

INDOOR COMFORT

MARCH 2015

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY
NEWS

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THE WEST'S LEADING MONTHLY NEWSMAGAZINE FOR THE AIR CONDITIONING, HEATING, REFRIGERATION, SHEET METAL AND VENTILATING INDUSTRIES

IHACI Names New President of Organization

Phillip Grosenbach, vice president of General Heating and Air Conditioning, takes over the reigns of nonprofit organization.

By Peter Landau
Contributing Writer

Phillip Grosenbach, vice-president of the San Gabriel Valley, Calif.-based contracting firm of General Heating and Air Conditioning, has taken the next step in his long career in the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) industries. He has been voted the new president of the Institute of Heating and Air Conditioning Industries, Inc. (IHACI) board of directors, replacing Robert Helbing, president of Air-Tro, Inc., who continues on the board as immediate past president.

Grosenbach has grown up in HVAC. His father and mother started General Heating and Air Conditioning in 1981, when Grosenbach was only four years old. As soon as he was able to work he followed an innate curiosity about HVAC to his parents shop, helping out during summer and holiday breaks from school. "I was the guy doing odd jobs, going out on the work site and getting parts and tools for the workers," he says. "I put stock away and swept up the yard."

He would also drive along with his father on sales calls, which gave him a holistic understanding of the business from the bottom up. Though Grosenbach knew HVAC was an opportunity, as a young man he had aspirations of working in apparel and opened a clothing company in high school. "Things always happen for a reason," he says, "and by the time I was 18, out of high school and waiting to start college, I was here running crews." While pursuing an undergraduate degree he continued working at his parent's shop.

When his father was stricken with cancer in 1998, Grosenbach took on a larger role at the company, doing estimating among other duties. His parents were in the process of bringing on another comfort advisor when Grosenbach's



Phillip Grosenbach of General Heating and Air Conditioning.

father offered the position to him. "He said I have an opportunity for you to get out of the truck and start surveying jobs and doing sales," Grosenbach remembers. "If it works out, it works out, and if not, you're back in the truck." Needless to add, it worked out.

Grosenbach graduated from being a lead on the install team to estimating and sales work. The leap from technical to a more managerial position was not insurmountable for Grosenbach because of his knowledge of every aspect of HVAC. "The best people in the industry know about service and installation and business," he says. "Fortunately for me, I was going to IHACI classes when I was still a teenager."

From the IHACI trainings and experience in the field to the manufacturers' classes on sales presentations, Grosenbach was ready for the added responsibility. Also, his father was a great mentor. "I'd carpool with my dad to work and, if I finished my work early, I'd sit in his office and listen to him on the phone and watch him work," Grosenbach says. "I wouldn't just come in at eight and clock out at five. I'd hang around the office. I was eager for the challenge and to be able to learn everything I could about the work."

That can-do attitude is one reason why Grosenbach hasn't been complacent with his success. He wants to give back to an industry that's been so beneficial to his family and himself. He knows from first-hand experience the power that a trade organization like IHACI offers contractors. By 2008 he was serving as a member of its board of directors. "I didn't know what I was getting into," he jokes. "I knew of

IHACI, but I didn't know what goes on behind the scenes. I would attend the trade show and trainings, participate in the annual golf tournament and read the articles in *Indoor Comfort News (ICN)*, but I had no idea that the board regularly goes up to Sacramento and San Francisco to lobby on behalf of the industry, and all the partnerships and relationships it develops to help contractors stay profitable and make our voices heard."

Grosenbach was elected to the board at a volatile time in the industry, with 13 SEER in effect and Home Energy Rating System (HERS) testing underway. These challenges prepared him for the new challenges that he faces today as president of the board. The HVAC industry is constantly in flux, with new codes and ongoing regulatory issues, not to mention the technological advances in equipment that require constant education for contractors to remain competitive. IHACI has vowed to monitor and direct these changes as advocates for the industry and its contracting community.

As president of the IHACI board of directors, Grosenbach's main goal is to remain by the side of the contractor and be its voice in California. "California is our home and we're the only source that does what we do," he says. "Our training curriculum is now accredited by the California Community College Chancellor's Office, Title 24 is ever changing and there are new codes coming. The governor has stated he wants California to be on the forefront of environmental concerns. This is fine on paper, but in the real world it's far more challenging."

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Enforcement of these laws continues to be an issue for compliant contractors who are underbid by unlicensed and uninsured or disreputable contractors who cut corners with code regulations and permitting simply because they are confident they can get away it. Added to this is the lack of permitting consistency from county to county and the time and labor often needed to file for permits. "IHACI, along with others, continues to seek remedies to a complicated and often tedious process," Grosenbach says.

"Although the state works diligently to develop codes and regulations geared towards energy savings and conservation, applying these requirements in the field can prove daunting. The HVAC industry is a consumer driven market and, as such, price does matter. There's got to be a balance between state regulators, industry, and consumers. The voices of the contractors, who are in the field everyday, who are running a business, who know the hurdles that need to be cleared to do what's being asked of them, need to be part of the regulatory discussion during the setting of these codes, and that's where IHACI is crucial for the industry."

To ensure that contractors are heard, IHACI is constantly gaining new members to its trade organization. It serves its membership not only on the regulatory side, but through an aggressively expanding slate of training classes on technical and code issues. New classes in such disciplines as economizer training, commercial rooftop packing, helps contractors better service and work on a broad range of energy-saving technologies. IHACI continues to champion North American Technician Excellence (NATE) and is responsible for producing the largest group of NATE-certified workers in California.

Another initiative is the re-launch of the IHACI website, which will provide a suite of new resources for contractor members online. Keep reading IHACI NewsBriefs (members only) and ICN for an announcement of when the

revamped site is live.

"This is all work that's been in the pipeline for years," Grosenbach notes. "Nothing happens overnight. It's all a process that has been due to the hard work and dedication of previous and current presidents, board members, committee chairs/members, volunteers and, of course IHACI members."

Grosenbach is confident that contractors appreciate what membership in IHACI means to business owners and to the industry at large. There are, however, different levels of membership that includes technicians and installers. Grosenbach worries that those who are not yet members may be unaware of how much IHACI can empower them, from training opportunities, to the trade show and the less visible but vital work such as promoting the industry in government and beyond. "If there wasn't an IHACI," he says, "I don't know what the heating and air conditioning industry in California would look like. It's so important to be part of the industry. It remains a mystery as to why "every" HVAC contractor in the state of California is not a member of IHACI."

As much of a big-picture strategy Grosenbach is required to create as president of the IHACI board of directors, he still runs a family business. His passion is kindled in the hearth of General Heating and Air Conditioning. He has a 16-year-old son and a 12-year-old daughter. "The funny thing is my son wants nothing to do with the company," Grosenbach says. "My daughter, on the other hand, loves to come into the office to work. As president of IHACI, my desire is to do my very best to represent the needs and concerns of the HVAC industry. And, by doing so, I may very well be protecting my daughter's future in HVAC as well."