

My Take: More from ACC Chair Mike Madden

Community

Interviews and Profiles



ACC Chair Mike Madden continues his conversation with ACC Associate Vice President of Editorial Strategy Tiffani Alexander about his vision for the future of the in-house bar.


Mike Madden, Head of Group Legal, Commercial & Procurement at Hyne Timber

Tiffani Alexander, AVP, Editorial Strategy at ACC

Tiffani Alexander: When you think about leading the ACC board through the next year, what aspect of that role excites you the most?

Mike Madden: The opportunity to lead this great organization and working closely with my esteemed fellow board members and staff to shape Strategic Plan 3.0, a plan to streamline and strengthen ACC's activities to be even more in tune and adaptive to the needs of our global membership as well as helping ACC expand its focus on critically important ESG related issues.

Alexander: What do you think will be your biggest challenges?

Madden: As much as we thought we were on top of the pandemic, we will still need to adapt and so as the custodians of ACC we need to ensure we have a viable organization that continues to meet the needs of our members. That means we need to ensure our members have the right tools to effectively deliver on their roles and that ACC is serving as an effective advocate and central resource point for them. Like many businesses, we've had to change pretty quickly, and we will need to continue to adapt quickly and that's critically important. ACC certainly isn't immune to threats and in challenging times such as these, your weaknesses can be exposed so before we invest or make any shifts in strategy or direction, we need to carefully consider that through the lens of our members.

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I must pay credit to the ACC leadership including previous board chairs and treasurers, who have led ACC into the very strong financial position we were in as we went into this pandemic. Thankfully we've weathered the storm relatively well to date and that stable financial base allows us to continually identify opportunities to invest and look carefully at opportunities as they arise.

Alexander: As someone with a busy job and young family, what motivates you to stay involved and continue to volunteer your time to sit on the ACC board?

Madden: First and foremost, it's an absolute privilege to serve on ACC's global board of directors. I really enjoy working with the ACC board, ACC staff, and broader membership. It's those connections with people that motivated me and I remain deeply passionate about the mission of ACC and supporting that mission by whatever means and in whatever capacity I can.

Alexander: How has serving on the ACC board supported your in-house career?

Madden: The skills I've acquired and developed as a board member, at the Queensland Division, at ACC Australia and now at the ACC global board have certainly translated across to my various in-house roles. The ACC board is 24 people strong and with such a large and importantly diverse and inclusive board I have certainly benefitted from the many enriching discussions with my fellow directors both professionally and personally.

Alexander: What would you say to an ACC member who is thinking about getting involved in their local chapter?

Madden: I believe volunteerism is by its very nature incredibly rewarding and undoubtedly, how much you put into it will determine how much you get out of it. ACC offers many opportunities at all levels to volunteer and get involved both locally and globally. The pathways to getting involved are numerous and in addition to committee roles include contributing articles and speaking at events.

My ACC path started with the Queensland division and then moved onto the national and now global board. Each level presenting new opportunities and new experiences.

It's not for everyone and that's OK, but I'd recommend to anyone to give it a go and do so with an open mind. I still enjoy the opportunity to give back to the in-house community and I know that I've personally benefitted enormously from my association with ACC over many years. To anyone considering it, I'd suggest they don't think — just do. Make your mind up and I'd be surprised if you don't find it as rewarding an experience as I have.

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Alexander: As a fellow cyclist, what's your preferred route in Brisbane and how often do you get out on the bike?

Madden: These days I'm spending more time at the gym lifting weights! But during the lockdowns where gyms were closed, I did get back into riding the bike! The Brisbane River Loop is an iconic path through Brisbane and for any ACC members who find themselves in Brisbane and enjoy a ride, I'm always happy to come along for a ride! The 40-odd kilometer loop follows the river, passing through the city, around the University of Queensland and thankfully also includes plenty of coffee shops and bakeries that are worth a stop along the way. Brisbane really is a great city to live in and ride around. Again though…any ACC members in Brisbane who enjoy a ride, look me up!

Alexander: Your family traced an extraordinary path in coming to Australia, can you talk a little about that?

Madden: I was born in Iran and my family emigrated to Australia when I was nine years old. When I was born, my family lived in Tehran, however as the Iranian revolution erupted in 1979, my family moved to a smaller city north of the capital on the Caspian Sea called Ramsar.

With the ongoing Iran and Iraq war waging, I was facing the prospect of mandatory military service as a young teenager. The regime would train school kids as minesweepers in the Iran-Iraq conflict! With that looming, we were successful in being granted permanent residency in Australia in 1987 (my parents had applied in 1980!). In late March 1988, we returned to the capital to stay with my grandparents for a week before flying out of Iran.

That was an extraordinary time and I still remember that week well. Ramsar was a small city of no strategic importance, so we'd been largely immune to the Iran-Iraq conflict. However, at the time of leaving, Tehran was being routinely bombarded by missile strikes. Each night that week, we'd hear the air raid sirens, and the family would huddle in my grandparents' basement as we listened to the explosions in the distance.

Some days, I remember standing on the roof of their house watching fighter jets and antiaircraft ballistics fly overhead as the conflict raged on. It's crazy when I think about it now! Tehran's airport had been a target for Iraqi air raids or missile strikes from time to time. On the day we were scheduled to leave Iran, we arrived at the airport at 4 am for our 7 am flight.

In order to minimize the impacts of air strikes, the aircraft were parked well away from the terminal building and as different flights prepared for departure, before boarding had even commenced, each plane would taxi to the end of the runway so they could take off immediately.

So as passengers, instead of boarding via the terminal, we'd pass through the gate and board buses which would taxi us across the tarmac to the end of the runway and the waiting planes. However, just as we were preparing to board our bus, the air raid sirens rang out and we had to board the bus which headed out to another part of the airport well away from planes and terminal buildings.

The air raid over the city gradually ended and at 11:30 am they tried to board the flight again. Yet just as we pulled up at the plane, the sirens sounded again. Those already on the plane were ordered to stay there, while ours and other buses, still with people eager to leave, retreated to the back of the tarmac well away from other planes and buildings. I still remember standing on the bus alongside my family looking out in the distance and watching the contrails of the rockets in the distance as they flew towards Tehran! This went on for most of the day!

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Eventually, at 5:30 pm, we were finally able to board the plane and take off. I remember the plane's climb rate was very aggressive such was the urgency to get airborne and out of the Tehran airspace and head north away from the combat airspace and onto Tokyo and eventually Brisbane, Australia! I was 11 years old when my family arrived in Brisbane on April 13, 1988 and have lived here ever since.

I share this part of my life story because I am forever grateful to my parents for the sacrifices they made, leaving their life, friends, and family behind. To move to a new country, no recognition of their qualifications or experiences, where they had to start over which was no doubt difficult, overwhelming, and at times heartbreaking!

But above all, they showed courage, kindness, generosity of spirit, and a strong work ethic and ambition to build another life, a better life for my sister and me. It has certainly shaped who I am! They made those sacrifices to ensure my sister and I had the opportunity to live a better life and a life of freedom and opportunity.

This story is by no means unique, and I'm sure many of our members will have similar stories. I celebrate your successes and your unique stories!

Tiffani R. Alexander



CEO & Chief Creative Officer

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Tiffani R. Alexander is an award-winning writer, editor, and executive leader with 20 years of experience developing publications and multimedia, content strategy, and executive communications. As the owner of TiffaniWrites, LLC (TiffWrites.com), she provides editorial, design, and content strategy services to individuals and organizations.