

Industry's Toughest Challenges Bring Creative Solutions

A Message from The Chairman

There are lots of reasons that time flies. Being busy certainly is one of them. So I look up and it's September—nine months into my year as ISA Chairman of the Board.

If time has taken up wings, it's because it's been a busy season for me personally, for ISA and for the industry in general.

Businesses in our industry are growing. At ISA Sign Expo 2015, we asked CEOs how their companies had performed in the previous six months. More than 38 percent said they'd seen growth in excess of 20 percent. That's not only a staggering figure, but it also is up significantly from 2014 and 2013.

Even more promising: about the same number of CEOs expect 20 percent or greater growth in the coming year. It's clear that the last six months haven't been an anomaly, or the result of one major new project. It's a trajectory that points up for the industry as a whole.

In this positive business environment, we face a few challenges. That's where ISA is perfectly positioned to help, and where we've focused much of our efforts in the past year.

The first area has prompted a constant refrain from companies large and small, no matter which region of the country they operate in: It's hard to find qualified workers. If we don't

solve this problem, it will become a threat to our survival.

ISA has launched a number of new workforce development initiatives designed to help companies recruit new workers and train existing staff. We've launched a new career center, found at www.signs.org/careercenter. It includes information about the Hiring Our Heroes program, which places military veterans and their spouses in post-military careers. It also allows employers to post job openings and search through resumes.

For those seeking more information about the industry, it includes resources and videos

to assist in exploring the many career opportunities. They also can search openings on the job board. And for those looking to grow in their careers, it includes educational resources from the International Sign Academy and instructional videos.

We've also begun to develop the next generation of sign and visual communications industry leadership through the ISA Elite program, which brought 34 young professionals to ISA Sign Expo 2015 for networking and educational opportunities. These young people were excited about careers in our industry. They were thrilled to meet their peers and industry leaders. We'll continue this program in 2016 with a new class of participants. Look for details soon on the signexpo.org website; registration for the 2016 event in Orlando opens in September.

Sign Manufacturing Day reaches into an even younger potential workforce: those currently in high school or attending a technical or community college. In 2014, we had more than 1,000 students tour sign industry manufacturing facilities to learn more about careers in the industry. This year's event—scheduled for October 2—includes even more participating companies.

With workers in place, companies still face another hurdle when it comes to installing signs. Local sign code challenges and regulatory issues can prevent signs from being displayed, or can place severe limits on a designer's creativity.

That's one of the reasons that ISA continues to grow its commitment to helping sign and visual communications companies—and the industry at large—work collaboratively with communities in developing sign codes. Some of this work is done through research conducted by the Signage Foundation, Inc. That research is then shared with local communities by ISA's government affairs staff. They provide materials through email and



Helping planners understand how signs benefit their communities is just one way that ISA is reaching local officials.

occasionally will make in-person visits to testify at hearings or assist local planning staff in understanding more about our industry—and the valuable benefits signs offer to businesses.

We've also trained planners. And when the Supreme Court issued a recent ruling that raised questions about every community's sign codes, ISA developed resources to help planners understand how the ruling affected their sign codes. One responded that her community would be looking at its sign code again.

"ISA is a wonderful resource for small towns like mine (population 1,950 in rural Arkansas) that do not have the knowledge or resources to do all they need to do," she wrote. "We did

not know about ISA at the time we revised the sign ordinance, but I am certainly passing along your information so others can benefit, as well as to those who need to revisit ours."

We met this planner through a Planning for Sign Code Success™ event, a day-long educational session designed to help local officials understand the effects of the regulations they create. This important groundwork, which ISA has been laying for several years now, is bearing fruit.

Out of these challenging issues come success. And there's one more success that I want to point to: a closer relationship between ISA and Affiliated Associations that has strengthened both. I see it with my own regional association, where our Expo and educational events are stronger than ever. With ISA's help, our regional association has become more relevant and offers more benefits for sign owners to become involved.

I would urge any local/custom sign and visual communications company owner or employee to become involved at the state or regional level. (Find your Affiliated Association at www.signs.org/affiliatedassociation).

As we head into the last few months of 2015, I see that much work has been done. There's much more to do as well. I hope you'll join in building upon what we've accomplished and let's continue to grow the sign and visual communications industry together.



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Hotel and retail construction are expected to grow by 9.2% and 11.5% respectively in 2016, according to the American Institute for Architects.

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New office building construction also will increase. •