



Famed Flashbacks

2020 Vision: How I, we got from there to here

By Fred W. Crans

SCHAUMBURG, IL (July 15, 2026) – Several years ago, Bellwether League Foundation Co-Founder and Executive Director Rick Dana Barlow asked me to contribute an opinion column for publication/posting on BLF’s “Leaders & Luminaries” webpage. Ostensibly, the purpose of the column – Famed Flashbacks – was to regale the readership with stories about Bellwether Hall of Famers, Ammer Honorees and Future Famers from the past and present – something light and entertaining to bring some of the honorees to life in 1,200 words or less.

It was easy work. Telling stories has always come easy to me, and believe me, after 60-plus years in healthcare, I have plenty of them to tell.

Then, in 2020, two things happened that no one could have predicted: The COVID pandemic hit and out of the blue, I was inducted into BLF’s Healthcare Supply Chain Leadership Hall of Fame myself. To say that I was surprised and overwhelmed would be a gross understatement. Bellwethers seemed to be the Big Timers – the marquee names everyone knew – members of an exclusive group of industry leaders and influencers. Many of them were people I knew but had not interacted with on a peer level. There was a “highest-archy” in healthcare Supply Chain, and my career path had left me at least a couple of levels below the top group. I was known for my flashy pants, my quick wit and the library of articles I had written for various publications – impressive to some, but likely not resonating with everyone.

There I was, preparing to write an acceptance speech. The global pandemic required that BLF's Hall of Fame induction event, like most other conferences and trade shows in 2020 and 2021, be held online only until people could or would resume traveling. Still, I felt like Steve Martin's iconic character Navin Johnson from his 1979 film, "The Jerk." My name was in the phone book. I was finally ... Somebody!

The 2020 Induction Ceremony was a virtual event. I sat in front of my computer's camera and recorded a four-minute acceptance speech, then watched the event when it aired. While the recognition was personally moving, the event was, unfortunately (but necessarily) far less than it would have been had it been live before an in-person audience. Still, I was immensely proud and humbled to have been recognized as a Hall of Famer, and I decided to wear my BLF pin proudly wherever I went.

2020 Vision

Following my induction, I became an active contributor to BLF, joining various committees and eventually becoming a Board Member serving as its Outreach Ambassador whose official job it is to represent the nonprofit charitable foundation at various conferences and spread the word about its history, structure, operations and aspirations.

There was another, unofficial function -- one I assigned to myself, and to which Barlow bestowed a ceremonial title of Sergeant-At-Arms: To seek out, identify and chastise those honorees -- Future Famers, Ammer Honorees and Bellwethers -- who were spotted not wearing their pins.

At first, it seemed like a joke. People "forgot" or "couldn't find" their pins or claimed they had lost them outright. The more I became involved with the organization the more I began to realize and understand several things.

It would not be a misnomer to say that after my induction, I began to see clearly what being a Bellwether meant and what challenges faced the organization. You



Fred Crans' Bellwether Class of 2020 pin. Honestly, he only removed it from his lapel for this photograph.

might say that after my induction in 2020, I developed 20/20 vision about the organization. Here are the things I have seen in the years since 2020:

- Being voted a Bellwether consists of surviving an arduous and exhausting vetting process equal to that of any HoF anywhere. The people who make the cut truly earn their induction.
- The BLF is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that works via the efforts of a small and dedicated group, only one of whom is compensated under contract. The rest are dedicated, devoted and dutiful volunteers.
- The organization is constantly trying to improve its inclusion and outreach. It has added two award recognitions in addition to the original Bellwether recognition for HoF induction: Future Famers for people early in their careers and Ammer Honorees for mid-career leaders.
- The Annual BLFIRE (the acronym stands for Bellwether League Foundation Induction & Recognition Event) features keynote addresses from industry experts and influencers as well as an educational event in which students from chosen universities share Collegiate Capstone Project results and Bellwethers, Ammer Honorees and Future Famers discuss relevant issues in a roundtable or lecture format.
- The purpose of the BLF is to recognize the contributions of high performers at every stage of their careers and to give back to the discipline it represents -- Supply Chain.

There is no doubt that Bellwether League Foundation represents and honors the accomplishments of an oft-overlooked, oft-underappreciated group of professionals who seldom gain any recognition until a catastrophe strikes. That's why it should be known, honored and feted across the industry.

But it's not. Or at least it's not enough.

BLF experiences several challenges (which may not be unique to nonprofits):

- Try as we may, not enough people know about us. In the last two years, we have been able to gain complimentary access to a few of the industry's annual meetings to spread the word from informational tables, but the returns in awareness have been slow.
- Cash flow is always an issue. Unlike major venues that charge people thousands of dollars to belong and attend meetings as a mechanism to foster relationships that generate sales, revenue and ultimately profits, the BLF relies solely on voluntary contributions from organizations and individuals to keep the lights on and host the annual event as a mechanism to foster relationships

and demonstrate unselfish regard for designated influencers, innovators, leaders, pioneers and visionaries.

- People need to know who the BLF is, what it does and how they can help.

Call to Action

Here is what you can do to help:

- If you are an awardee, **WEAR YOUR PIN.** Wear it where it can easily be seen. Engage folks. Tell them about what the BLF is and what it does. Tell them what it means to you. Encourage them to learn more and participate. Direct them to the website (www.bellwetherleague.org) or to Barlow, BLF Board Chairman Barbara Strain (Bellwether Class of 2021) or me.
- Nominate folks for the awards.
- Ask for time at your chapter/regional AHRMM events to tell the attendees about BLF. We can provide you with what you would need for a brief presentation or reach out to us to do it.
- Share the BLF story with your organization and with suppliers. Direct them to Barlow, Strain or myself to see how they can help (Hint: Money is always welcome, of course).
- Contribute yourself. The BLF awards are not trivial. Don't be afraid to make a tax-deductible donation.

Just as BLF has consistently supported the healthcare supply chain industry and profession for 19 years – yes, next year will be the 20th anniversary – so should the industry and profession – professionals, providers and suppliers alike – support BLF in the ultimate example of and tribute to sustainability.

Fred W. Crans, Bellwether Class of 2020, has roughly six decades of healthcare supply chain experience and service in a variety of executive leadership roles that spans military and private-sector communities as well as provider, supplier, group purchasing organization and consultant segments. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of Bellwether League Foundation as Outreach Ambassador and as Healthcare Business Development Executive for St. Onge Co. For more, visit Bellwether League Foundation's web site at <https://www.bellwetherleague.org/>.



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