The Roofing Metal Heating Associates (RMHA) has been a contractors' association for 122 years. I cannot say what type of contractor membership it originally had or whether it has changed over time. Of course, it represented roofing contractors who would have installed all types of roofing systems, including metal roofing systems. However, from its name, did it also represent separate sheet-metal contractors who did not do roofing but fabricated sheet-metal items, such as cornices and ductwork? Also, how did the word "Heating" fit into the association's original title? I am sure the word “associates” means the same today as it did then, “non-contractors who supplied materials, insurance, information, etc., to member contractors.

Today, sheet metal and heating contractors are very separate trades. Coming out of World War II, my father went through a government-approved apprentice program with a roofing contractor who also installed heating systems and sheet metal ductwork that they fabricated. He told me that heating work gave roofers work during the winter when the weather would not allow roofing system installations.

So, was the association basically roofing contractors who also did general sheet metal work related to roofing systems and installed sheet metal ductwork with heating systems, or did its past membership include separate sheet metal and heating contractors? The answer could be all of the above, but the true answer appears lost to time.

I ask these questions to highlight that today’s RMHA consists of only two groups – Roofing Contractors and Associates.

For anyone who has been an association member for any length of time, it is evident that membership and the involvement of members within the association has been declining. If we are honest, we must be concerned about the life of the association. How much longer can the 122-year-old association survive with a dwindling membership and members who don’t seem to have the time to be involved? I have publicly stated many times that I find it hard to believe there is no overflow of roofing contractors at the general membership meetings, but that is just my opinion.

So, why aren’t roofing contractors joining the association or members becoming more involved within the association? Well, there was a book that was published in 2000 called “Bowling Alone”. The name reflects the fact that individuals are bowling more, but they are not joining bowling leagues. The book’s author, David Putnam, a Political Scientist, documented the steep decline of people joining civic associations, clubs, leagues, religious groups, etc. A few of the reasons included not having enough time due to work schedules, pressures of society to achieve individual success, and, with today’s younger society, the amount of time spent in front of a computer screen. A general conclusion was you cannot make people join anything, but it should be taught that people who join groups with similar interests are more socialized and successful in life than those living as individuals in their own personal world. So, whatever stage of life you are at, and regardless of how financially successful you are - you would have more success which may be undefined - if you become involved with an organization that relates to your interests. Furthermore, society is more successful with less depression and has a greater positive outlook for the future when people are involved with others of the same interests.

So, how can the association grow if roofing contractors are not personally aware of the benefits of joining the RMHA? We can spend countless hours trying to convince fellow roofing contractors to become involved with the RMHA, but how many members have the time, and how would you explain the benefits of membership to someone not interested?

I can only think of two possible ways to ensure the long-term survival of the RMHA, both of which are my personal opinions. Furthermore, members may disagree with my thoughts as being too controversial, radical, or even stupid, but we need to think outside the box to keep the association alive:

1) The associate members of the RMHA are just as involved within the roofing industry as any roofing contractor. Furthermore, judging from their attendance at the general membership meeting, I could conclude that they have as much interest in the survival of the RMHA and the roofing industry as any member roofing contractor. Yes, they do not install roofing systems; however, from personal experience, how many roofing contractors learn about materials and systems from the associates?

Would it benefit the RMHA to allow associates to be voting members of the association and eligible for the Office of Director, Treasurer, or alternating Presidency between a Roofing Contractor and an Associate?

What could Associates offer that RMHA cannot?

A) They have daily contact with hundreds of roofing contractors, and this can be an introduction to the association for these contractors.
B) They probably have a good idea of which contractors are quality-oriented and would be an asset to the association.
C) They could sponsor events to highlight their involvement within the local roofing industry, the materials they sell, and conduct training seminars in conjunction with the RMHA. Because many associates represent multi-million dollar worldwide material manufacturers, it would be a great way for these companies to be involved in the local roofing industry.

2) Another way to increase involvement in the RMHA seems unrealistic, but the idea is now required in 20 states nationwide, and appears to have a growing list. What is it?

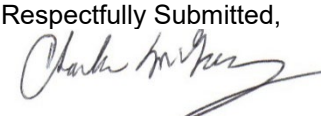
State licensing, where a roofing contractor must take a written trade test, be able to prove work experience in the roofing industry, supply a financial bond against fraud, and, depending on the state, meet any of several other requirements. Only after a roofing contractor has met the requirements would a state roofing contractor's license be issued.

If state licensing ever occurs, where trade requirements must be met and not just supply liability insurance, the RMHA could offer testing information to a roofing contractor. I think this would significantly increase the interest in the RMHA and expand the membership.

Furthermore, could both actions occur sometime in the future to make the RMHA one of the country's oldest and strongest roofing industry associations?

I don't know if either opinion makes sense or is realistic; however, I genuinely believe that as older members of the association retire or pass away, so may the 122-year-old RMHA.

Respectfully Submitted,



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