

Cautious Optimism at the SSA Fall Conference & Trade Show

CubeSmart CEO Dean Jernigan said storage operators need to find innovative ways to attract new customers and to retain their current tenants as well.

Speaking at the Self Storage Association Conference and Trade Show in Las Vegas last month, Jernigan addressed the ongoing changes within the industry and the importance of offering ancillary services to give customers more bang for their buck. His speech came on the same day that his company, the nation's third largest self storage company, was changing its name and brand from U-Store-It to CubeSmart.

All current CubeSmart facilities currently offer storage and logistics services such as package receipt, item storage and retrieval, comprehensive moving services, individual lighting, and the ability to print, copy and fax.

The CubeSmart SuperStores, however, will take customer service to an entirely different level. Some of the full-service business features will include individual alarms, free wireless access, automatic door openers and workstations. The company also introduced SmartTrakr, a mobile app that allows tenants to track all of the items they store.

Jernigan admits that these services might not be affordable for every storage owner, but he said he does see a day when savvy renters will come to expect these perks in competitive storage areas. He was the second of three REIT chief executives to address the self storage associa-

tion. Last year Ron Havner, president and CEO of Public Storage, spoke during the SSA spring conference in Colorado Spring, Colorado. Next April, Extra Space Storage CEO Spencer Kirk will address the self storage community at the Gaylord Palms Resort in Orlando, Florida.

Also speaking at the SSA fall conference during the SSA Foundation Forum was political pundit Michael Murphy, who brought his veteran sense for the upcoming election year. The Republican consultant who writes for *Time* magazine and appears on *Meet the Press*, asked attendees, mostly business owners, to identify their political affiliation and then quipped, "We'll throw out the balanced speech."

Murphy handicapped the GOP challengers for the 2012 presidential race, noting that Texas Governor Rick Perry and former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney will likely remain the top contenders through the convention next summer. Tea Party favorite Michelle Bachman is "terribly inexperienced," he said.

Prior to Murphy's appearance, the SSA Foundation inducted three new members to the Self Storage Hall of Fame. Ronald Boorsten, Michael Schoff and Bob Soudan each showed their appreciation for the industry and association that they helped to build. Each encouraged cooperation and careful planning to ensure that self storage remains competitive moving forward. ❖



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