

Unexpected Takeaways from the 2025 SID Congress

Seeing our industry through international eyes.



PMPA is a member of the international precision machining industry association Syndicat International du Decolletage (SID), a group of eight global associations from Europe and the U.S. Every two years, each association hosts a congress, inviting member companies to tour local manufacturing facilities and experience their culture. PMPA was proud

Comparison of the costs of business inputs — labor, materials and social costs — gave us all plenty of insights into the most important factors affecting our profitability. What was problematic was the difficulty of managing commercial uncertainties due to the tariff process.



to be the host of the 2025 SID Congress. Held June 8-12 in Chicago, the congress brought together 150 delegates and partners to visit precision machining shops, suppliers, training institutes in Chicago and Milwaukee — as well as tourist venues worthy of an international audience.

Here are my unexpected takeaways from this event:


- The abundance of available floor space in U.S. facilities was unanimously cited as “shocking” by our visitors. Aisles in U.S. factories were said to be “many times” wider than the European practice.
- Tariffs were neither polarizing nor the source of animosity between delegates — regardless of country.
- Social costs for the workforce differed substantially by country, but their increase by all countries reporting made a compelling case for increasing investment in automation, lightly attended operations and buying higher quality materials to minimize production complexity and higher labor inputs.
- Demand for talent and the need to grow the manufacturing workforce was universal and a major concern by every delegation regardless of country. All delegates were surprised at the claim — supported by facts — that now is actually a positive and underappreciated opportunity for our investment in automation, technology and training.

- While many of the shops we visited had similar processes and technologies, each made a convincing case that it was their different management approach and workforce expertise that provided their advantage and success.



- The collaboration, cooperation and sharing of the PMPA members was seen initially as “an incredible fantasy.” But by the end of our shop visits, our visitors agreed that the sharing between “competitors was unlike anything they had ever experienced and undeniable in its strength.” (This is how we explain PMPA member shops’ better-than-benchmark performance.)

- The delegates all shared how welcomed and comfortable they felt, unlike the image of the U.S. that they get from their media.
- Many attendees were surprised by the apparent abundance they saw on the tours — whether the amount of dedicated greenspace on our industrial properties, the size of homes or the sheer abundance of supplies and products readily available in our shops.
- After five days of networking, conversations, presentations and meetings to share data and best practices, many of our visitors were using the term “better together” to describe their experience at SID 2025. Whether the wide expanse of manufacturing space available, the automation and technologies they witnessed — or the delight at learning how to grill a steak “American- style” at Weber Grill or sample the tastes of Chicago.

SID 2025 was a singular opportunity to see, feel, taste and learn just what in the world our industry is up to. Better together — sharing, networking — we couldn’t agree more. It was a pleasure to host, participate and learn. Despite the anger in the world news, we found that people with shared interests and mutual needs had plenty of good will — and sharing of our data made our mutual future success much clearer. 



Miles Free III is the PMPA Director Emeritus with over 50 years of experience in the areas of manufacturing, quality and steelmaking. Miles’ podcast is at pmpa.org/podcast. Email: mfree@pmpa.org — Website: pmpa.org.