



**Brian Blackmere**  
**WRHBA 36<sup>th</sup> President**  
**2009-2010**

## **President's Report**

### **Brian Blackmere**

**May 27, 2010**

It is truly hard to believe my year as President has passed. It has been a very interesting and exhilarating year and the report will touch on some of the highlights that took place during my term.

When I was sworn in as President last May I was somewhat hopeful that what I had been told about a lesser level of activity during the summer months would be true. However, both the Region and Kitchener's DC By-law reviews were nearing completion-necessitating presentations to both Councils and negotiations with staff on the numbers and the manner in which the charges would be implemented especially in light of the fact that the new housing market fell off the map the previous Fall (commencement of the [2008] economic downturn).

I'm pleased to be able to say that the quick return in building activity and the resultant rebound in my mutual fund balance we experienced this year is something that I will always be pleased happened on my watch. It wasn't all good news though. Local unemployment rates approached 10% and remain hovering in that area, dramatic increases in development charge rates were being tabled and the spectre of the HST loomed over our heads. On top of that we started to hear ill-conceived support by Provincial and local government for inclusionary zoning and initial and quite ridiculous regulation proposals in support of the already approved Ontarians with Disabilities Act. These last two issues remain very active and will demand our on-going attention by our Association.

We continue to excel at organizing the many events that allow members to network, learn and socialize and that also help fund our Association and allow us to bequeath charitable donations to worthy causes within our Community. Our dinner meetings this year had informative, entertaining and motivating speakers. Ranging from the recent Mayors Forum that provided us, who listened closely, a 2 month advance notice that Carl Zehr would be running for Mayor again to the recent visit by President and CEO of TARION Howard Bogach who provided a candid account of the new and very positive changes to TARION policy. Spring and Fall Golf were over the top and lent to our financial support of the Supportive Housing Of Waterloo build that will provide 42 apartments to house the homeless. The increasingly popular Steak BBQ was really enhanced by holding it at Chicopee Ski Hill's wonderful venue. Our Awards of Distinction night in November was an absolutely outstanding event wherein 2 MP's attended and gave out awards to WRHBA's High School Design Recipients.

The Industry Luncheon was outstanding with over 500 in attendance. I was somewhat concerned about our key note speaker, Frank McKenna (former Premier of New Brunswick) as he seemed very low key and quiet while I spoke with him during lunch BUT as soon as he got to the podium it was as though someone flicked a switch and he became larger than life, a man on a mission. His impassioned speech actually garnered him spot, along with ourselves, on the front page of the Waterloo Region Record the next day.

I recently looked back on the Presidential address I provided to you when starting my term and quickly realized I should have expressed a more spartan agenda for myself. In the back of my mind I think I knew that a lot of work would be required if I was to be successful in writing articles every week in order to heighten the profile of our Association and to help the general public understand who we are and what we do in this Community. I was unprepared for running out of ideas for subject matter, writer's block and media deadlines but managed to overcome those obstacles enough to have over 45 articles published this year. I have been constantly approached at the supermarket and at church, by real estate agents and by my neighbours who have said how they enjoyed the articles and look forward to reading them. For me this really constituted a high point for me personally this year – it wasn't easy but worthwhile endeavours never are.

Our advocacy efforts seem to reach new heights each year. What a team we are when it comes to understanding and helping shape the broad strokes of higher level policy right to the other end of the

spectrum dealing with the very technical nature of the guidelines and manuals that set out the how, when and determine the financial implications imposed development and building implementation.

Past President Peter Armbruster, Chair of the Kitchener Liaison Committee made a really good observation in a recent email regarding the work of his committee in reviewing the proposed changes to Kitchener's Development Manual – he noted that the many hours spent by volunteers in reviewing and having changes made to the document will, in fact, result in thousands of dollars in savings to everyone developing and building in Kitchener.

This is the case with all of our advocacy work – we are the voice of the new home buyer in a complex regulatory environment in which they are incapable of participating. Our efforts benefit the entire industry even those who are not members. Bravo and thank you to all of our talented and committed volunteers.

I won't list all of the issues that we have dealt with this year but the following are some highlights:

#### **CHBA**

- Our current rep on Urban Council Brian Campbell has attended meetings in Ottawa and at the CHBA Conference in Victoria B.C. and has participated and returned with valuable information that we need as a local to tackle upcoming issues.
- We continued to push MPs on the promised indexing of the GST rebate thresholds which continue to be based on 1991 house pricing.
- The matter of the Provincial initiative to introduce the HST was also a hot topic with our Federal reps.
- The horrific tax leakage resulting from a rampant underground economy was sufficient to get their attention at least for a moment.....that is until they realized that the changes needed to effectively combat the problem were not going to be easy. This matter will be one of on-going interest.
- Changes to the Tax Act and other regulations needed to actually incent private industry to invest in rental stock were actively promoted to our MPs.
- Viable alternatives to the insidious spectre of “inclusionary zoning” were promoted to the MPs while we had their attention.

## **OHBA**

- Via our Past President Douglas Stewart we had active participation on the changes being promoted by the MOE regarding brownfield regulations.
- We took advantage of the opportunity to provide comment on the OHBA response to the proposed regulations for the Ontarians with Disabilities Act – an issue that particularly irked me by the way.
- We provided response and suggestions for improvement via OHBA regarding the way that Conservation Authorities currently operate in this Province.
- We lobbied very hard locally for changes to the original proposal for HST on new homes and we continue to lobby against its structure related to renovations. This lobby effort included TV interviews with Rogers and CTV as well as two articles on the subject as part of my regular contributions.
- We also actively lobbied our local MPPs on the matter of the underground economy – you would think that this cash cow would be enough to incent these admittedly “broke” levels of government to take some action!!
- An increase of \$20 for the OHBA membership fee was recently approved by the Board.

## **WRHBA**

- Attended an “industry leaders” pre-budget roundtable by MPP John Milloy – the roundtable was interesting and the fact that we were invited means that our efforts to raise our profile are paying off.
- I was invited by Conestoga Colleges Women in Skilled Trades Program to address the class. I was nervous but ended up having great dialogue with a very diverse group of enthusiastic women.
- Attended the City of Waterloo “Economic Summit” recently to provide the views of the development and home building industry on how to sustain strong and balanced growth in Waterloo.
- A Conservative Party fundraiser hosting by Kitchener MP Stephen Woodworth provided an opportunity to have a couple of nice waltzes with my lovely wife and to again speak to all our local MPs and Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Diane Finlay regarding our issues.
- Recently accepted an invitation to be a guest of honour at the first annual Realtor’s Expo put on by our friends at KWREB. Over 600 in attendance and a really well organized event.

- Gave a one hour lecture to members of the Real Estate Board (they get educational credits for these sessions) talking about the elements of sustainable development and changing demographics and how this will affect their business.
- Enjoyed hosting our very successful and well received HST seminar.
- Was a judge for the London Home Builders Awards of Excellence
- Was a judge for the Guelph HBA Awards of Distinction – both of these were all day events.
- Attended both the London and Guelph Awards events.
- Attended dinner meetings at HBAs in Guelph, Brantford and Stratford as part of our efforts to forge closer alliances with these Associations.
- Was an award presenter at the Food Bank of Waterloo's annual Construction event.
- As a result of intense discussion a sub-committee of the Board authored a Strategic Plan for the Association. This was another highlight of my year due to the positive attitude and constructive and exciting dialogue that took place. Thanks to Lee Deline, Janice Kochan, Jamie Adam, Douglas Stewart, Tim Ingold, Mark Van Dongen as well our EO Marie Schroeder for their valuable input and time devotion. The Strategic Plan has been adopted by the Board and is available for viewing on the Association website.
- Yesterday I was a presenter at the Conestoga College Trades and Apprenticeship Awards ceremony. I was proud to present the Renovation Technician Award on behalf of WRHBA.

The administration of the Association, organization of dinner meetings and all of our annual events rests, for the most part, on the shoulders of the now legendary 3M Corp comprised of Marie, Michelle and Melissa. I am confident that each knows how much I appreciate the support, good humour and outstanding "handling" that you provided to me over the past year. I would have been lost without their guidance and help.

Also thanks to the Executive Committee and Board of Directors and my appointed advisors (Ian Rawlings, Craig Robson, Martin Jones and Mark Van Dongen) for lending their support and wisdom to me throughout the year. Past President Eric during his address at this time last year mentioned that WRHBA is a great team, and a great team always makes the President look good – truer words have never been spoken. The real highlight of my year was the fulfilling experience I had in working with the team of dedicated, knowledgeable and committed volunteers that come from our membership. We are truly fortunate.

I also want to thank two member companies that provided me tremendous latitude and support during my tenure on the Executive Committee culminating in my past year as President. Reid's Heritage Homes and Stantec Consulting are both long standing and ardent members of this Association and their full support has been provided to me over the past 4 years.

You know, as much work as it was, I had a lot of fun with it. I enjoyed being able to represent the Association at the OHBA Conference held in Niagara Falls in September, the OHBA Builder Forum at Blue Mountain in February as well as the CHBA Conference held in Victoria B.C. this past March.

One thing I have to emphasize is the tremendous personal growth and satisfaction that one derives from being fully engaged in the work that this Association does. If you haven't stepped up yet, I strongly urge you to considering doing so. You won't regret it.

I have the distinct pleasure to be passing the guard to our first female President, Janice Kochan from Eastforest Homes who will be addressing you in a few minutes. I have every confidence that Janice will demonstrate that she is a dedicated and effective leader and that she will have an outstanding year as President. I can't tell you how much I look forward to being a Past-President but I will certainly be there to lend my support as needed.