

Presidential Perspective

Jimmy Kerr is a Tough Act to Follow!

Approaching the coming year as president of SAHMA prompts a kaleidoscope of thoughts and a great deal of uneasiness. Similar to what many of us attempt at the approach of each new year, there is the assessment of where we are and how did we get here. This first thought—where we are—is a pleasant exercise.

SAHMA membership is at an all time high with 446 members. We are having the best year ever with our 28 educational classes on nine different subjects and a total attendance of more than 1,100 persons. Member services, our reason for existing, have been substantially expanded. Fiscally, SAHMA stands head and shoulders above the other AHMAs in resources and reserves. Our Regional Conference was a success, including the best Trade Show in our history (Helen Pommer's leadership was vital here), and last spring the impressive turnout at the individual state meetings was a fitting prelude to that success. SAHMA not only survived this year, but flourished, despite an atmosphere in our industry where the only constant is continuing change and the only certainty is that more confusing and challenging regulations and responsibilities are on the way.

How did we do it? You must first look at leadership. Jimmy Kerr, our outgoing president, is a quiet, unassuming man. Most would describe him as the quintessential "Southern Gentleman." He is a consensus builder, always emphasizing common ground rather than differences. He goes out of his way to make sure every voice is fairly heard and every position adequately considered. His depth of knowledge of matters vital to our industry is truly impressive.

Make no mistake, however, underlying this flowery description is a man with the strong leadership abilities necessary to guide SAHMA through this past year to the level of excellence in services for members that we now enjoy. He did not use his presidential gavel often, but when he did, it was with fairness, consideration and authority that earned him the respect of all who know him. As I said above, Jimmy Kerr is a tough act to follow.

SAHMA is fortunate, however, in that Jimmy Kerr is only the most recent in an amazing succession of good presidents; each building on the accomplishments of the previous administration with the cooperation and support of an active and dedicated board. The SAHMA membership has been richly favored, indeed, in the quality of leadership it has enjoyed over the years.

SAHMA's good fortune has another major ingredient in our excellent staff under the leadership of Sue Chapel-White. The convention services representative at Opryland Hotel made a special effort to find me and compliment Sue and her staff. He told me that in his thirteen years of experience, he had never seen a more organized and professional staff for any organization of any size, bar none. Of course, the SAHMA board knows we have a great staff and I am sure that the members who deal with them on a day-to-day basis know it also. So to Sue, Diane, Shannon and the newest staff member, Contessa, our hats are off to you for a job well done.

Finally, I spoke earlier about a great deal of uneasiness about stepping into this position of president. I feel better now. With the firm foundation and precedent left by Jimmy and his predecessors, and with the continuing support of the board and a great staff, I would truly have to be a real klutz to mess up. Perhaps, if we all work together, there will be even better things to report this time next year.

All in all, however, Jimmy Kerr is still a hard act to follow.



Bill Kennedy

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