

Executive Director Report

Since meeting in November, the bulk of the administration's attention has been on preparations for our February convention. Timing has been a little different this year, as with the necessary change in dates we announced last year, this convention marks the earliest convention (by almost 2 full weeks) that the Guild has hosted in at least 10 years. None-the-less, despite the added adventure of record-setting weather challenges across the country, the annual convention and trade show is always a time of energy and excitement and the staff looks forward to welcoming everyone to Hartford.

So far, registrations are tracking competitively and according to budget as we expect roughly 600 attendees at this year's convention. These numbers are not quite as high as our last meeting in the northeast in 2007, but with that year being our 30th anniversary celebration we were not necessarily expecting to match those numbers in 2011. However, it is worth noting that registrations are up by approximately 20% over the past 2 years (2009 and 2010).

Membership numbers for the Guild are maintaining but not yet rebounding to reflect the growth we are looking for. The feedback we are getting from those whose membership has lapsed has been primarily two-fold. Many have indicated that while they have experienced increased business this past fall, the perception of which is a sign of finally a slow but sure turnaround of the economy, additional cash flow is being redirected into business infrastructure that had been neglected over the past several years. As a result, in many of those cases they are indicating that for at least the time being cash flow is not available for memberships...although they expect that to change over this next year. The other primary reason we get for non-renewal is simple cost. Jay and I have discussed that the issue of "value" (and effective communication of value) will need to be the front-burner topic of conversation for the new membership committee this year. The value of the coupon program we introduced to our members a couple of years ago is now at an all-time high (in excess of \$21k), but we recognize that these opportunities may or may not appeal to everyone so the charge of the membership committee will be to continue to not only explore enhancements to this specific program, but to identify a greater breadth of value to the membership as well.

It has been our plan to bring back the combined telephone and mailing recruitment campaign this spring. As you may recall, we incorporated the telephone service into our plan last year but did so in the fall. The response broke even for us but didn't generate the increases we were looking for. Analysis of that campaign indicated that time was an issue...far too many potential members were unable to be contacted because of the typical fall business pattern. Russ and I agreed that program should be conducted again, but in the late winter/early spring rather than in the fall. The board did budget for this program this year, and we anticipate getting it underway on or around March 1.

Since the last convention, NCSG has been involved in a number of projects on behalf of the membership. Much of what was going on within the Guild was highlighted in a new

“progress edition” of *Sweeping* magazine last May. The expanded edition of the magazine was also used as a recruitment piece and was subsequently mailed to more than 4500 members and potential members alike. The feedback we received on this issue was positive and we plan on repeating the effort this May again.

To assist our members with their own marketing efforts, the Guild did produce a series of public service radio announcements this past year. All members were given access to a variety of styles and lengths that they could download directly from the NCSG website and provide to their local radio media. The audio files also included the option of and directions for customizing the radio spots with the member’s own local contact information. Those spots continue to be available for use and we hope to continue promoting them this year. In addition, in late 2010 we introduced the first in what will become quarterly press releases promoting not only NCSG itself, but on behalf of the industry promoting the use of professional chimney sweeps across the country. As with any new program, it takes time for it to gain real traction, but we will be monitoring the success of these press releases and continue to do so throughout the year ahead.

While generally considered more of an industry tool than a homeowner tool, the NCSG website does continue to provide a variety of resources for sweeps and the general public alike. We have continued to see visits to the website increase year over year, and 2010 was no exception.

Last year we did experiment with a different means of contacting members of the Technical Advisory Committee. While well-intentioned, it did not prove to be as effective as we would have hoped. As the TAC chair, Dennis Dobbs has taken us back to what we know worked before, and hopes to re-establish the incredible value that this group of technical experts provides to our membership.

NCSG continues to work with the Federal Occupational Health & Safety Administration (OSHA) relative to the impact of federal fall protection and walk work surface rules on our trade. This has been a slow process, but the issuance of an actual set of proposed new rules this past year does show promise. The addition of Billy Sweet and Toby Brown to our task force, along with Jim Brewer and myself, has proven to be very productive for us. Billy, Jim and myself had an opportunity to appear before a hearing of the OSHA panel in January of this year to articulate the challenges imposed on our trade by the new and existing rules. We were very well received and have reason to believe that our comments had an impact. The next step is for OSHA to take all of the comments they have received and review their proposed rules for potential alteration. We hope to have a much better feel for the status of all of this later this spring.

Plans are well underway for NCSG’s hosting of the first-ever meeting of the European Federation of Chimney Sweep (ESCHFOE) in the United States. While the vast majority of this meeting is closed to members of ESCHFOE itself, we are working on a social event during the August conference that will be made available to members of NCSG. I’d like to take this opportunity to thank Randy Brooks for his 3 years of service to NCSG as its president. The organization can be proud of its many accomplishment and

advancements during his leadership tenure, and he can be proud that he hands the reigns over for an organization that he leaves in solid shape both programmatically and financially.

Additionally, thanks goes out to Russ Dimmitt for his contributions to the board over the years on behalf of our many supplier members. Russ leaves the board as the Guild enjoys its greatest number of supplier members in over a decade. Due to business and other personal priorities, Bob Priesing unfortunately resigned from board service this past year. His contributions not only as TAC chair but most recently as vice president of the Guild were greatly appreciated and will be missed.

Finally, as Jay Walker shifts his focus toward the volunteer leadership helm of NCSG, I look forward to working with him and the new era of leadership from John Pilger as the incoming CSIA president to continue the unique partnership between our two organizations.

I look forward to seeing everyone soon in Hartford. Safe travels.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark McSweeney, CAE