

Meet PMPA's New President, Aneesa Muthana

The PMPA installed its new board president, Aneesa Muthana, CEO and co-owner of Pioneer Service Inc., at PMPA's 88th Annual Meeting held in October 2021 in Charleston, South Carolina. In this interview, Aneesa shares her history, thoughts and goals for the association and the importance of makers/manufacturers and why it is time to shine.



Miles Free: You took the gavel from outgoing President Tom Halladay after quite a year.

Aneesa Muthana: Tom Halladay kept us above the waterline during another challenging year and put faith in me as his vice president. It was an honor to work with him and I appreciated his kind nature and thoughtful approach. Thanks to him and the PMPA team, we are now primed for a rebound year of travel and expansion.

MF: Your involvement in the metalworking industry came early, even before high school.

AM: It was my family's shop and, of course, I wanted to help. And, more importantly, I wanted to learn. I wanted very much to work the machines *right away* but my parents were (at first) more comfortable letting my brothers take those jobs. I started cleaning the shop including the tanks, sanding down desks then jumping over bundles to answer the phones as quickly as I could. While I wanted to learn shop things, it was even more important to learn to get along with people. A few years later, not only were my parents letting me get my hands dirty but I was talking to customers, and managing payroll and accounts. My uncle also worked for my parents, but left to start his own business — although he didn't care so much for the business end of things. In 1993, he asked me to partner up and the rest is history.

At Pioneer, we make precision parts for medical/dental, aerospace, defense, EV, hydraulics, oil/gas and more. We made the transition to CNC Swiss machining in 2014 as a means of recovering after losing 90% of our business. This was after we survived the Great Recessions 2007-09 when most of the industry's business left for foreign shores. It was a messy transition, but we're better for it. Our success was only possible through building a team that embraces continuous improvement, diversity and leading-edge technology. Our specialty is stainless, but we run tons of aluminum, carbon, brass, copper and many of the exotic materials.



Tom Halladay poses with Aneesa Muthana after handing her the president's gavel at the PMPA Annual Meeting 2021.

We partnered up with one of PMPA's Technical Members in the ERP space at the very beginning of our digital transformation. Six years later, our partnership couldn't be any better. Our team now has the use of customized reports and dashboards — automatically generated and integrated with our IIoT. They have gone above and beyond, and are a great example of what a good partnership looks like. It has helped us better serve our sophisticated customers. That is a great membership "dividend."

MF: You've been a PMPA member for almost 10 years, and now you are president.

AM: When I originally joined the PMPA in 2012, I didn't feel it was a good fit and I didn't have the time or energy to try to fit in. Then I met the Wrenns of Hudson Precision Products Company. The family is one of the founding members. Jim Wrenn invited me to his shop, gave me a

tour, showed me the ListServe, then introduced me to his mother, Joan. I was so inspired by her tenacity! I was there for hours and immediately felt a connection. I knew if this is what the association represented, I wanted to be part of it. I have never looked back since!

In 2015, I was asked to join the Board of Directors during a visit to my shop by the executive director at the time. During that same visit, the president of PMPA, Harry Eighmy, also asked me to join. I later found out that neither knew the other had asked. I was honored. I felt like I had an opportunity to give back to the industry that has been my livelihood my whole life. I also knew I'd learn through the relationships I'd make. It was definitely getting out of my comfort zone — I didn't think about it much, but I was ready and willing.

I had a condition that we create a group for the Women of PMPA. It was a team effort and we made it happen. We have more women on the Board and attending conferences than we ever did in the history of PMPA. My goal: Empowering without Dividing. I think we did that!

Besides the Women of PMPA, the financial reporting of the Financial Committee was on point. Also, we built a great partnership with Tactical Alliance led by Tim Rankin, and we have a new executive director, Cate Smith, and a strong partnership with Gardner. The PMPA team has grown and is much happier — you can see it in their demeanor and smiles.

I feel that the Board and the Executive Committee, in particular, led these positive changes because we all want what is best for the association and the members. Less ego, more productivity.

MF: These are some important accomplishments. What else is important to you about PMPA?

AM: I can't imagine being successful in this industry without camaraderie and collaboration. I love finding common ground with people who look and sound nothing like me, whether men or women, new or experienced, Boomers or Gen Z.

MF: Pioneer came through for its customers during the COVID-19 crisis. What was that like and what did you learn?

AM: We came through like everyone else did — by the seat of our pants — but also with the help of our friends. Our team was able to channel the stress of uncertainty and danger into making precision parts for stretchers and ventilators and it made a world of difference. One of the

key takeaways through PMPA was how competitors can put aside petty differences to push through the biggest challenges. Those differences make us stronger — a key tenet of DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) and a reminder that pushing in the same direction doesn't necessarily mean agreeing on every little thing.

MF: Your personal values are evidenced every day in your work, in your speaking and in your online posts. You have written and spoken of Amanah as an important value to you. Help us understand Amanah and how you came to embrace it professionally.

AM: Amanah comes from my faith and means many things: trust, respect, accountability, responsibility and more. I have my parents to thank for it and we don't need to follow the same faith to believe in it or benefit from it. You can call it "holding yourself accountable," "The Golden Rule," or a million other things, but all of my favorite people have some version of it within themselves — Trust, Respect, Accountability and Responsibility.

I believe, as manufacturing leaders, it's our responsibility to give back. I speak, host and mentor to inspire because I know how much I benefited from inspiration in my youth. We need role models. They don't need to be perfect — and it's a good thing because I'm far from it! But we need to see people, who remind us of ourselves, succeeding at things that matter most to us. We never really lose the need for role models — I still have some myself. Also, teaching others forces us to stay current on the latest and greatest tech, and I almost always learn a thing or two from each student.

There's satisfaction when being part of someone's journey to success. Many times, they grow up and remember you. They become your mentor. I also consider it part of my legacy. I realize that not everyone who tours my shop will become a maker, but those who don't can still become advocates!

MF: You have shared the stage with many prominent people. I can name a few: the Assistant Secretary for Manufacturing in the current administration, former Vice President Pence and Indra Nooyi, the CEO at PepsiCo. You were even mentioned by then Presidential Candidate Biden. What does that mean to you? What does it say to us?

AM: Sharing the stage with these high ranks is an incredible honor. I am a centerless grinder's daughter! My parents came to this country not speaking a word of English. I have no formal education, yet I was able to achieve this level of success. I've come to realize that it's not about titles, degrees

or even salaries — it's about building relationships and acting with integrity. The people in my industry do that every day. That's what it means to be a maker.

MF: What do you hope to help all of the members of PMPA achieve on your term?

AM: I want every single member to know they belong and their perspective matters. Not just the owners or managers but *every single person*.

The process includes regular Executive Committee and Board calls, and a strategic planning meeting. I plan to work closely with members (new and senior), board members, along with the PMPA team and Gardner. Recognizing those who have been the PMPA's ambassadors and encouraging others to do the same. I also plan to start the strategic planning meeting off with a SWOT exercise so we can bring it all out and recognize what to improve and what to leave alone. There's plenty of good history and best practices in place and I'm looking to build on that.

MF: I am hopeful that we will embrace compliance. But compliance is not the only challenge we face. Why are you attentive, but not concerned, about the issues that are monopolizing the media these days — mandates, supply chain, inflation, materials shortages and workforce issues?

AM: We're still thriving even with these challenges. I know firsthand my company's revenue can increase by at least 20% if not for these issues, but I also know that the industry has survived a lot worse. Bring it on! PMPA, with the help of The Franklin Partnership and Fisher Phillips has helped all of us in PMPA adapt and thrive — and will continue to in the year ahead.

MF: You are now the president of a group you joined not quite 10 years ago. You share the stage with impressive, easily recognized names. What have you learned about leadership and associations through your board service?

AM: Servant leadership is already in my nature, but the association magnified it for me. No matter the size of our shops, we face very similar challenges and,

when listening, you'll sense a great deal of empathy for one another. Different perspectives bring new ideas and innovation. It's not necessarily something specific. It's knowing and feeling that we're in this together, for both the good and the bad. Better Together.

MF: What would you like to say to everyone — members and non-members?



Aneesa Muthana addresses the attendees at the PMPA Annual Meeting.

AM: Trust. Respect. Accountability. Responsibility. Taken together, the word for these in Arabic is amanah, and my promise to each of you is to uphold these values as your president. I will not be perfect, but I am blessed with an exceptional team of motivated and devoted individuals who will help me uphold our legacy.

This is our time to shine! The world needs manufacturing now more than ever. Our status as a tech industry is no longer a secret, and the best is yet to come! ☺

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