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President's message: We are fighting back/initiating change

November 19, 2007 - Rhode Island

At our annual meeting a year ago, I stood before you to outline five goals that I would focus on to position the Rhode Island Builders Association to address the hits the shelter industry is taking from all angles: the economy, the legislature, the media and the general public.

The industry continues to face a challenging environment. But there's one major difference: We are fighting back and initiating change. A major achievement has been our aggressive response against media content that negatively slants reports about our industry.

Working as a unified front with the Rhode Island Association of Realtors, we captured the attention of Howard Sutton, publisher of The Providence Journal. On September 27th, we met with the managing editor and the business editor of the newspaper to discuss our concerns about news articles that sometimes sensationalize controversial issues and misrepresent the industry. The meeting opened a healthy dialogue.

We have also taken major steps toward improving the public image of both the association and the industry by working with our public relations firm, The RDW Group. We are already realizing the results of their comprehensive PR strategy. RDW has been instrumental in crafting numerous editorials that state our position on various issues, and in expanding our presence in publications throughout the state and region.

From a consumer education standpoint, an exciting and well received endeavor has been our new radio show, You're Home with the Rhode Island Builders Association. This is a live, weekly call-in program on 920 AM WHJJ. Every Sunday from 11 a.m. until noon, RIBA members are the hosts, answering consumers' questions on a bevy of home topics.

Since going on the air in September, our listening audience continues to grow, and our association has become a trusted public resource for information pertaining to the shelter industry. We are streaming You're Home on our website, providing even greater audience reach on a 24/7 basis.

We also have taken advantage of the National Association of Home Builders' Buy Now Advertising Assistance Program that matches, dollar for dollar, the money we spend on local advertising to promote the idea that there has never been a better time to buy a home. This has enabled us to run ads in the Rhode Island Newspaper Group (RING) publications as well as on radio.

In addition, I've appointed two new co-chairs to the remodeling committee to serve as spokespersons for the remodelers' segment of our industry, and address issues and concerns specific to their area.

Turning to legislative advocacy, our diligent efforts have been met with great success in several areas. A complete legislative status report is posted on our website, www.ribuilders.org, but I would like to highlight a few.

We were the driving force in the passage of:

* A fixed fee for fire plan review and inspections for one- to three-family dwellings,

- * An amended stormwater control bill that addressed our concerns,
- * A meaningful time limit on the issuance of residential building permits, and
- * The elimination of the duplicate mechanics' lien notice.

We also were able to defeat legislation that would have:

- * Reduced the state's historic tax credit,
- * Increased the real estate conveyance tax,
- * Required a sales tax on construction services, and
- * Established a new tax on mortgages.

We owe much gratitude to our government relations team, led by Steve Carlino and Ed Ladouceur, and our lobbyists, Joe Walsh, Gayle Wolf, Clark Curtis and Tom Hanley, for the hard work they do every day in communicating our issues to state and municipal legislators.

In our work to expand RIBA's Build PAC, our state political action committee, I'm pleased to report that we held our first fundraising event this spring and raised \$2,000. Moving ahead, we plan to hold other events and activities to increase the coffers of this very important vehicle.

We are also gearing up for local elections, where we look forward to supporting candidates such as our immediate past president, Ed Ladouceur, and others who best represent our industry in the political arena.

As we turn to 2008, there is much more that we can do to enhance the value of our association and the shelter industry. We will continue our efforts in our five goals areas, with specific attention to:

- * Expanding our web-based communications using best practices from our sister associations in other states, and
- * Implementing measures to make continuing education more accessible to our members.

Finally, I thank the members of my team who have worked diligently to accomplish this year's goals: Vice president Mike Artesani, secretary Bob Baldwin, treasurer Steve Gianlorenzo, and our dedicated board of directors.

And I extend an invitation to all our members to get involved with our trade association. Apply the talents that you use in your businesses to build an association that reflects the greatness of our industry. By working together, we can build a better tomorrow for ourselves and our industry.

Thomas McNulty is president of the Rhode Island Builders Assn., East Providence and is president of E.A. McNulty Real Estate, Cumberland.