

Grafton H. 'Cap' Willey, IV Elected 2007 NSBA Chair

By Rob Yulich

Director of Communications

Grafton H. "Cap" Willey, IV epitomizes NSBA's grassroots nature. He worked hard to start his own business and became a very successful entrepreneur. Simultaneously, he became a very active small-business advocate, first in his native Rhode Island and then nationally.

Willey, a certified public accountant (CPA), was elected NSBA chair during the organization's annual membership meeting, held Nov. 3, 2006 in Hilton Head, S.C.

"Small business is really big business for the U.S. economy—representing more than 50 percent of the country's gross domestic product and almost all of the new jobs created," Willey said. "Small business has done this in spite of huge disadvantages. We need to protect and encourage the growth of our economic engine. Bringing the success of the U.S. small-business sector into the global economy is our next big challenge. I am confident that our small businesses will meet this challenge with the same success they have met prior challenges."

Willey's career started off with a self-admitted failure.

"I failed at my goal of being a partner in a CPA [firm] by the time I was 30; but I achieved it at age 31, starting my own firm with two other partners," he said.

That new firm, Rooney, Plotkin and Willey (RPW), became larger than his old firm over the next eight years.

Willey became managing partner of RPW in 1998 and remained in that position until 2004, when they merged with Tofias PC—forming one of the largest CPA firms in New England. Tofias has since doubled the size of its Rhode Island practice. Willey's current official title is shareholder and a member of the board of

directors for Tofias.

The three RPW founders also jointly purchased Dyer Island, a 28-acre island in Narragansett Bay, R.I.

Willey subsequently created the Dyer Straits Yacht Club, which he dubbed "the club of last resorts."

DEDICATED ADVOCATE

Being a CPA is only a portion of Willey's professional life.

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of my career is that I have had the opportunity for more than 30 years to work with and help small-business entrepreneurs build successful small businesses and achieve the financial successes that they deserve," he said.

It does not take much investigation to uncover how Willey arrived at that conclusion. Willey first took notice of NSBA after joining the Smaller Business Association of New England (SBANE)—an NSBA affiliate—in 1981. He appropriately joined SBANE's tax committee and also attended local meetings.

At that time, SBANE organized the Washington Presentation (now one of NSBA's signature events) along with other small-business groups, most of whom are now NSBA affiliates. The groups jointly planned the 1980 White House Conference on Small Business, which Willey attended. He later attended his first Washington Presentation in 1983—at the urging of then-SBANE Executive Director

Lew Shattuck and then-SBANE Tax Chair Bob Haddad. He has not missed one since.

Willey became SBANE tax chair in 1985 and organized the New England and New York delegations for the 1986 White House Conference of Small Business—after being appointed by Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.). That same year, Willey also was elected to the SBANE board and to the NSBA board a few years later.

During his time on the NSBA board, he has served as first vice chair, treasurer, as well as chair of the tax and Washington

Presentation committees.

"During my term as chair, I hope to expand NSBA's grassroots support, to keep the small-business activists involved in the organization and get new people involved," Willey said. "I also want to make sure that we are heard on Capitol Hill and try to have some fun as we move forward."

Willey also is active in the Rhode Island Society of CPAs, three local Chambers of Commerce, the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council, and local activities of the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Willey holds a Bachelor of Science degree in finance from Syracuse University. He and his wife, Lois, have two children—Richard and Rhonda—and two grandchildren, Alexa and Kailey.

Willey has spent nearly his entire life in the Ocean State. He was born in Cranston, grew up in Barrington, and now lives in Portsmouth and works in the state capital of Providence. ★

DID YOU KNOW?

The National Small Business Association, founded in 1937, is the nation's oldest small-business advocacy organization.