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Thrifty and optimistic visitors attend annual four-day event

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"I'm tired of being told that I'm broke. I might be a little short, but I have a good job and I need a new bathroom!"

So said one visitor from West Warwick as he made his way through the crowds at the Rhode Island Builders Association's annual Home Show on Saturday, March 13.

That seemed typical of the thrifty but optimistic visitors who steadily passed through the turnstiles at the Rhode Island Convention Center, Providence, during the show, which ran from March 11-14.

Along with nearly 300 exhibitors, there were Newport Restaurant Week cooking demonstrations, the now-famous Rejuvenation Nights, with free chair massages, mini-facials and gourmet wine, cheese and fudge samples. Balloon animals and face painting entertained the children, while on Saturday and Sunday the Kaleidoscope Theatre performed "The Magic of Story Time," with appearances by Snow White, Cinderella and Rapunzel. There was even a visit by "Paws," the Pawtucket Red Sox mascot.

"Shape Up RI," an exercise and weight loss challenge, was at the Home Show to promote "Healthy Homes."

And there were seminars to educate homeowners, many presented by RIBA members. These included "New Kitchen and Bath Trends" with Steven St. Onge and Prudence Stoddard of R.I. Kitchen & Bath; "How To Hire A Contractor" with Felix Carlone, chairman of the state Contractors' Registration and Licensing Board; "Better Use of Space in Your Home" with Joseph Cracco of Modern Yankee Builders; and "Green Building" with Daniel Paquette of Woodmeister Master Builders.

On Saturday, RIBA's weekly radio show, You're Home, broadcast live from the Home Show floor, hosted by Carlone, RIBA president Michael Artesani, and past president Thomas McNulty.

Photographs and Home Show updates were sent real-time to the show's Facebook and Twitter pages throughout the event.

RIBA members who exhibited and who spoke with The Rhode Island Builder Report seemed universally pleased with their Home Show experiences, especially if their business involved home improvement, remodeling or maintenance.

"It's been a very good and steady crowd, very receptive," said Debbie Lozy of Granites of America, residential and commercial stone suppliers. "There has been particular interest from builders visiting the show."

Over at Elco Painting Inc., Steve and Mary Elliott said that some Home Show visitors were ready to roll. "Not only have we developed some leads, but two people have stepped up so far and signed contracts right here at the booth," Steve reported. "We're drumming up business!"

Len Boucher of Home Improvement Services Inc. was equally enthusiastic, and stated that the rain covering the region Friday through Sunday helped rather than hurt show attendance.

"People are ready for spring and have their projects in mind!" he said. "I think the rain helped bring them in. What else could they do in this weather?"

Home builders who exhibited generally reported good crowds and much interest, though the new construction and larger projects seemed more long term.

"Short-term, people seem more interested in smaller remodeling projects. But we're still very pleased with the show, and this is our eighth year," said Rick Nardella of Custom Builders, who agreed that the weather had been helpful.

The climax of the Home Show took place on Sunday afternoon, with a contest drawing for two prizes: 1) the Newport Restaurant Week's Demonstration Kitchen appliances and 2) a Mediterranean Cruise.

Taking home the refrigerator, range, dishwasher, custom cabinets, a solid-surface countertop and a 12-piece set of Paula Deen cookware was David Swaney of Lakeville, Mass.

Headed for the Mediterranean will be Janet Christopher of Bristol.

RIBA thanks all Home Show exhibitors for helping to make the event such a success. Thanks also to our prize donors: Apex, Gil's Appliances, JA Appliance, R.I. Kitchen & Bath, and S&W TV & Appliance.

The Mediterranean cruise was donated by Cruise Brothers.

Paul Eno is the owner and editor-in-chief of New River Press, Woonsocket and is the editor of the monthly RIBA newsletter, The Rhode Island Builder Report.

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