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## **RIBA Home Show success points to better times ahead**

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Good weather, a positive response to the new exhibit layout, and a higher-than expected turnout made for a successful 60th annual Rhode Island Builders Association Home Show from March 26th through 29th.

While final figures were not in as of this writing, show producer Yoffe Exposition Services unofficially estimated show attendance up as much as 36% over 2008 on some days. Visitors seemed to enjoy the more open show layout, and the wide variety of exhibits, seminars and other activities.

Rather than being outside the show entrance this year, RIBA's welcome booth was among the exhibits just inside the gate. This made it more convenient for visitors to get their parking validated for a discount during the show's first two days. Staffers reported a steady stream of people also looking for show information, copies of the 2009 RIBA Membership Directory and Buyers Guide, and information on joining the association.

Special thanks to Jutras Woodworking, which designed and manufactured the new, solid mahogany booth.

Exhibitors who talked with The Rhode Island Builder Report were generally positive about their show experience.

"People seem truly interested in doing something with projects they have in mind," said Alex Mitchell of Meridian Custom Homes. "This is my fourth year at the Home Show, and I'll be back next year."

With a product for the times, insulation, Roger Ouellette at the GreenSeal Inc. exhibit said that a desire to save money on energy and a new awareness of "green" building and remodeling helped draw leads.

"After Thursday, the people were pretty steady, with a lot of interest in our products and services," Ouellette said.

Carol O'Donnell of CRM Modular Homes noted a "better than expected" stream of interested potential buyers. "They're valid buyers, too," O'Donnell said. "There's an interest in modular as a less expensive construction alternative."

Steve and Mary Elliott of Elco Painting Inc. said they were benefiting from a strong interest in remodeling, especially with spring approaching.

"While there's not much new construction, we're seeing a real interest by people in fixing up their existing homes," Elliott said.

The Home Show boasted more special events than ever this year, certainly a draw for the crowds.

March 26th, was opening night and the traditional RIBA Member Night. Members had free passes, and could be seen around the show floor enjoying the exhibits, meeting old friends, networking, and taking advantage of the first of three "Rejuvenation Nights." These featured free wine tastings, courtesy of Coastal Wine Trail local wineries. There were complimentary mini-facials and massages by Renovo, tastings from Cabot Cheese, and fudge samplings compliments of Sweet Occasions.

Other activities ranged from Newport Restaurant Week cooking demonstrations, including tastings by Samuel Adams and Jameson Irish Whiskey, to an entire section dedicated to educational fun for children. The Audubon Society even brought in a life-sized, 65-foot inflatable fin whale.

On Saturday at 3 p.m., RIBA's weekly radio talk show, You're Home, on WPRO 630 AM was broadcast live from the exhibit floor for an extended two hours. Hosted by RIBA president Michael C. Artesani Sr. and board member Colin Kane, a parade of member-exhibitors filled the guest roster.

Meanwhile, there was a steady stream of educational seminars to attract Home Show visitors. These included NBC 10's "Home Pro," Bruce Morris, discussing do-it-yourself home projects. RIBA members presenting included Daniel Paquette of Woodmeister Master Builders on "Green Building"; "Staying In Your Home As You Age" with Steven St. Onge of R.I. Kitchen & Bath Inc., a Certified Aging In Place Specialist (CAPS); and "How To Hire A Contractor" with Felix Carlone, chairman of the Rhode Island Contractors' Registration and Licensing Board.

Sunday was "Family Fun Day," with children 12 and under admitted free. Along with other activities for kids, The Kaleidoscope Theatre offered two performances of Little Red Riding Hood and appearances by Cinderella and Snow White throughout the day

Capping off the show, at 5 p.m., was the drawing for the appliances used in the Home Show's Newport Restaurant Week cooking demonstrations (donated by Gil's Appliances and JA Appliance) and a Macy's \$250 gift card. The winner: Marilyn Perry of Riverside.

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