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President's message: Upcoming events

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Building permits were up 20% for 2013, and the news media have been trumpeting this. And it's great news, but statistics can be misleading. In fact, it's never wise to declare the end of a slump based on a chart. In this case, the permit increase reflects a few projects in a few towns in a still-sluggish market. The numbers are based largely on better figures from Burrillville, Jamestown, Lincoln, Warren and Woonsocket, which skewed the whole percentage. Central Falls, Charlestown, East Providence, Exeter, Foster, Hopkinton, Johnston, North Kingstown, North Smithfield, South Kingstown, West Greenwich and West Warwick are all in negative territory for last year, percentage-wise.

Still, any improvement is good, and let's hope it continues. But the barriers that have stood in the way of economic growth in the past are still with us, especially over-regulation and anti-growth attitudes. These are issues that RIBA continues to address at the State House and in our cities and towns.

The Home Show is almost here! And there's still time to reserve your exhibit space for what will almost certainly be your biggest marketing splash of the year. Member exhibitors will tell you that they generate leads at the Home Show that boost their bottom lines all year. One such member is Tom Lopatosky of Lopco Contracting, who came back to the show in 2012 after dropping out on 2009. Maybe you saw his story in the February issue of The Rhode Island Builder Report. He was amazed at the show improvements, the leads he generated, and he'll be back in 2014.

On the legal front, RIBA has achieved or is nearing settlements with Warwick, Lincoln and Cranston on permit-fee lawsuits. I must say that this whole process has resulted in a new, cooperative understanding with these towns. They are now working with our industry to resolve issues.

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