



## One Umbrella, Many Dry Heads

By Tim Dietz, SSA Sr. VP, Communications & Government Relations

I was struck last week when I received an email from an SSA member who said, in no uncertain terms, that the national SSA “catered to the big guys.”

Really? I said. “How could that be?” The Association is made up of more than 5,500 national and affiliate member companies, only five of which are traded publicly, with only 90 or so other companies filling out the top 100. That leaves roughly 5,400 other member companies that nobody could rightly describe as “big guys.”

In fact, I’m pretty confident that those other 5,400 companies are small businesses — “the backbone of the economy,” it has been said. And the backbone of the Self Storage Association, both in participation and contributions.

Further, the 40 or so current and former SSA board members whom I have known all owned or managed small businesses. They establish the direction of the Association as free-thinking volunteers, under no duress that I could see, charting a favorable course for the self storage industry.

Looking at the agenda of the SSA, it includes programs that support organizations of all sizes with networking, education, communications, research and advocacy. The largest companies have certainly taken a greater interest

in our legislative program, relatively speaking. Who could blame them? You care about a favorable business arena in the place(s) that you work, and so do they. They just have more places.

Even in the area of legislation, small business-owning board members and state associations play an equal role in setting the agenda. I have yet to see a new law championed by the SSA that was good for the industry’s larger companies, but not for everyone else.

I am not ignoring the very real competitive dynamics within our membership base. But the SSA pursues common goals best pursued together as an industry, governed by elected board members under the structure of long-standing bylaws and government regulations.

Often I find myself reminding members that we are not the same as the for-profit companies who might offer similar products and events as the SSA. These are terrific companies that have their own purpose and fill useful roles for our sector. But the SSA is in fact a different animal, formed and managed by storage professionals to represent the industry. It’s all in the perspective, and I hope you will pass this along to anyone you run across who could use a little perspective. ❖