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2012 ECONOMIC IMPACT AWARDS



## BUSINESS ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

# A Voice for Home Builders

Maria Hoover · mhoover@sbj.net

**F**ounded in 1954, the Home Builders Association of Greater Springfield is an active supporter of its roughly 400 members and the home building industry in matters of public policy and business operations, says CEO Matt Morrow. He notes that the organization also advocates for the broader business community, namely in fostering economic development and growth.

"Those things, of course, lead to job creation, and people who have jobs buy houses, and that's good for our members," he says.

The HBA has a six-member staff, including Morrow and Jennifer McClure, a government affairs specialist who's actively involved in advocacy, and a volunteer board of directors led by President Matt Bailey of Bailey Co.

Morrow says HBA's advocacy efforts are largely categorized into four types – regulatory, legislative, political and legal – at local, state and federal levels.

Regulatory advocacy entails working with bureaucratic employees, including those in Planning & Zoning at the city level; the Department of Natural Resources at the state level; and the Environmental Protection Agency or the Occupational Safety & Health Administration at the federal level on issues such as code interpretation and enforcement.

The HBA recently worked with the Missouri Division of Workers' Compensation to clarify the rules for workers' compensation insurance, overhauling the Affidavit of Exemption document, and developing and recording a series of Web videos outlining the correct answers to frequently asked questions about workers' comp.

Legislative advocacy entails working with elected officials to create – or amend – laws to support home building and economic development, Morrow says.

HBA worked last year on a legislative issue tied to residential fire sprinklers. Morrow says sprinkler manufacturers engaged in a relatively successful campaign to get requisite fire sprinklers included in international residential building codes.



Matt Morrow, CEO; Matt Bailey, president of the board; and Jennifer McClure, government affairs specialist

"It's a massive expense that increases the cost of a home by thousands of dollars," he says. "It would price an awful lot of people out of the ability to buy new homes."

The local HBA worked with other HBA groups and fire protection districts to find a solution.

"At the state level, we came up with a solution called mandatory option. It sounds like a total oxymoron, but what it says is that no code-adopting jurisdiction is allowed to mandate residential fire sprinklers in single-family homes. However, every builder is required to offer

campaign contribution all the way up to campaign management and execution," Morrow says.

Morrow describes political involvement as the axle of the HBA's advocacy wheel.

"Our regulatory and legislative advocacy [efforts] are far more effective if we're talking to people who have the same general philosophy on the economy and on job creation," he says.

The organization rarely engages in legal advocacy – i.e., lawsuits – and Morrow says that's because if regulatory, legislative and political advocacy are done correctly, going to court shouldn't be necessary.

There's also a fifth category, which Morrow describes as public advocacy that promotes the home building industry overall and highlights HBA members.

Annual events such as the Parade of Homes, the Home Show and the Remodeling Expo fall under the public category, which has been increasingly important during the economic downturn.

Also important to helping HBA members ride out the recession are enhanced marketing tools such as an overhauled Web site and in-house Web design services for members; access to local National Association of Home Builders training partially underwritten by the HBA Charitable Foundation to prepare participating members for industry recovery; and new Web tools such as [Look4UBuild.com](http://Look4UBuild.com), which allows builders and consumers to compare regulatory costs associated with new home construction, Morrow says.

The tool enables users to compare regulatory fees for up to three jurisdictions at a time in the 10 counties the HBA serves, using a sample 1,600-square-foot house.

Those comparisons will be important as recovery gains steam in home building, Morrow says.

"Communities have to compete with each other for the business of new construction and development, and we think one of the important factors is where they rank on these costs before you build," he adds.

### HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION OF GREATER SPRINGFIELD

Address: 636 W. Republic Road, Ste. D-108

Web: [SpringfieldHBA.com](http://SpringfieldHBA.com)

Purpose: Promoting the home building industry and homeownership through regulatory, legislative, political, legal and public advocacy efforts, and supporting economic development and growth to support the economy at large.

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The next step, which Morrow describes as most critical to the HBA, is political advocacy.

"That's where we engage in elections (and) advocating (for) people who have a perspective that is generally favorable to growth and residential development, construction and job creation to help them get elected," he says.

The HBA established its political action committee, the Coalition for Building a Better Tomorrow, in 2001. With a nonpartisan approach, the PAC has raised and contributed roughly \$250,000 since its inception.

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# 2012 Business Advocate of the Year: Home Builders Association of Greater Springfield

## *A Voice for Home Builders*

7/23/2012

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Springfield Business Journal Features Editor

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