

John Shorbe Rolls up his Sleeves... Again

By Jodi Goalstone, Associate Writer

When you talk to John Shorbe, Sr., two personality traits emerge: a keen sense of humor and a genuine feeling for humanity.

I experienced both while interviewing him a few years ago. The cellphone inside his open briefcase rang repeatedly, interrupting his thoughts. Shorbe looked over, frowned, and shut the case.

The phone continued ringing. He jumped up from his desk, grabbed the phone and threw it down the hallway. End of distraction.

Shorbe is tackling his second term as SAHBA President with the same fervor. But why did he agree to serve again?

He cites SAHBA's vigor and more proactive direction as reasons. He used a Texas aphorism to explain the Association's evolution: "If you continue doing what you did, then you get what you used to get."

He sees three key issues in sight this year: impact fees, the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and the fall election of the Pima County Board of Supervisors.

He believes that growth is inevitable: "Unless we shut off the sun and take the mountains out of here, people are coming."

He also has pledged to inform the public about the role and value of the construction industry--outside the filter of the print and electronic media.

It seems that Shorbe has been rolling up his sleeves for one reason or another all his life.

Raised in Nolanville, a small town of 700 in central Texas, Shorbe's father died when he was seven years old. To make ends meet, he went to work for his uncle in the carpentry trade at age 12.

"My uncle was a big, big motivator in my life. He helped me find out I liked to build things," said Shorbe.

A few years later, work in the tiny town dried up. Shorbe heard about opportunities for carpenters at an Ohio boat building company, and off he went.

"The only problem was that nothing (on a boat) was straight, even the tiller handle is curved," he said. Nonetheless, "it was the best education I ever had."

He became a foreman one year later at 19.

His next stop was a tour of duty in Vietnam in the Army, and another growing experience.

"You don't know what the world is about until someone shoots at you," he said.

After serving five years, Shorbe and his wife settled in Tucson to be near his mother who had retired here. He worked a few years in the grocery business, learning marketing and customer service, then returned to construction. He worked his way up to Superintendent.

In 1987, Shorbe and several colleagues started their own company. The time and timing couldn't have been worse: the bottom was falling out of the home building market.

Nonetheless, the team held on by doing remodeling and tenant improvement jobs. Shorbe, who did the work himself, recalled bringing a check in from a job just in time to meet payroll.

The company, Canoa Builders, Inc., has not only survived but thrived. Today, Canoa builds about 120 homes a year and has 21 employees.

But building a company wasn't the only thing on Shorbe's mind. His family was, too. Shorbe remembered that as a youngster, he had no one watching him play sports from the stands. He vowed things would be different for his five sons.

When he found the Flowing Wells area didn't have a Boy Scouts chapter, he started one in 1981. He is still involved with the organization today as a member of the Board of Directors of the Catalina Council Boy Scouts of America.

Shorbe also instilled a sense of responsibility in his sons with one-on-one "porch talks."

"We lived in a little house with five sons ranging from 16 down to eight. It was hard to have privacy to talk about important things," such as school, girls and behavior.

Sometimes, they'd make appointments in advance. Other times, he would say, "Let's have a porch talk *right now*."

For example, one son was caught kissing a young lady on the high school grounds. So, Shorbe took him out for an immediate porch talk.

"Your hormones are on a freight train going 1,000 miles per hour," he told his offspring. "How do you know," the son asked.

"Because you are me, 20 years ago," Shorbe replied.

Honest, honorable, respectful, and full of fun. That's your 2004 President, John Shorbe

The Shorbe Profile

- 2004 SAHBA President
- 2003 2-10 Home Buyers Warranty Diamond Builder Award
- 2002 Tucson Father's Day Council Father of the Year
- 2001 SAHBA Member of the Year
Construction Industry's "Good Scout" Award
- 2000 Arizona Building Officials Member of the Year
- 1999 SAHBA Life Director
- 1997 SAHBA President
NAHB Life Spike Award
SAHBA Builder of the Year
Boy Scouts of America Silver Beaver Award
City of Tucson Community Service Award
- 1987 Formed Canoa Builders

Community Service Boards/Committees

- SAHBA Technical and PAC committees
- Boy Scouts of America Catalina Council
- Registrar of Contractors Advisory Committee
- Metropolitan Pima Alliance
- Arizona Builder's Alliance
- Arizona Better Business Bureau
- Exec. Coord. Casas Adobe Baptist Church Choir