

## View from HQ: Spirit of St. Louis



RVAA held its annual Executive Conference August 5-8, 2008 at the Chase Park Plaza in St. Louis and with the current questions about the state of the industry and the economy in general, the results were more than encouraging. The association's drop in attendance was less than expected for the three-day event, and the membership of RVAA which consists of supplier, distributor and agent members showed a spirit of seeking solutions throughout the course of the four-day event.

The industry continues to struggle with a "perfect storm" of economic and global situations that have led to challenging times for every segment of the industry. No one could have predicted how four-dollar gas, the general downturn in the economy and continuing global uncertainty might affect our industry. Certainly like all segments of the RV industry, the association and its membership is looking towards a brighter future in the coming months and looking forward to that inevitable recovery that is waiting in the not-too-distant future.

But more than simply waiting, the association saw its membership take action during the August conference in St. Louis. RVAA's Executive Conference remains unique among the industry in that it focuses on bringing distributors and suppliers together in one-on-one meetings to discuss the health of their business relationships, introduce new products, and further define marketing and service programs that can assist in improving their performance in the coming year. But this year, many members were talking about the state of the industry and the state of the economy – and rather than focusing on the "gloom and doom" kind of spirit seen in so many corners these days, the association's membership sought solutions.

During one-on-one meetings that took place during the four days of the conference, suppliers worked with distributors to determine the most effective means of bringing products to market in what is unquestionably a challenging marketplace. Questions that were discussed among trading partners included means of making the channel work more efficiently to cut costs – both in the process of getting products to market and finally for the end user. Ultimately for the industry to succeed, consumers will have to feel a sense of confidence that they are paying a fair price for

their RV experience, and the topic of the day for RVAA members included how to make that a reality for the aftermarket.

During segment meetings which brought the three RVAA membership groups together for a one-hour meeting, each group discussed ways in which the association could help them in their effort to more effectively serve the industry as a whole. Each group brought strong ideas to the table that will be discussed at the RVAA Board level, and will further help to impact the efficiency of the channel as a whole. Additionally, a topic of discussion for each group involved education – how can RVAA members most effectively bring product education to the industry and how can the association help? It was encouraging to see that in a time when the nation's economy is in downturn, the members of RVAA look towards enhancing their educational efforts to further the support the industry upon which they rely.

And beyond the individual and segment meetings, the Association's Board of Directors led by RVAA President Mike McKay from StagParkway, Inc., worked to introduce programs to the membership in St. Louis that would help them in their efforts to improve performance in the coming year. A Task Force led by RVAA Vice President Piar Adams of Carefree of Colorado introduced a series of Best Practice Standards to the association's membership that will help to streamline essential business transactions between supplier and distributors, thus cutting costs and time lost to the end user. The Association introduced a new website, [www.rvaahq.com](http://www.rvaahq.com), and a feature of that website – the "New Product Showcase" – which will allow RVAA members to introduce new products to the distribution community quickly and at any time during the year. Utilization of this tool alone by RVAA's supplier community will help to increase the speed to market of new products that will enhance the RV experience for consumers.

*So for four days, RVAA's membership turned out in the Gateway City to evaluate where the industry stands, but more importantly, to take action on methods for helping all segments of the industry initiate the recovery and hasten the return of brighter and profitable days for the RV industry. This kind of resolute spirit and desire to take action rather than simply "wait" for a recovery is the kind of spirit being displayed throughout the RV industry. For four days in August, that spirit was truly headquartered in St. Louis, Mo.*

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