccurate data in any of the estimating systems, they need to take a minute or two and submit an inquiry to the DEG. We'll take it from there; we work with the originator and the IP to submit the inquiry, monitor progress and ultimately provide the user with a resolution to their inquiry. Together, we've made tremendous strides in improving the accuracy of collision repair data, and every inquiry plays a vital role in our mutual success.

H&D: *In your mind, what is the best thing about being a part of the Database Enhancement Gateway?*

BC: It's an incredible honor to be involved with an organization like the DEG and to be working with so many tremendous people who are absolutely committed and passionate about the collision repair industry. I am really enjoying being involved with the DEG and having the ability to assist fellow collision repair professionals improve the accuracy of repair estimating data. I look forward to helping industry professionals find the information they need to prepare an accurate estimate so they can be fairly compensated for the work they are doing.