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President's message: Welcome to the new RIBA

March 08, 2012 - Rhode Island

In an inspiring demonstration of unity and determination from "the new RIBA," over 100 members, guests and support staff contributed to the success of the January 26th fundraiser for our Political Action Committee. The event was a reception and networking evening at the beautifully renovated Dorrance Restaurant in Providence.

The fact that so many participated, and that so many contributed so much to the PAC fund, is a clear indication that our message about the importance of state legislation to the health of our industry is getting through. It's a sign that more and more members realize how important it is to get that message out to the General Assembly and, in particular, to our own senators and representatives.

It is not the job of government to reach in and directly take over and bail out industry. It is the job of government to provide the conditions in which industry can thrive on its own. The residential construction industry does not want handouts from Smith Hill. What we do ask is that thoughtless and unnecessary barriers be removed so that we can get back to the job of rebuilding Rhode Island's economy, of which housing is the backbone.

Another thing lawmakers can do is to support -- and put on the November ballot -- Gov. Lincoln Chafee's proposed \$25 million housing bond issue, contained in his 2012-2013 budget. Lawmakers will find our industry and every housing advocacy organization in the state behind that proposal. Not only will this help our industry by encouraging the construction of workforce housing, as did the 2006 Housing Bond, but it will provide housing for those who need it most - the working people of Rhode Island.

It will also help construction employment. Be sure to read the eye-opening interview in this issue with Dept. of Labor and Training director Charles Fogarty. Fogarty points out just how hard-hit construction employment has been in Rhode Island. Amid the recession that began in 2007, according to Fogarty, Rhode Island lost about 7.7% of its jobs, but the construction industry lost 27.6% of its jobs - a shocking number!

As you can see from the results of our PAC event, however, RIBA's members have united and are ready to act. All I can say is: Stay informed and stay active in this cause! Attend our PAC events and, when the time comes, personally support our efforts at the State House. And to our RIBA executive director, staff and legislative committee: Keep up the great work!

Robert Baldwin is president of R.B. Homes, Inc., Lincoln and is president of RIBA.

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