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President's message: It's up to us to represent our industry

March 13, 2008 - Rhode Island

I'm sure I speak for most members of the Rhode Island Builders Association when I say that I continue to be frustrated by media coverage of the shelter industry lately. I understand that people in the media can't be expected to know all the ins and outs of the industries and people they report on. But they should at least make an effort to present all points of view.

There's too much at stake if they don't.

So it seems to fall to us, not only as an association but as individual contractors, to communicate a balanced view of the housing market to whomever we can. RIBA is working hard with all its public relations resources, including our weekly radio outreach and publications, to put out the message.

As individuals, however, our best grassroots audience is our customers and potential customers. Use your own advertising, newsletters and word of mouth to get the whole story across.

We're coming off a very hot regional housing market. Job creation has slowed somewhat in New England. Credit isn't as free and easy as it was. In short, many aspects of the economy are more normal than they have been. Of course, driven by energy costs, prices for life's necessities are higher. It seems tougher to make ends meet if people haven't been careful all along.

But if your customers are among the majority of people who have exercised common sense and good judgment with their finances and credit as their parents taught them to, if they have done at least basic financial planning, and if they continue to exercise care in their daily expenditures, they are in excellent condition to buy or remodel a home.

Try to communicate the fact that there are all sorts of opportunities with their names on them.

Interest rates are down for those with good credit, and rates are even lower than last year. This is important: With lower interest rates, a house or even a financed remodeling project will cost your customers less in the long run. A higher price and low interest can be cheaper down the road than a lower price and high interest.

This is how auto manufacturers sell cars: Downplay prices but emphasize the low interest rates customers can get! Maybe we should sell houses and services the same way.

Housing inventory is up. Prices are lower. In fact, the overall housing market is better in southeastern New England than it is nationally. It's a buyer's market. It's your customers' market, especially if they lock in these favorable interest rates for the long term.

If they don't want to buy, they should think about remodeling. By doing so, they're improving the value of their homes either for future resale or for their own comfort, convenience and satisfaction in coming years.

It might not even be a question of remodeling, just repair. Whether they plan to stay in their homes long term or not, they can't afford to neglect that leaky roof, those crumbling steps or the peeling paint or wallpaper in the hallway.

And don't forget to tell them this: Whether they're using your services to take advantage of today's

opportunities to build custom homes, upgrade their kitchens or just do necessary repairs, there are other members of the Rhode Island Builders Association to help them with everything from financing to architecture as well.

Encourage them to visit www.ribuilders.org for information.

Let's get the word out!

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