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Attendance at Home Show was up 7% over previous years

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When was the last time you heard the words, "We've been selling like mad?"

If you spent enough time at the Rhode Island Builders Association's 2012 Home Show at the Providence Convention Center March 29-April 1, you might have heard that comment several times.

"This has been a great show for us. We've been selling like mad!" commented Joe Falvo of Lighting & Design by J&K Electric, longtime Home Show exhibitors, as he juggled interested show visitors.

With show traffic up 7% from recent years, many exhibitors and visitors who spoke with The Rhode Island Builder Report noted "a new energy" or "great new features" at this year's event. People seemed universally pleased with the show's centerpiece: the Model Home, professionally decorated by Christine Abbott, that was the first one of its kind at the show for decades. There also was excitement about the Fine Arts Showcase, making its second appearance at the Home Show. The Newport Restaurant Week cooking demonstrations also drew praise, especially after visitors were offered samples of what was being prepared in the demonstration kitchen.

The show officially opened on Thursday afternoon with Providence mayor Angel Taveras cutting the ribbon at the front entrance to the Model Home. He was joined by RIBA president Bob Baldwin; Model Home sponsor Carol O'Donnell, president of CRM Modular Homes; Jack Bentz of Property Advisory Group Inc., and RIBA executive director John Marcantonio.

The line of visitors then poured into the Model Home and didn't stop until after the show closed on Sunday at 5 p.m.

Media coverage of the Home Show increased this year as well. All Providence television stations covered the event, and Channel 6 was there as mayor Taveras cut the ribbon at the opening ceremony. Just before the Home Show opened, a time-lapse video, produced by Mediapeel, and showing complete assembly of the Model Home in just a few moments, "went viral" on the Internet.

Of the nearly 40 RIBA members who exhibited, most said they noted a more positive attitude among Home Show visitors than in previous years.

"More people seem to be serious leads this year, and there are fewer 'tire kickers,'" said Steve Bator of The Stormtite Co., Inc. "Visitors seem to be spending more time talking with the vendors."

Bill Fagan of Wood's Heating Service noted that energy was on the minds of Home Show visitors.

"This has been an excellent show for us. People are very interested in energy savings," said Fagan.

Steve Fitzgerald of Fitzgerald Building and Remodeling noted that new construction is picking up, but that the market is still sluggish. "We saw a lot of visitor interest at the show, but remodeling still seems to be the stronger market. Many potential home buyers are still skittish," he said.

Longtime RIBA member Arnold Lumber Co., Inc., was back in the show after an absence of several years. "There's just so much more energy around RIBA now and at the Home Show, that we just felt we had to be part of it again," said company president Bruce Charleson.

Visitor Pierre Cote of Woonsocket commented that he had not been to the Home Show in years, but

was impressed. "There seems to be a lot of energy, and lots to do and see here. It makes me think that the housing market will be getting better this year," he said.

"Ed" from Burrillville, who is considering an addition to his house to accommodate a growing family, was impressed with the Home Show spirit also. "I felt more 'can do' here this year. That's especially true because the banks (exhibiting) here seem more willing to lend, and that's what I need to get going with my project," he said.

Staff at the RIBA booth adjacent to the show entrance were busy throughout the four-day event, distributing copies of the 2012 RIBAlist Membership Directory, and, to potential recruits, the new RIBA Membership Benefit Guide and application form. Staffers also fielded visitor questions and distributed giveaway items.

Those giveaways included 18 bicycles awarded to children by RIBA; the appliances from the demonstration cooking area, donated by Gil's Television and Appliances and S&W TV and Appliance; and a seven-night cruise to Bermuda, donated by The Vacation Center.

An additional vacation, a seven-night stay in Jamaica, was donated by TNT vacations and The Vacation Center.

There were daily fine arts giveaways, courtesy of the artists from the Home Show's Fine Arts Showcase, and vouchers and gift cards to Newport restaurants and hotels, along with other Bristol County attractions.

Home Show visitors included at least one dog, who enjoyed the Designer Dog House Competition, with creative entries from construction students.

If you didn't exhibit at this year's Home Show, you will have another chance next April. Watch for news of the 2013 RIBA Home Show!

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