

Executive Director Report
November 2008 – NCSG Board of Directors Meeting
Mark McSweeney, CAE

We are receiving mixed reports about the impact of the current economy on the sweeping industry. As evidenced by the regional reports received from directors, it almost seems to be feast or famine. Over the summer, initial reports indicated that many sweeps were doing better than compared to last year at the same time. Those doing well attributed it to homeowners anticipating a greater reliance on their fireplaces and woodstoves this upcoming winter due to the increase in energy prices. For those not doing as well, the decrease in business was largely attributed to homeowners cutting back on expenses and unfortunately not viewing chimney maintenance as a necessity. Membership in the guild is remaining relatively flat, so clearly the economy is something we are needing to keep an eye on from an association perspective.

By the time the board meets in November I hope to have an update relative to our ongoing discussions with the Federal Occupational Health and Safety Administration. Our task force will be meeting with OSHA directors in October when we anticipate refining what we are looking for in terms of an interpretation of the application of current fall protection standards. This has been a predictable slow process, but we maintain optimism that the end result will be a documented interpretation that will help sweeps with many of their OSHA compliance challenges.

As you know, we launched our You Tube campaign this Fall with the goal of generating positive PR about the trade on the web. The entries we received were all good, but unfortunately we didn't receive the quantity of submissions we were hoping for. A suggestion we have received is that we re-launch the campaign in the spring when perhaps more sweeps have time to experiment with a video. There is real merit to the suggestion, and while we are honoring the entries we received this first time around as promised, I would like to look at trying it again during a better time of year. We also may want to consider expanding the time limit for the videos to two minutes rather than the one minute parameter we placed on these initial entries.

The start-up package program (aka August West program) is not yet receiving wide spread support from suppliers. Currently we have only one supplier expressing interest. They will likely begin promoting the program during this fourth quarter.

Convention programming is primarily wrapped up for Winston-Salem. Barring the still yet unknown economic impact, we are expecting a good turnout in February. We conducted a recent site visit of the two host hotels and convention center, and were very pleased with what we saw and the way things are coming together. A summary of the educational programming follows:

- Keynote: The Business Building Idea Hall of Fame with Bob Daniels

- Learn from the Past; Predict your future (understanding and applying trends) with Bob Daniels
- Panel Discussion: Inserts in factory-built fireplaces moderated by Russ Dimmitt
- Masonry Workshop: Hearth Removal and Deficiency Correction with Chris Pryor
- Government Affairs with Diane Pilger and Melissa Heeke
- Installing Factory-Built Chimneys with Dale Menges
- Masonry Workshop: Creative Fireplace Face Rebuilds with Chris Prior
- Pellet Appliance Service & Troubleshooting with Fred Joy and Dean Piper
- Unsolicited Referrals (word of mouth marketing) with Bob Ferrari
- Masonry Heaters Overview with Steve Bushway
- Business Roundtable moderated by Mark McSweeney
- Side-Wall Venting with Tim Begoske
- Marketing with John Pilger
- Codes & Standards update with Jim Brewer and Royal Edwards
- CSIA Certified Chimney Sweep Program Update with Ashley Eldgridge
- Inspection Procedures with Bob Priesing and Tom Urban
- 90 Business Tips in 90 Minutes with Mark McSweeney
- General Session: How to be Profitable in a Down Economy with Tom Grandy
- The Gas Alternative to Fireplace Restorations with Art Sewell
- Key Performance Indicators: What to Track & Why with Tom Grandy
- What You Need to Know About Transite Pipe with Royal Edwards
- Labor Pricing for a Profit with Tom Grandy

I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark McSweeney