

## Long Time Coming Randy Smart

Unlikely as it seems at least to me, here I am, beginning my term as president.

My path to this position and involvement in the association was maybe a bit different. Forty-two years ago, as a small agency in a small town and as an active father with two busy children, my focus was on growing the agency and building a client base while also attending as many events as our family schedule could handle. Being dedicated to those tasks left little time to leave my agency for other involvements. However, after significant growth and an increase in staff, I was freed up enough to consider making that commitment and seeing where it would take me. Looking back, I have no regrets, but I realize how much more there was to gain from having the insights that others in the association were willing to share. The question of sooner or later is not always an easy one, but having time for what you value most is the important thing.

I have long been a fan of the building block company LEGO, and my grandkids are responsible for reigniting my passion with the always-popular toy. I feel it's a safe assumption that you're all familiar with their amazingly successful brand, which has this subtle way of winning you over by helping you reach one milestone and one goal after another. First they start with a small, very simple object for you to build. Then they offer you a slightly more complex item to construct, and before you know it you are building a complete scale model of the Eiffel Tower. At this point you are deemed ready for the level of extremely advanced LEGO construction that is called Creator, and you are ready to take on the greatest LEGO challenges. This method of developing your skills so you are able to complete more and more difficult projects and ultimately having you willing to attempt the extremely complex comes with a detailed, step-by-step guide, which at the most advanced levels can include as many as 1,000 steps for a single project. And such has been my journey to today with this association as gradually, after many more than 1,000 steps, I joined something that became much more than I could have ever imagined.

Just as if we were building our own LEGO creation, our association is the foundation of so much knowledge and connection. Properly laid, that foundation is extremely important for the next things that come. From our association we meet others who share ideas for us to adopt, adapt to our own agencies and build on for our future growth and success.

Presently, we are in times when the ability to connect with others in the association is more challenging than ever before. Our group has become accustomed to great events like the Small Agency Conference with the Crawfish Feast and the MAC Summit with its annual golf tournament. We relied on these events to renew our connections, or in many cases, make them for the very first time. Without those events we will each lose something in our connections. We will return to those days very soon, but in the meantime we need to work to maintain our relationships in new ways. Step by step, we must use the virtual tools at our disposal to continue the building process.

As we begin to build the next creation, let me thank all those who have encouraged me and others like me to become more involved in our relationship-building association. Who would attempt the LEGO Millennium Falcon with nearly 8,000 pieces without the instruction booklet to guide you? As such, our association serves to challenge us, guide us, encourage us, and more, if we will only get involved.

This year, during my tenure as president, I challenge each of our members to bring along someone to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of our association. Without the generosity and

wisdom that each of you have to share, the association would mean very little. With it, and by passing it on to the next generation, I believe we can further secure the survival and fitness of our agencies for years to come. Let's have a great year as an association, one that truly demonstrates the value of a firm foundation. Thank you.