

As a one-store operator, I've often given consideration my APRO membership and its value to me and my business. Fifteen years ago, my wife and I were both government employees living in Albuquerque, New Mexico. My wife's mother had recently been diagnosed with a terminal illness and we wanted to move back to her hometown in rural northern Michigan.

There was not a lot of call for special agents in the backwoods of the upper peninsula of Michigan and we had become accustomed to eating every single day, so we had to figure out a way to

but I believe the reason he helped us was because of his involvement with APRO and the culture of openness and sharing that APRO has always fostered.

So maybe you are saying to yourself, "Nice story. But what has APRO done for you since then?" Well, about 10 years ago at an APRO convention, we listened to some rental dealers talk about how they had added income tax filing to their businesses. After talking to their vendor, we decided to give tax preparation a try. That one decision has allowed us to double our rental revenue, while still growing accounts, during what had been a very slow time of the year, business-wise. This, in addition to the added income from the tax preparation, made a huge impact on our bottom line. That one decision—one I never would have made had it not been for my APRO membership—was worth all the dues that I could ever pay.

This is a big example, but there are dozens of smaller ones that happened before and after this one, that when added together have had the same impact on my business. What excites me is what's going to come next. What waits for me around the corner? What will I learn at the next meeting I make the effort to attend? What will the next rental dealer I meet tell me that I didn't know before?

I believe that you should take advice from successful people. That same observation was made by our keynote speaker at this year's convention in Las Vegas. He also made an interesting point, which I'll paraphrase: "If your business stinks, it's because *you* stink."

There have been times when I, and my business, have been a little stinky. APRO was there to give me the information I needed to smell good again. APRO members who were successful in areas where I was lacking were there to give me good advice.

Over the years we have not added a lot of stores, but 15 years later, rent-to-own is still putting a roof over our heads and food on our tables. The only difference now is that there are six plates, along with ours, at that table. I guess we have grown. Thanks APRO! ■

Sidney Burton owns and operates Hometown Rent To Own in Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan.

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Benefits of belonging

put food on our table for ourselves and our two-year-old daughter. My wife's brother, a furniture retailer suggested that we look into the rent-to-own business.

We knew nothing about the rent-to-own business, so the first thing we did was take a quick trip to our local library. There, in a huge reference book that listed every trade association imaginable, we found the sole listing for the RTO industry: APRO. We didn't know it at the time, but we had just made a very valuable discovery.

We contacted APRO and right away received two great packages of information. The first told us exactly what rent-to-own was, where RTO stores were located and who its customers were. The second package contained a copy of *APROach*

magazine. It was full of articles about the issues being faced by dealers. We devoured that first magazine and meekly asked if they might have any others. To our great joy, we received a stack of back issues that we dove into with the same interest we had for that first issue.

The next RTO-related exploration we did, not knowing any better, was to walk into a local RTO store in Albuquerque.

Lucky for us, the owner was there and he spent the rest of his day giving us a crash course in the industry. He answered all of our questions and even provided us with the projections for a new store that they were opening. I didn't know it at the time,



By SIDNEY BURTON
APRO board member