

“As an owner/operator, I am grateful to Mike and his team who have successfully helped to pass legislation in many states.

—Nancy Gunning,
Chesapeake Resources, Inc.

“When Mike Scanlon joined the SSA, we moved literally from the dark ages of associations into the light.”

—Kenneth E. Nitzberg,
Devon Self Storage

“Mike Scanlon has never been afraid to make successful decisions after careful consideration of all of the facts. The industry has grown in integrity by having him as our dynamic spokesperson.”

—Nancy Martin Wagner
Chateau Products, Inc.

“The SSA was in turmoil. Mike Scanlon had a plan. He executed it. The result is the dynamic SSA of today.”

—Robert Schoff,
National Self Storage

“Mike brought accountability, teamwork and enthusiasm that allowed the association to make it through the Great Recession. We thank him for his energy, his continual push forward, but most of all for his ideas.”

—Mike Burnam,
StorageMart



Scanlon Brought Vision, New Standard for Representation

By Tim Dietz, SSA Chief Operating Officer

Mike Scanlon called me one hot afternoon during the summer of 2004 to tell me that he had just taken over a nonprofit trade association and he needed me to join him by September. “What is the industry?” I asked. “Self storage,” he replied.

That was my first exposure, other than as a customer, to this remarkable real estate sector. I asked the cliché question that I’ve heard a thousand times myself subsequent to Mike’s call: “They have a trade association?”

“You need to come over here and help me,” he said. “We are going to under-promise and over-achieve.”

Well, he was half right. It has never been Mike’s style to under-promise, probably one of the marks of a visionary.

Mike and I had enjoyed a productive working relationship at a telecommunications company for many years before he “retired” the first time, around 2002. He had been in his mid-fifties and decided he wanted to

manage his own business out of Hilton Head, South Carolina, for a while. When he left that company, I knew he was spent and didn't want to answer to anyone for the time being. When he was recruited to the SSA, he didn't have to answer to just one person, but ten.

Mike had provided that board of directors with a detailed analysis of what he felt this organization and its membership needed. Although I will be stepping up from an internal position to lead the organization, the situation was much different when he came along. Mike brought both a Washington and general nonprofit trade perspective with him.

Previously, Mike held executive positions at trade groups including the Petroleum Marketers Association and the American Bar Association where he was very proud to be a non-lawyer with a bigger office than all of the lawyers who worked on lower floors of that trade group.

Mike and I set out to create a couple of functional areas that had not yet become part of the SSA. Whereas he had been a Washington administrator and nonprofit professional, I'd had a different track that complemented the needs of the SSA. Out of college I had taken roles as a business and newspaper reporter, but moved on to a primarily lobbyist career.

"This place needs a magazine, because the members don't know what they're getting," he said. "You're going to get that up and running. Then we need to start a government relations department, so that we can represent this industry." He didn't simply put me in charge of both areas and disappear; he went about establishing the resources that would enable us to make it happen.

It didn't hurt that there was a tremendous staff of professionals already on board and willing to adjust to the new vibe. Some of them—including Ginny Stengel, Jennifer Pettigrew and Joan Baccay-Marsha—are still enjoying a career representing self storage operators. Each has, in her own way, provided the continuity that is refreshing and unique in the new world order of Millennials.

Nor did it hurt that we had a remarkable board in place, willing to do whatever it would take to bring the SSA to the forefront of the real estate trade association community. Among them were industry operators who had a hand in selecting Mike, including Gary DeBode, Nancy Gunning and Dan Nixon. The board members who would provide leadership over the next decade are too numerous to name, but two in particular stepped up for much longer than their prescribed tenures and made an indelible mark: Ken Nitzberg and Patrick Reilly.

Mike's legacy cannot be viewed as an executive who started with a blank slate. The many men and women who constituted the early years of the SSA provided an ideal base on which to expand this association. And it was Mike who conceived the Self Storage Hall of Fame in order to duly honor these pioneers.

Having been established as the national meeting place for owner/operators of self storage units, Mike instituted many other additions. He did so very deliberately and at such a brisk pace that those of us on his staff would have to race to keep up with not only today's ideas, but yesterday's ideas, last week's ideas, last month's ideas.

It was his nature to push for more and, after a decade, the SSA reflects this era of unashamed trial (and occasional error): a legislative program that has matured into a healthy model of representation, a collaborative dynamic with the state associations that has benefited everyone; the SSA Foundation, the home of the SSAF scholarships, supporting the dreams of dozens of students with ties to the industry; and a healthy respect for the traditional elements of the SSA, most importantly our industry education and conferences.

Under-promise? Certainly not, but a great deal of achievement to be sure. ❖

"Our industry and association had many challenges during the past ten years and Mike's leadership was invaluable."

—John E. Barry,
All-Time Self Storage

"Mike Scanlon was the catalyst who brought our association into the 21st century with a vengeance! Storage owners owe this man a debt of gratitude for what he has done for our industry."

—John Gilliland,
Investment Real Estate, LLC

"Mike was able to pull the SSA through what could have been its darkest time and truly put a team together to excel for the future."

—Brenda Scarborough,
William Warren Group

"Mike was always there for you when you needed him. I lost my suite for meetings in Vegas one year and he gave me his room to use for two days. Thanks Mike, we'll miss you!"

—Charles "Chico" LeClaire,
Marcus & Millichap

"Mike brought the perfect set of personality, skills, teamwork and expertise to our organization when we needed them the most."

—Robert Francis,
Heron Group Management
& Consulting