

A Significant Milestone for Small Business

NSBA prepares to celebrate 70th anniversary of small-business movement

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Seventy years ago, the Great Depression consumed the nation; a stamp cost three cents and there were no zip codes; “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” became the first full-length animated movie to hit theatres; the 75th Congress began without Hawaii and Alaska—who would not achieve statehood for another 22 years; there was no Super Bowl or National Basketball Association; most companies were small; and “mom and pop” stores were the norm, not the exception.

In some ways, things have not changed since 1937. Small businesses still are the backbone of the American economy, comprising 99.7 percent of all employer firms, employing half of all private sector employees, and creating 65 percent of the net new jobs.

In other ways, things are very different. The American economic climate is extremely complex, the 110th Congress is underway, stamps cost 39 cents, zip codes now include a plus-four element, and Alaska and Hawaii have been in existence for nearly 50 years.

But one thing has remained steady since 1937—the National Small Business Association. NSBA is celebrating the 70th anniversary of the organization and the small-business movement during a gala celebration on May 9 at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in



NSBA FILE PHOTO

DeWitt Emery founded NSBA on Nov. 13, 1937 after being convinced that the White House was unfairly targeting small-business owners.

Washington, D.C. The special event will feature a chance to honor those who have made a difference to the small-business movement, several of NSBA's past leaders, as well as a special performance by the renowned Capitol Steps comedy troupe.

The gala is part of NSBA's annual Washington Presentation, to be held May 9-10 at the Wydham Washington. It includes an opportunity to learn the latest about small-business issues directly from the source, the chance to meet with your congressional representative, the honoring of the Small Business Advocate of the Year, and much more.

Registration for the event will begin in late February on NSBA's Web site, nsba.biz.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

NSBA can trace its beginnings to the actions of one man, DeWitt M. Emery—owner of the Monroe Letterhead Corporation in Akron, Ohio. His company was struggling amid the Great Depression and Emery was running out of answers. The Monroe Letterhead Corporation, founded in 1911, dealt with the task of paying Social Security, unemployment insurance, increased county and state taxes, higher material costs, and

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increased wages—the same plight faced by small-business owners today.

Emery, convinced the White House was unfairly targeting small-business owners, wanted to do something to correct this injustice.

“How can one man fight a situation like this?” he reportedly shouted as he stood in his empty office.

“No... of course not... not one man, not 10... but thousands just like me... grouped together, with common interests and a common purpose... sure, we’re all small, how does that saying go? ‘Many small make a great.’”

“Other groups organize into associations, why not an association of small-business men from all over the nation! We’ll have our own House of Representatives, right in Washington,” he added.

And thus the small-business movement had begun. On Nov. 13, 1937, Emery founded the National Small Business Men’s Association. He crafted a mission statement and began to recruit members. Emery sent a letter to as many small-business owners as he could find, asking them to join the newly-formed association. Of the 200 owners that received the letter, 160 of them joined the nascent group.

By 1962, the group had changed its name to the National Small Business Association—acknowledging the strong presence of female business owners. While the name is the same one the organization uses today, there were more name changes ahead.

In 1981, Small Business United (SBU) started with a similar mission statement as NSBA. Although SBU technically was a competitor at the time, that group helped lay the foundation for NSBA’s current network of affiliates.

The original SBU member groups included the Smaller Business Association of New England (SBANE), SMC Business Councils of Pittsburgh, and the Council of



NSBA FILE PHOTOS

ABOVE: During NSBA’s 60th anniversary gala, then-Vice President Al Gore (left) spoke to the crowd—while the Capitol Steps comedy troupe entertained them later in the evening.

BELOW: The 70th anniversary gala will give NSBA an opportunity to remember Lew Shattuck (left), a major influence throughout the small-business movement, and some of the organization’s former chairs, such as Sharon Miller.



Smaller Enterprises in Cleveland.

In 1986, SBU and NSBA merged to become National Small Business United. The organization kept that name until 2003, when it reverted to the NSBA moniker. As the association grew, so did the list of affiliate groups. Later additions include the Arizona Small Business Association, Small Business California, the Missouri Merchants and Manufacturers Association, and the Small Business Association of Michigan.

SBANE originally created the Washington Presentation (then known as the Washington Group) in the 1960s. After the SBU-NSBA merger, NSBA became responsible for running the Washington Presentation—now its signature event.

“It’s very fitting that NSBA’s 70th anniversary will be celebrated at an event that is so important to the group’s history,” NSBA President Todd McCracken said. “It’s a wonderful opportunity to honor our distinguished past and stay true to our grassroots nature.”

Emery died in 1955 and most likely would be blown away by the progress achieved by the group he founded. For example, the organization currently reaches more than 150,000 small-business owners—a number well beyond the group of 160 members Emery recruited.

Although much has transpired since Emery’s death, NSBA’s original roots remain. And that alone gives the organization reason to rejoice. ★