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President's message: Looking forward to 2012

November 10, 2011 - Rhode Island

Thank you for the honor and privilege of leading the R.I. Builders Association as president for the next year, and I once again welcome all of you to the new, proactive RIBA! Guided by our newly adopted, 10-point, five-year business plan and our new and energetic executive director, John Marcantonio, we look forward to another challenging but successful year.

As for the past year, we have been very active with our traditional work and with new endeavors. We have also had a seamless transition from the leadership of our retired executive director, Roger Warren, to our new one.

As for legislation, 2011 was probably the most successful legislative session for us in decades, and we owe a debt of gratitude to our lobbyists, Joe Walsh and Gayle Wolf, along with the co-chairs of our legislative committee, Ed Ladouceur and Steve Carlino.

The newly passed permitting bill gives municipalities 45 days to act on residential and light commercial applications - or forfeit half the permit fee. Thanks to the successful "tolling" bill, approvals on our projects have been extended to accommodate the economic slowdown.

On the insurance front, Ken Jones, our workers' comp committee chairman, has been putting in countless hours - I don't know how he does it - working with the Renaissance Group to develop workers' compensation programs to be approved for our members. And other kinds of insurance are in the works as well.

We continue to offer the most important educational programs for our members, and we are working hard with leaders of the career and technical programs in our state to strengthen construction education. We also are working with the R.I. Contractors' Registration and Licensing Board to develop more education programs.

One of our past presidents, Steve Olson, has generously agreed to chair our health insurance committee. Not only are we working to reduce rates, but we would like to see RIBA become R.I.'s health insurance exchange for the construction industry.

Among our new efforts is RIBA's first membership drive in decades, headed by Cheryl Boyd and Lou Cotoia of Arnold Lumber Co. John Marcantonio is even making jobsite visits to help recruit new members.

We now have a home show committee, headed by Ron Smith, that will work with the show producers to expand and improve our annual Home Show, which we intend to fill.

Our Builders Helping Heroes charity has a new project in the planning stages, and you will be hearing about that.

Goals for 2012

Overall, our goal over the next year will be helping members find work and helping them save money. Many members don't even realize the benefits they are eligible for, both through RIBA and the National Association of Home Builders. The pull-out "Guide to Your RIBA and NAHB Member

Benefits" in this issue of the magazine will get you started!

Also over the coming year, you will see our staff acting as project managers, with more active and more engaged committees. This will help us tackle our industry's challenges more effectively within the context of our business plan.

One of our chief challenges has always been the anti-growth forces. Well, the current economy has granted their wish, and we see what has happened. There's no growth, no jobs, no revenue. Are they happy now?

In 2012, we will use this new RIBA spirit and the tools it has given us to improve the Home Show, member services and recruiting, our insurance and health care programs, education, and to fight overregulation.

Legislatively, we almost passed what we call the high-dry land bill, which would allow more of a buildable lot to be developed and encourage higher densities. During the 2012 session, we will be working hard on a second shot at that bill, on restoring historic tax credits, and on reducing the motor vehicle taxes that affect us all.

On the regulatory front, we will be working with the Coastal Resources Management Council and the DEM, especially on wetlands mitigation and septic system issues.

Builders Helping Heroes will continue to support our troops.

We have a very active year ahead on many fronts, and we must tackle it all as a team. You all need to be part of that team! Let's get it done!

Robert Baldwin is president of R.B. Homes, Inc., Lincoln and is president of Rhode Island Builders Assn

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