

PROGRESSIVE
Rentals

THE VOICE OF THE RENTAL-PURCHASE INDUSTRY
SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2003

A portrait of Lyn Leach, a man with short brown hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a red and white striped tie. He is smiling and looking towards the camera.

Lyn Leach

APRO's new president wants to make rent-to-own one big, happy, politically active industry

Plus

Background checks on potential employees

RTO's Customer of the Year and Employee of the Year

Reno review: APRO's 2003 Convention highlights

POWER



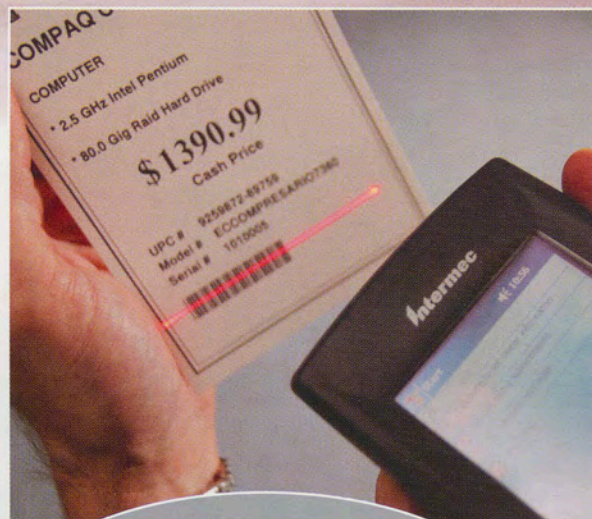
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SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2003
FEATURES

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AN APROFILE OF LYN LEACH

Elected to serve as APRO's 2003-04 president, Lyn Leach is a small-chain dealer with political savvy. Owner/operator of six Ace Rent-To-Own stores throughout Nebraska and Iowa, Leach is a strong believer in taking care of the industry that takes cares of you. He's a strong political proponent of federal legislation, gives credit where credit is due and is not one to operate without a solid agenda.

BY KRISTEN CARD

34 | **ALL IN A DAY'S WORK**

For the past four years, APRO has held an annual nationwide contest searching for the best industry employee and customer. Here are profiles of the winners of the 2003 Rental-Purchase Employee of the Year and the 2003 Rental-Purchase Customer of the Year, along with several of the entrants who made the final cut.

BY JULIE SHERRIER

40 | **EMPLOYEE CRIME AND
EMPLOYER PUNISHMENT**

Negligent hiring lawsuits are on the rise. While the law does not yet require that employers guarantee that its employees will always act properly, it does require employers to act reasonably when hiring employees.

BY ED WINN III

44 | **THE 2003 APRO IN RENO REVIEW**

APRO 2003: Riding High in Reno, the Association of Progressive Rental Organizations' annual convention and trade show, welcomed more than 950 rental dealers and vendors to John Ascuaga's Nugget in Reno in August. Take a look at some of this year's show highlights.

BY JULIE SHERRIER

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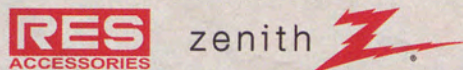
APRO HOSPITALITY ROOM
2~6 p.m., August 12, and 9 a.m.~5 p.m., August 13 and 14



WELCOME COCKTAIL RECEPTION
6~8 p.m., Tuesday, August 12



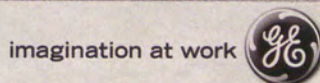
TOM KITCHENS/JOE EASON GOLF TOURNAMENT
7:30 a.m.~12:30 p.m., Wednesday, August 13



SEMINAR REFRESHMENT BREAKS
Wednesday, August 13 (RES) and Friday, August 15 (Zenith)



GALA COCKTAIL RECEPTION: RIDIN', ROPIN' AND RENTIN'
6~11 p.m., Wednesday, August 13



GENERAL SESSION, BUSINESS MEETING AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER
9~11 a.m., Thursday, August 14



EXHIBIT HALL CHAMPAGNE WELCOME
11 a.m., Thursday, August 14



COMPLIMENTARY ICE CREAM IN EXHIBIT HALL
3~4 p.m., Thursday, August 14



APRO PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION
6~7:30 p.m., Thursday, August 14



CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST
8:30~9:30 a.m., Friday, August 15



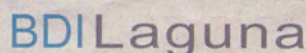
AWARDS RECEPTION
7~8 p.m., Friday, August 15



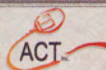
AWARDS DINNER, FEATURING RICH LITTLE
8~10 p.m., Friday, August 15



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news

BREAK

COMPILED BY
JULIE SHERRIER

RTO revenue and customer count continue to grow

The annual revenue for the nation's rent-to-own industry grew by more than \$400 million to \$5.98 billion, according to the *2003 Rental-Purchase Industry Survey*.

Last year, the industry's revenue was approximately \$5.57 billion. In addition, the number of RTO customers grew from 2.85 million to 2.94 million—the first significant customer growth in the past three years.

The annual survey was released in August at the APRO Convention and Trade Show in Reno.

Other interesting numbers show that the number of total merchandise units on rent grew from 6.4 million to almost 6.6 million over the past year after a substantial decrease in 2002 from 2001 (almost 7 million in 2001 vs. 6.4 million in 2002). The annual average household expenditure for RTO products actually decreased for the first

time in five years from \$1,642 to \$1,585. The average rental rate per unit per month increased from \$61.35 in 2002 to \$65.73 in 2003, according to the survey.

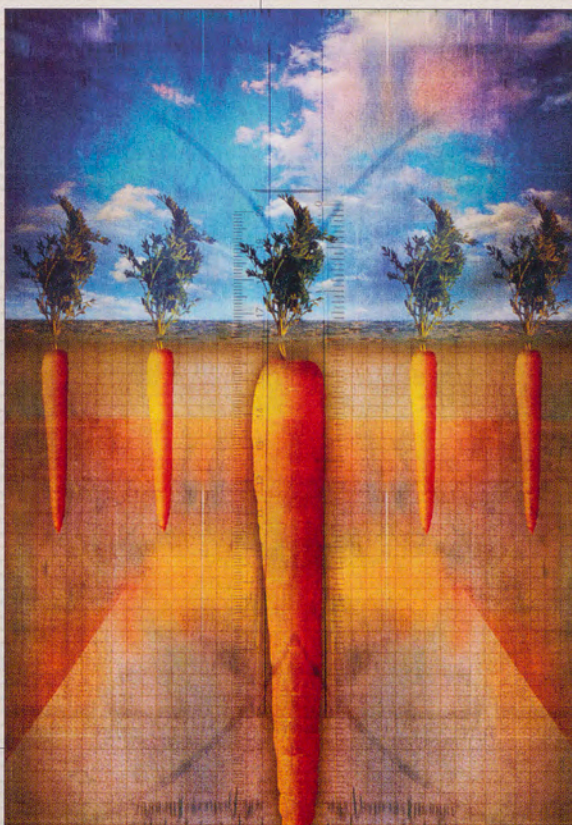
For 2003, the average store has annual revenue of \$484,299 with 613 items on rent at any one time compared to \$432,517 in revenue with 587 items on rent at any one time in 2002.

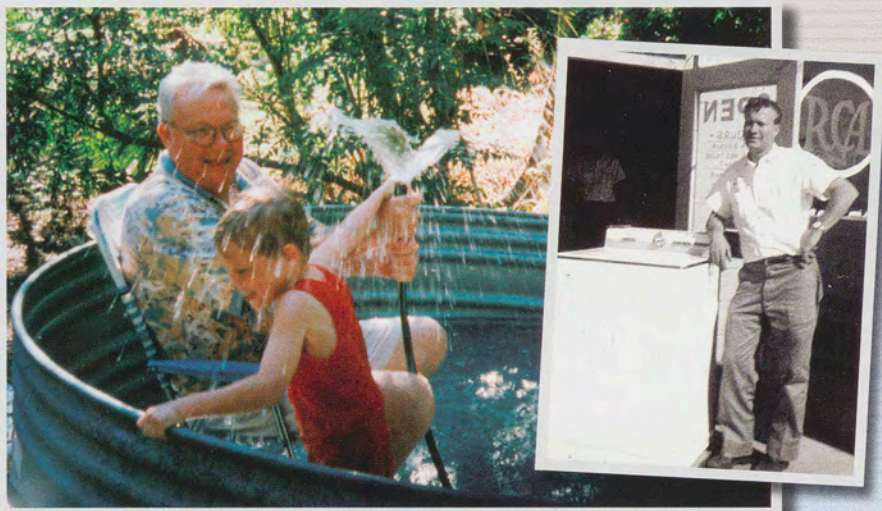
As far as product breakdown numbers are concerned, there continues to be a substantial decrease in VCR rentals and a rise in DVD players. Other items showing an increase are beds, sofas, loveseats and upholstered chairs, living room tables and recliners. Items showing a decline are jewelry, computers and decorative accessories.

More than 55 RTO companies responded to the 2003 survey. APRO members who participated receive the survey free of charge. Otherwise, the cost of the survey is \$300 to both members and non-members. To get a copy of the survey, e-mail Carolyn May at cmay@apro-rto.com.

Former RSSS owner Feldser dies

An innovator and pioneer in the rent-to-own industry, former Rental and Sales Software Sys-





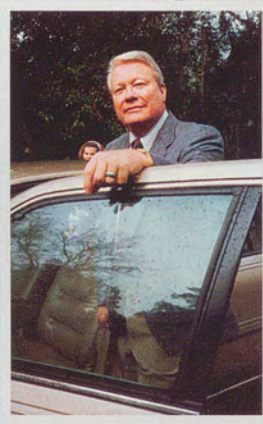
“Slat” remembered at Florida meeting

Rental dealers from around the country met in Orlando, FL, on September 17–18 to honor one of the most esteemed leaders the industry has known, Norm Slatton, who died on November 18, 1999.

When he died, he left behind a family deeply involved in the 56-store chain, Buddy’s Home Furnishings, and a lot of friends and supporters in the business. The “post roast” was held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Florida Rental Dealers Association, a convention and trade show with some 250 people in attendance. At the banquet on September 17, a number of friends and family members fondly remembered times with “Slat” and the things that they learned from him.

FRDA President Terry Beville assembled some of “Slat’s” favorite sayings about life and the rental business, which appeared on posters spread around the golf course where the Florida dealers held a tournament. What follows are some words that Slat’s family and supporters live by:

- If an employee leaves Bi-Rite trained for a better career, we’ve been successful.
- Never lie to yourself about your business.
- If your competitor is selling below cost, send him some business so he’ll go broke quicker.
- Take care of your credit and it will take care of you.
- If a customer was really “just looking,” he’d go to Busch Gardens.
- Never do things you would fire your employees for doing.
- The people I have met in this industry are my friends and this industry is my life.
- People will tell you anything you want to know; you just have to listen.
- Rent-to-own can be done with honor and dignity because our customers are really good people.
- If you don’t think you can learn something new, you had better think again.



tems owner Les Feldser, 77, passed away on August 27, in Corpus Christi, TX, from complications ensuing from open heart surgery. Funeral services were held on August 29 at Seaside Memorial Park and Funeral Home in Corpus Christi, which was well attended by family, friends and many former employees.

“The funeral was a fitting tribute to Les Feldser, a man who touched many lives and left a lasting impression on so many of us,” says RSSS General Manager Ellison Crider, who had worked with Feldser since 1979 until Feldser retired. “His memory, vision and influence will live on in the rent-to-own industry through the legacy of RSSS, L.P., whose future success he cared so much about.”

Feldser and his wife, Rosie, began their mutual career when they opened two discount

appliance stores in Corpus Christi called Feldser Discount Mart. The company grew to include eight Les Feldser rent-to-own furniture and appliance stores. In 1979, Les and Rosie opened video rental clubs inside their stores and were among the first in town to

be successful renting videos. Feldser also hired

programmers to write software for their store operations.

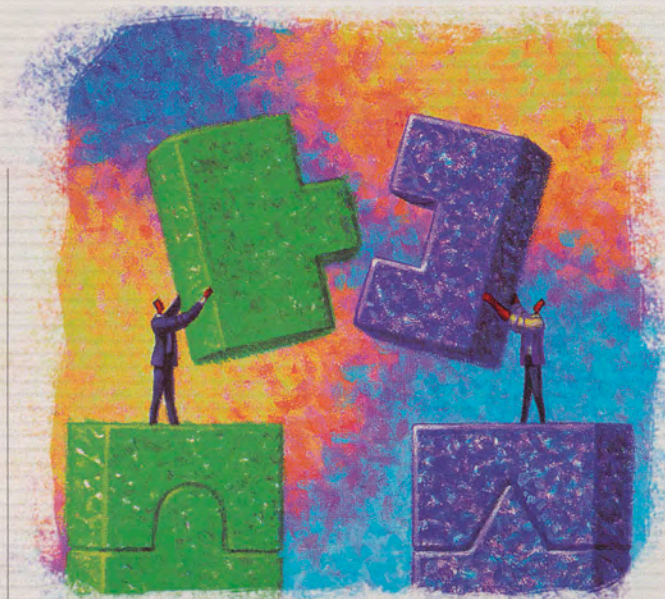
In 1983, the Feldsers created their second company called Rental and Sales Software Systems, which sold software programs to rent-to-own operations. After 41 years running two very successful businesses, the Feldsers retired and sold RSSS to



In 1998, Les Feldser, right, was awarded the Norm Smith Vendor of the Year award from Al Zagorniak, the previous year's recipient.

High Touch Inc. Feldser was awarded the APRO Vendor the Year Award in 1998.

Says High Touch President Lyle Jones: "I had not been at High Touch long before I learned that RSSS was our major competitor. I set a goal to learn more about them and that took making it a point to get to know Les and his key people. I came away with a strong respect for Les' business sense and his sense of humor. What I also observed was that Les cared about the people in the company and that



Industry M&A activity noted by national publication

An interesting article on RTO merger and acquisition activity appeared in the July 28 issue of *Mergers & Acquisitions Report*, published in New York. Associate editor Mark Cecil noted that the number of buyout deals has increased considerably between U.S. RTO companies and predicted that the "takeout multiples...will likely rise in the near term, as industry leaders say they are ready to step up the M&A pace."

Cecil reported that the valuation range with acquisitions is eight to 10 times monthly revenue, slightly higher than in the recent past. Rent-A-Center CEO Mark Speese was quoted as saying that with the increased competition, the multiples "might stay toward the higher side."

Citing recent acquisitions by Rent-A-Center (295 RentWay stores), Aaron Rents (37 Rosey Rental stores) and Rent Rite (15 Rarick's Easy Pay), Cecil reported that Rainbow Rentals, Rent-A-Center and Aaron's are hot to pick up more stores. According to Cecil, Aaron Rents "has been a longtime suitor of Rainbow, of which it owns 8 percent. Aaron's has filed several 13Ds indicating it would buy the rest of Rainbow at any time in a friendly deal, though Rainbow isn't interested in selling."

Aaron Rents CFO Gilbert Danielson, who was interviewed for the story, said that there are several "up-and-coming" privately held RTO chains that could be targets for the industry's larger players. "Rent Rite is among those," reported Cecil.

2003 2004

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NOVEMBER

21
Oregon Rental Dealers
Association meeting,
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JANUARY 2004

8-11
CES Las Vegas, 703/907-7600,
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28-31
San Francisco Furniture Market,
San Francisco Furniture Mart,
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FEBRUARY 2004

4-6
IFAM—First Annual
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19-22
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Mississippi Market Complex,
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MARCH 2004

Date to be announced
APRO Mid-Year Conference,
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Date to be announced
TRIB Group annual meeting,
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7-9
Texas Association of Rental
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NEWS BREAK

makes for a strong organization. The staff that he had pulled together made RSSS successful in

developing a strong client base. That organization of people and client base made RSSS a

very attractive acquisition for High Touch. We are fortunate to have retained the complete

RSSS organization and its customer base. The Corpus Christi operation is still Les Feldser's selection of people. We're trying not to mess it up!"

2004 APRO Legislative Conference dates set

The 2004 APRO Legislative Conference, held annually in Washington, D.C., has been scheduled for May 4-6 at the Wyndham City Center. This conference draws rental dealers and other industry supporters from across the country to meet and educate their elected officials on issues facing the rent-to-own industry.

"We have high hopes that the industry will have hearings on the two industry-supported bills in both the House and the Senate this fall," says APRO Executive Director Bill Keese. "If those hearings occur, then we will be focusing on pushing the ball across the goal line at next year's legislative conference."

To make room reservations, please call the Wyndham City Center at 202/775-0800. Registration forms will be available next February.

RPDA raises \$10,004 for children's hospital

Full-O-Pep Appliances' David P. David recently presented a check in the amount of \$10,004 to the Riley Hospital for Children. Full-O-Pep is based in Bloomington, IN, and the

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money was raised through donations of pennies, including 400 pennies raised from children's piggybanks. Riley Hospital for Children is based in Indianapolis, IN, and is one of the nation's top centers for pediatric research and care.

Rent City's DeLoach retires

On August 29, after 21 years in business, Clyde DeLoach of Rent City in

Grand Prairie, sold his store to a former employee, Ed Wisdom. According to Texas Association of Rental Agencies' Executive Director Lynn Clark, DeLoach had served as a TARA board member for more than 10 years. "He has held every executive officer position, has been instrumental in convention planning and securing dynamic speakers for our meetings," says Clark.

DeLoach and his wife, Beca, opened their first

Curtis Mathes store in 1982. A second store was opened in 1986 and a third in 1988. After Curtis Mathes went bankrupt in 1993, the DeLoaches changed the name of their store to Rent City. In 1996, they sold one store to Kelly Sayre's Big Value rental chain.

The DeLoaches' retirement will not be dull as they both plan to continue to be active in both their community and church.

Aaron Rents to open stores in Canada

Canada's premier rent-to-own company, Easyhome Ltd., will soon have some competition with the opening of six Aaron Rents stores in southwestern Ontario this fall. According to Todd Evans, Aaron's vice president of franchising, this is the first time the Atlanta-based company has expanded beyond the United States and Puerto Rico. "The Canadian market has long been of interest," says Evans.

"We can probably put in another 1,000 stores in the United States, but as we start reaching critical mass, it's natural to look at other fertile fields," says Evans.

Easyhome President David Ingram says that he is pleased about Aaron's entrance into Canada. "They're a competitor, but right now we're in a business that doesn't have huge awareness and there are only so many marketing dollars one company can spend on building that,"

he says.

Easyhome operates 130 locations in Canada. Aaron Rents has 700 stores. Ingram estimates that there is room for about 800 rent-to-own stores in Canada. "I'm

Rent-A-Center raises \$216,000 for Big Brothers Big Sisters campaign

On August 21, Rent-A-Center CEO Mark Speese presented a \$216,545 check to the Big Brothers Big Sisters youth-mentoring organization at the company's headquarters in Plano, TX. The funds were raised by Rent-A-Center stores across the country by offering customers the opportunity to sign their name to a paper egg that was then displayed on store counters for a \$1 donation each. The stores raised a total of \$116,545 and Rent-A-Center contributed the remaining \$100,000.

The money is going to be allocated to the communities where it was raised by Rent-A-Center stores where there is a BBBS chapter.

"We are very appreciative of Rent-A-Center's generous support, which not only benefits BBBS agencies in designated communities, but also provides additional BBBS visibility and awareness in those communities," says Judy Vredenburgh, president and CEO of BBBSA.

BBBS is the oldest and largest youth-mentoring organization in the country serving youth in one-to-one mentoring relationships in 5,000 communities throughout the country.



Rent-A-Center Chairman/CEO Mark Speese (right) presents the \$216,545 donation to Big Brothers Big Sisters' Joseph DiVincenzo.

not sure we'll ever have the same kind of size as there is in the United States, but there is certainly under capacity here," he says.

Washington Group's Saunders featured in D.C. publication

In an article published August 20 in *Influence online*, an e-publication owned by The National

Journal that goes to Washington lobbyists and staffers, APRO lobbying group's Tonya Saunders was interviewed



for her perspective on belonging to a select group of African-American lobbyists on the Hill.

The article, entitled "Blacks on K Street: Getting Beyond Race. African-American Lobbyists, More Powerful Than Ever But Still Few In Number, Recount Their Experiences," discussed at length the slice of life African-American lobbyists encounter on Capitol Hill.

In a series of interviews with African-American lobbyists on how they either broke into the business or how they view the world from their corner, Saunders was quoted as saying,

"May I help you?" is not a rhetorical question



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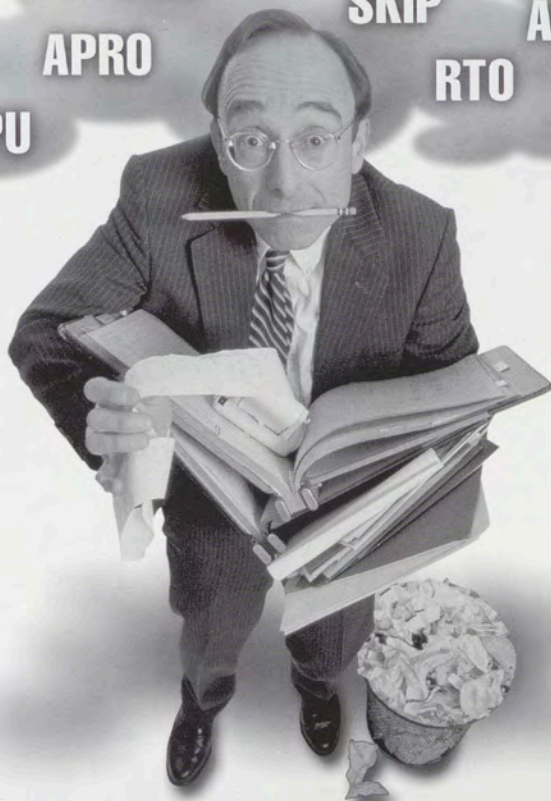
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Associate Member APRO

NEWS BREAK

"For me personally, [race] has not been an issue.

"What baffles me," says Saunders, "is how to integrate more people into this club. I believe the water's fine, once you get in." APRO has been one of Saunders' clients for almost a decade. Other clients include the Financial Services Roundtable and Eastman Kodak. She is senior vice president at the Washington Group.

Showplace sells 10 stores to Aaron Rents

In a deal that closed on July 29, Gary Ferri-man of Showplace Inc. sold 10 Showplace Lease/Purchase stores to Aaron Rents.

"Four potential acquirers made offers and Aaron Rents was the successful bidder," says Ferri-man. "As a company, we recognized that our quality wasn't meeting our standards. We thought that if we could reduce the size of our company, we could vastly improve the quality in which we operate our stores," he says. Showplace still operates 14 rental-purchase stores, in addition to seven Sunshine Cash Advance locations, a wholly owned subsidiary of Showplace Inc. All of the Showplace stores are located in Ohio.

"Of the 10 stores we

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NEWS BREAK

sold, Aaron Rents is going to keep six open and consolidate four into existing locations," says Ferriman. "It is also my understanding that Aaron Rents has a good record in keeping people who work in acquired locations."

Ferriman says that his remaining stores will now concentrate their efforts on increasing dominance in the markets in which they operate. "With our increased ability to manage and serve our customers better with a smaller number of stores, we are

going to push to dominate the markets we are in," says Ferriman.

Details of the transaction were not disclosed. "I will say that it was a pleasure doing business with Aaron Rents and CEO Charlie Loudermilk," says Ferriman.

APRO's Martinek honored

APRO Education Director Shelley Martinek was awarded the Conferon 2003 Award of Special Recognition in appreciation of her busi-



Shelley Martinek (second left) is presented with the Award of Special Recognition from Conferon's Dave Lutz, Wanda Kovacs and Jim Harmon.

ness and long-standing support. Conferon Inc. is the nation's largest independent meeting planning company based in Twinsburg, OH. APRO and Conferon have

worked together for the past 18 years assisting in the production of the annual APRO Convention and Trade Show.

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APRO over the years by seeking out the best properties and contracts for our convention," says Martinek. "I was honored to be invited to their annual meeting in Montreal. I was awarded with a beautiful plaque on stage in appreciation of my support of Conferon over the past 16 convention that I have participated in. Our Conferon account executive, Jim Harmon, however, has worked with APRO for the past 18 years. I never miss the opportunity to tell others what a great job the company does for us and appreciated the treat of a lovely trip to Canada."

Rainbow Rentals appoints director of marketing

Daniel J. Griffin Jr. will be responsible for all consumer branding and marketing activities for Rainbow Rentals Inc. as the company's new director of marketing. In this newly created position, Griffin will report to Wayland J. Russell, chairman and chief executive officer.

"Dan's 20-plus years of experience in retail branding and marketing will help us strengthen Rainbow's position in the rent-to-own marketplace and enhance our relationships with our customers," says Russell. "We hired Dan after a



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State President's Workshop boasts record attendance

At the 2003 APRO Convention and Trade Show, State Association Coordinating Committee Chairman "Tiger" John Cleek held the annual State President's Workshop in Reno on August 13.

Cleek reports that attendees at the meeting represented 23 state rental dealer associations, which broke all previous attendance records. During the meeting, Cleek reported that the past year has been the most aggressive and successful year so far in the five-year existence of this committee. Four state rental dealer associations were successfully re-organized, including Oregon (Shawn Dileo), Alabama-Mississippi (Shannon Strunk) and Georgia (Dale Tanner). Five other state associations are now targeted for re-organization and they are: Arizona, Michigan, Louisiana, Idaho and Kansas.

State association awards are presented every year during the convention and in case you haven't heard the winners yet, here they are:

- State Association of the Year: Ohio
- Most Improved State Association: Arkansas
- Legislative Achievement Award (formerly known as the Firefighter of the Year): Texas
- Continued Excellence: California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Indiana and Missouri

Seven state rental dealer association presidents talked about their personal experiences running a state association. Terry Beville in Florida discussed how FRDA has held its fourth annual legislative conference. Robert Briley of Texas talked about TARA's recent legislative achievement with the state's rental-purchase law by reducing the grace period for late fees from seven days to three. Geron Vail of Arkansas was very excited about the success of ARDA's first trade show and the generous sponsorships of vendors. Shannon Strunk of Alabama-Mississippi shared his experience in successfully organizing a multi-state association and setting goals for the upcoming year. Tony Craig of RentWay discussed how important active state associations are to a large RTO chain. Paul Davis of California reflected on his state association's first year and, finally, Amy Zeller-Fankhauser of Ohio discussed ways to keep the momentum going in order to maintain the energy of an existing state association.

"I am so proud of these folks and their dedication to their fellow businessmen and women," says Cleek. "My goal is to keep the energy flowing and get as many inactive state associations re-energized as possible and keep the excitement and participation level high in those state associations that remain active."

Please feel free to contact Cleek via e-mail (tigercleek@cleeksrto.com) or by phone at 573/449-1010 with any ideas, suggestions or to request assistance in any aspect of state rental dealer association operations. If he can't answer your question, he'll know who can help.

careful nationwide search. We look forward to building a stronger marketing program to support Rainbow's long-time success as a premier store operator."

Previously Griffin held marketing management positions at Cleveland-based Cole National Corp., an international optical and specialty gift retailer and Pearle Vision.

APRO hires new staffer

Jeannie Hutchison was hired by APRO Executive Director Bill Keese in late July to replace Faye Rougeau, who relocated to Louisiana. Hutchison was lured out of early retirement by Keese, who was impressed with her background and work



experience. Many APRO members met Hutchison at the 2003 APRO Convention in Reno in August. Hutchison will be the primary receptionist at the APRO office, with myriad administrative duties.

Please join us in welcoming Jeannie Hutchison to APRO! ■

Answers :) to Important Rent to Own FAQ's...



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On Friday morning, August 15, my life changed. In the blink of an eye, I was elected president of what I believe is the greatest association on this planet. Many of the people I greatly admire are former APRO presidents. Now I am faced with the daunting task of living up to the standards these rental-purchase professionals have set.

There are many goals that the Association must accomplish this year. We, the members of APRO, are very fortunate to have such a talented and committed board of directors and staff to see that we stay on course and accomplish these

who help us most, our customers. David P. David and Ernie Lewallen will serve as education committee co-chairmen. Continued improvement and expansion of the online training program will be one of their many goals.

Kevin Quinn is chairman of the membership committee, which hopes to exceed the 17 percent growth in member stores achieved this year. Mamie Harper continues her incredible track record of success as PAC chairperson. Her committee will be asking for your support so we can once again break last year's fundraising record. Mamie also will be chairing the women in rent to own committee, with an eye on humanitarian efforts.

"Tiger" John Cleek continues as state association coordinating committee chairman with a goal of strengthening all state associations. Amy Zeller and Sidney Burton are leading the charge to reorganize the Michigan state association. Tiger will also chair the communications committee, working on our online publications, Web sites and the award-winning *Progressive Rentals* magazine.

Mike Viveiros will chair the ethics committee and lead our effort to leave no customer complaint addressed to APRO unsolved. Larry Carrico will chair the budget committee, seeing that all our revenues and dues are spent wisely and that the numbers all balance. Finally, Ernie Lewallen will chair the historical committee.

Board members who are not chairing a committee, but who are doing terrific work, include Gary Romine, Jeff Lebakken, Amy Zeller, Gary Hughes, Robert Briley, Kelly Sayre and Mark Windsor. Be sure to thank these dealers for their tireless efforts on behalf of the industry.

I thank you for the opportunity to serve as your president and the privilege of helping coordinate the accomplishment of this work. Feel free to call me about anything anytime. I understand, well and good, that first and foremost, I work for you, the members. ■

Lyn Leach is the owner of Ace Furniture and TV in Malcom, NE.

"Feel free to call me about anything anytime. I understand well and good, that first and foremost, I work for you, the members."

A board of distinction

goals. We will work as hard as humanly possible to show you the success you deserve.

In August, Bill Keese and the fantastic staff of APRO put on a convention for all to enjoy. From the general session to the golf tournament, the seminars to the gala dinner and awards ceremony with Rich Little, it was awesome. For a job well done, thank you APRO staff and all the APRO members who helped put it together.

We have a great deal on our plates during the next 12 months. Task No. 1 is getting federal legislation passed to protect our customers and our businesses. Chris Korst is our government relations chairman and if there is anyone who can help guide us in this quest of seeing President Bush sign the "Rental Purchase Act" into law, he is the one. We all need to stay in touch with our senators and congressmen and women and urge them, if they have not already, to sign on as cosponsors of S 884, our Senate bill, and HR 996, our House bill. It is very possible that we will end up with both bills passing and the president signing rental-purchase law by the end of this Congress.

Shannon Strunk will be chairing the nominating committee and the public relations committee. The public relations committee is working on the APRO scholarship program, awarding college scholarships to rental-purchase customer's families. This program helps those



By LYN LEACH
APRO's President

What's Hot...



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The wisest advice I ever received about the RTO industry came on my third day as executive director. Dick Grauel, APRO's president at the time, told me we have an obligation "to always treat our customers with dignity and respect...that's how you build a company...that's how you build an industry."

What a great philosophy to build an industry on! Even more so, what a great philosophy that is to live our lives by. What if we carried this philosophy beyond our customers and included our employees, suppliers, friends and neighbors?

Respecting employees

Commitment and the proper execution are the manifestations that define a life of respecting others with dignity. It's not enough just to make a commitment, one should fulfill that commitment.

Have you ever called for a plumber to repair a leak in your kitchen faucet and heard a friendly voice tell you a repairman will be out the next day at 10 a.m.? Then you take off work and so does the plumber, leaving you with a drippy faucet for another day. If you are like most of us, you get mad and resent the fact that the commitment to repair your faucet wasn't fulfilled. The plumber and his company have just lost your respect.

Think, for a moment, about how your rental customers feel when you commit to them. Assume you don't execute that commitment. How will they feel? Wouldn't you feel the same way if a promise had been broken with you? The customers will get mad and frustrated and may take their business to another company. If you fail to execute on your commitment, you have failed to keep them as a good customer. It's not a good way to build your BOR.



By BILL KEESE
APRO's Executive Director

Friends are more forgiving of broken commitments. However, if you do it enough times, they will either strike you from their friendship list or learn they cannot depend on you.

Some people believed in treating their vendors

or suppliers like candy wrappers. If a supplier doesn't ask how high to jump when you say "jump," then throw them away. In the restaurant business, I know of occasions where a restaurateur couldn't get emergency deliveries on holidays when they ran out of food for their customers. They treated their suppliers like candy wrappers. They had to close their doors and turn away a lot of hungry people.

Let's talk about employees. More conflicts arise between management and labor than any other area of business. Currently, we are in an economic climate where there are more people looking for work than there are jobs. Be careful! Every management course, book or consultant will advise, even in this type of climate, that good employees are hard to find and expensive to train and should be treated with respect and dignity.

When a commitment is made to an employee, it must not only be fulfilled, it must be done so in a reasonable amount of time. Where issues arise and the commitment must be changed, involve the employee in the development of the change. You invite disappointment and resentment to do otherwise.

Because of the economic control of management over labor, it is often impossible to measure the real damage done to an employee's psyche when a commitment has not been fulfilled. Unfulfilled commitments will result in the employee harboring feelings of hurt and anger, resulting in a loss of respect for you and your policies from a tenured and valued employee. Issues of personal worth and value to the company are more likely to cause problems than issues involving compensation. Try to avoid solving one problem by creating another, possibly bigger, more costly ones. ■

Bill Keese's e-mail address is bkeese@apro-rto.com.

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"Issues of personal worth and value to the company are more likely to cause problems than issues involving compensation."

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A rental dealer called the other day to talk about troubles he was having in his family business. Over the years we have seen a lot of families in rent-to-own. The Talley brothers started the industry together some 40 years ago. Then we have had other industry-famous siblings: the White brothers (Bill and Bob), the Grauel brothers (Dick and Steve), the Quinn brothers (Kevin and Dan), the Sutton brothers (Larry and Steve) and the Leach brothers (Lyn and Jeff) to name just a few.

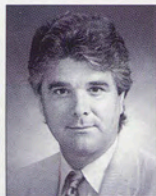
Interestingly, the groups that I just named,

O brother, who art thou?

while they were or are still in rent-to-own, chose not to do business together. There may be something in the nature of a daily grind business like ours that puts a strain on family relationships.

That was the gist of the conversation I had with this particular rental dealer. I had no advice to give this dealer. I just listened. He said there was no easy solution. Feelings were going to be hurt no matter what. The choice he had to make was whether to continue to suffer in silence or finally do something and suffer the consequences.

I have to wonder why it is that brothers who have grown up to be competitive, antagonistic or jealous ever think that they can run a business together harmoniously. Of course, maybe these relatives once got along famously and cannot do so anymore because of the extraordinary pressures that arise in the rental business.



By ED WINN III
APRO's General Counsel

If that is indeed the case, then the answer is simple—figure out a way to split the difference and recover that once-harmonious family tie. For the family members who never got along all that well and now get along even less because they are in business together, sort

of deserve what they got. One could say that they should have known better. No one would rationally think that trying to run a difficult, challenging, risky and, at times, discouraging and fretful business like ours would bring people who al-

ready had issues with one another any closer together.

In either case, the answer seems to point toward separating the business. That might be easier said than done if such a separation risks devaluing the enterprise, which could be the case if all parties have their areas of expertise and add real value to the company through their efforts. The loss of a team member can set the company back, although no one is finally irreplaceable.

It is interesting that the business has attracted so many families. Maybe the exigencies of rent-to-own make people

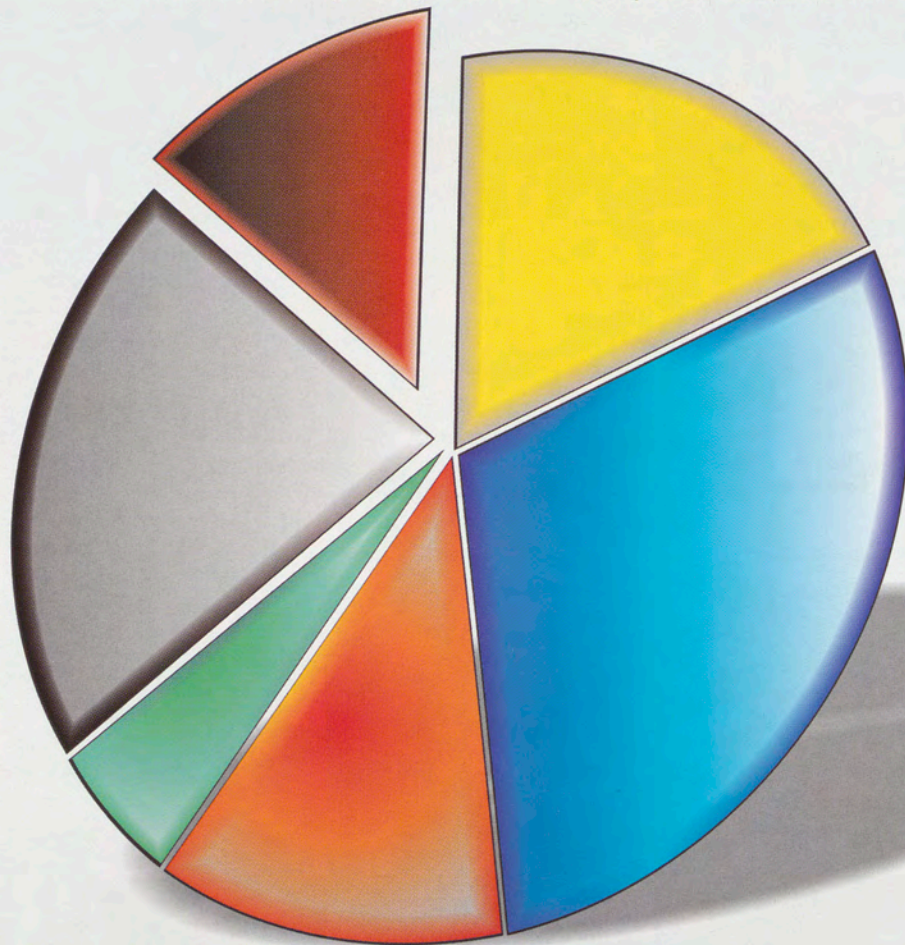
instinctively seek relatives to help solve the many problems that arise every day. Maybe the opportunity is so good that family members want to share it. Perhaps in a business where trust is at a premium, we trust family first and foremost. Whatever the reason, we seem to attract more than our fair share of real, honest-to-God family enterprises. It brings a real strength to the industry, even when things become strained.

If you are in the rental business with family members and are at odds with any of them, I would suggest first that you keep the air as clear as you can. If open communication cannot solve the problem(s), then you may need to do something apart. Ernie and Willie Talley parted ways and both achieved remarkable success on their own. There is no reason why you and yours cannot do the same. Breaking up a family business does not sound like fun or an easy thing to do, but at times it may be the only thing to do. ■

Ed Winn's e-mail address is edwinn@e-bylaw.com.

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"Maybe the [RTO] opportunity is so good that family members want to share it. Perhaps in a business where trust is a premium, we trust family first and foremost."

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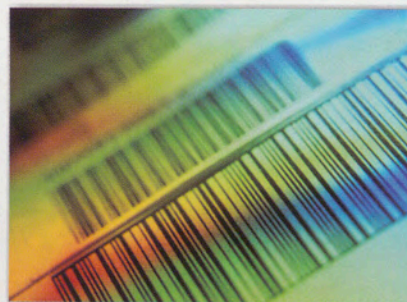
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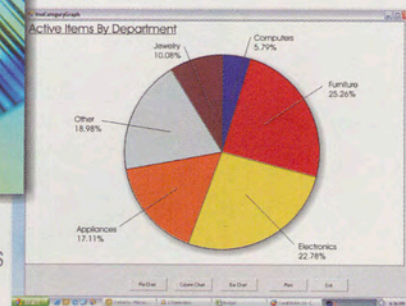
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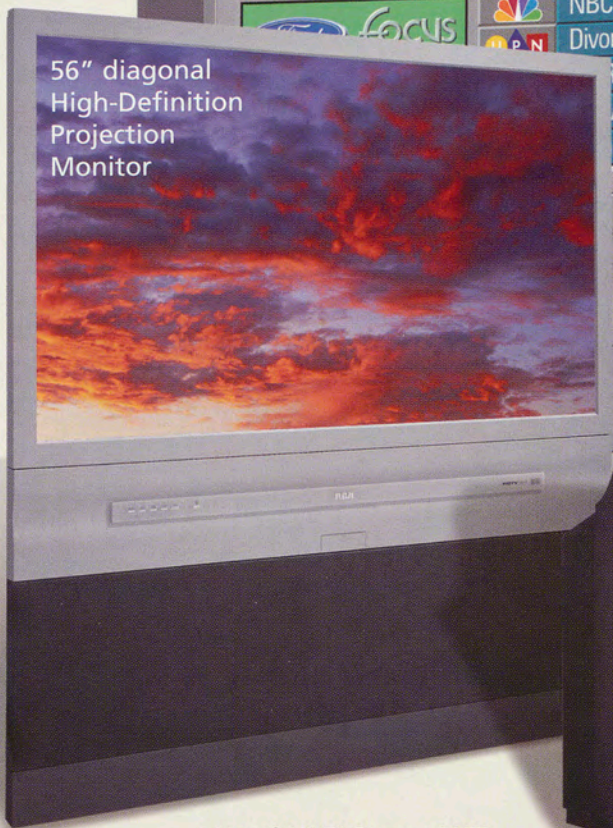
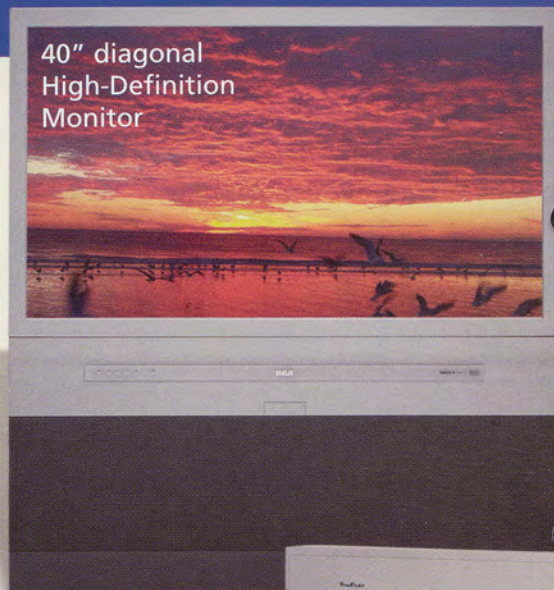
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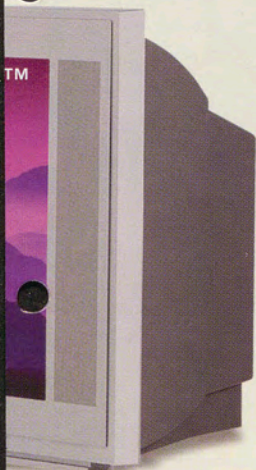
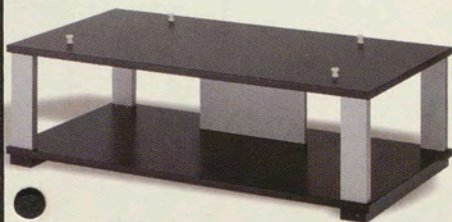
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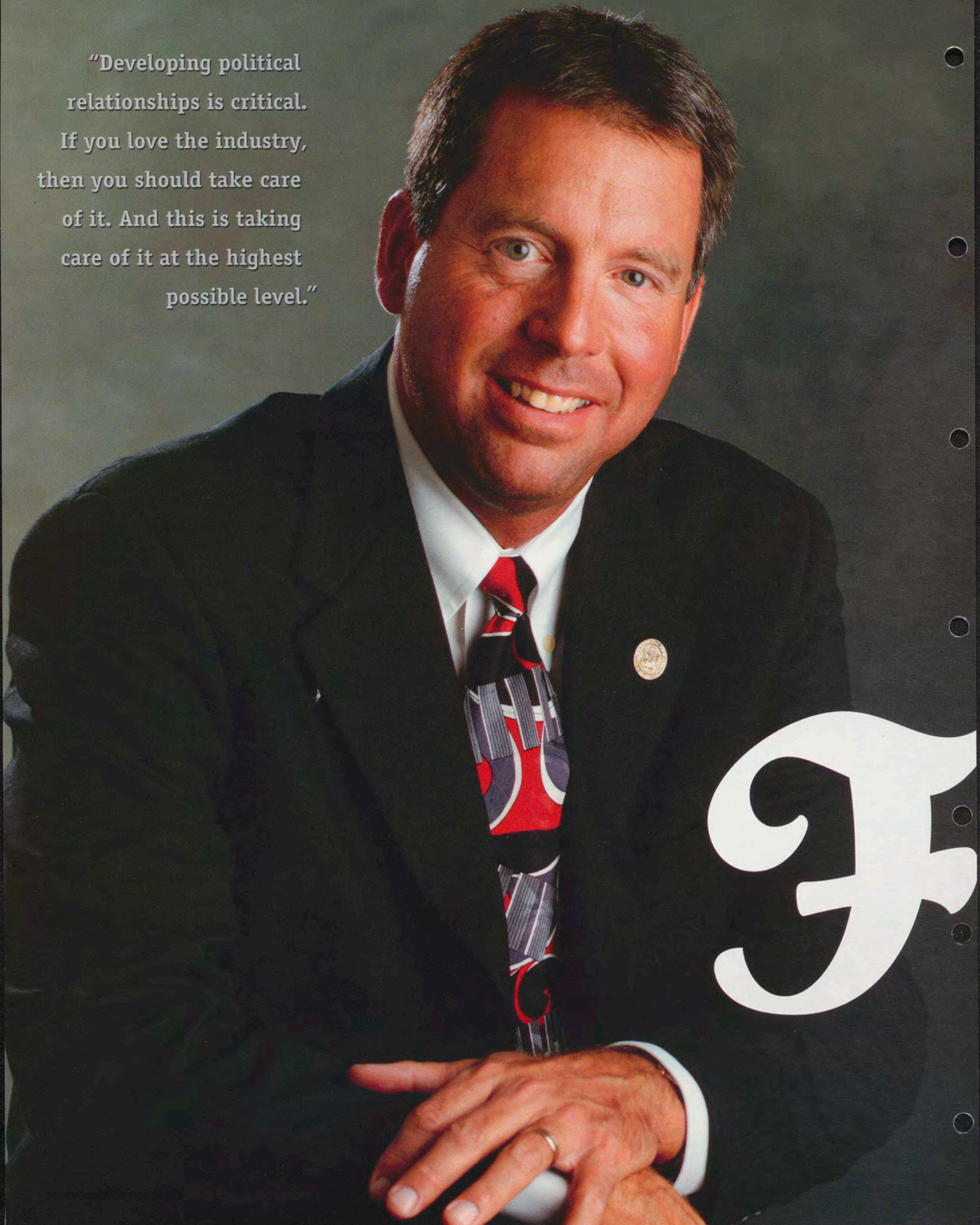
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"Developing political relationships is critical. If you love the industry, then you should take care of it. And this is taking care of it at the highest possible level."



**APRO's new president,
Lyn Leach, envisions
rent-to-own as one
big, happy, politically
active industry**

IT'S ALL IN THE

family

**APROFILE BY KRISTEN CARD
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID OMER**

A conversation with Lyn Leach is, generally speaking, a talk with a measured Midwesterner. This Nebraska native's answers tend to be straightforward yet thoughtful, at times even deliberative. Yet ask Leach to pinpoint his single greatest professional achievement and he doesn't miss a beat.

"Easy," he says, without a hint of hesitation. "In 2001, I was given the industry's highest honor when APRO named me Rental Dealer of the Year.

"There's no question that was my proudest moment in the industry," says Leach. "It's recognition from your peers that you're making a difference in the industry. It demonstrates you're doing business right, you're doing the right things for your clients and fellow workers, and it acknowledges your involvement in the big picture. To get an award like that from an industry as great as this one is, frankly, humbling and a little overwhelming."

For Leach, it was a moment rooted in family. It was a family member who introduced him to the rental-purchase industry and now it was his extended RTO family who were applauding him as the best among them.

F

FAMILY IS A CONCEPT THAT SEEMS to be reflected in every facet of Leach's life, both personally and professionally. Leach was just a teenager when he began working with his father, a furniture and appliance retailer, performing a vast variety of tasks, from delivery-truck driving to store management. But when Leach graduated from the University of Nebraska and began seriously considering his future career path, his father surprised him by directing him away from the family business—sort of.

"He could see the writing on the wall," says Leach. "He was watching his competitors close down and knew the independent furniture and appliance retailer was going the way of the dinosaur, becoming extinct. He told me, 'The wave of the future is rent-to-own. If you want to be involved in furniture, appliances and electronics, the way to do it is to go into the rental-purchase industry, so you don't have to compete against the retail giants.'"

Together, the duo decided to attend APRO's second annual convention in 1982 to see what the rental-purchase industry was all about. What they discovered was a welcoming group of entrepreneurs, eager to share their enthusiasm and best practices. RTO Inc. owner Barry Gambini and brothers Dave and Ron Happe went so far as to invite Leach out to California to learn the ropes first-hand through their business; Leach accepted. When he returned home to Nebraska, Leach was well-prepared to launch his own business. In 1982, he opened up the first Ace Rent-To-Own in Lincoln. And again, family played a vital role.

"My father provided financial help for that first store," Leach says. "He's retired now, but he stayed with me through the opening of several more stores. If it weren't for him and his foresight and his financial support, this company would not be where it is today."

A slow, steady growth plan

TODAY, THERE ARE NINE Ace Rent-To-Own stores throughout Nebraska and Iowa—three are managed by Lyn's younger brother, Jeff, and the remaining six stores are owned and run by Lyn; his seventh location is scheduled to open this fall.

Describing the chain's past growth as "slow and steady," Leach intends to continue that pattern with a long-term plan of opening one new store a year over the next decade. He credits his ability to continue such consistent expansion, despite mounting competition and a sagging economy, to a single factor.

"We have absolutely zero borrowed money," Leach says. "We've grown on capital and on capital only, and we've not grown until we could afford to do so."

Leach says the company's lack of loans also provides a competitive advantage. "Because we don't have the over-

"Our company philosophy is real simple: we offer the absolute best customer service in the industry. Seventy-one percent of our business every day is repeat customers. They can see our money's where our mouth is."

head of borrowed money, we're able to turn a profit on a lower price and pass that savings on to our customers."

Another unique feature and distinct advantage of Ace over competitors is its "Good News Exchange Program." The policy provides a 100-percent lifetime exchange guarantee, which lets Ace customers who change their minds about a product transfer the payments they've made to anything else in the store. If they choose to close their account, then they can reactivate it later, using their past paid rent toward paying for a new item.

"Our company philosophy is real simple: we offer the absolute best customer service in the industry," says

Leach. "Seventy-one percent of our business every day is repeat customers. They can see our money's where our mouth is. The 'Good News' is, our clients don't lose what they've paid. We go out of our way to make sure in the end they have something to show for their money."

Doing right by employees and customers

TAKING CARE OF CUSTOMERS IS, of course, only half of the equation. Not surprisingly, Leach adopts an extremely personal, hands-on approach to keeping his staff of about 40 "fellow workers" content. He interviews and hires every employee, conducts reviews, grants raises and promotions and copes with all personnel issues himself. He spends time weekly in each of his stores observing day-to-day activity and occasionally waiting on customers or accepting payments.

"We try to foster a family work environment," Leach says. "My

employees don't work for me; they work with me. They deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. I consider them my second family."

Leach works to offer Ace "family members" plenty of opportunities for friendly competition amongst themselves. From Las Vegas jaunts to Caribbean cruises, Leach provides a continuous stream of lavish incentives, but clearly views them as additions to a strong compensatory base.

"You should pay employees as much as you can possibly afford to—more than you think you can afford to," says Leach. "Whenever I've done that, it has paid dividends. People stay with the company. It makes me feel good about



the company and what it's about. I sleep well at night because I'm not profiting at someone else's expense; I'm profiting along with them. They're family. They're being taken care of along with the corporation."

That carefully fashioned familial feeling is enhanced by the presence of Leach's real family. His wife, Natalie, serves as the company's vice president, managing the home office and the firm's bookkeeping. Leach's two children, Mindy, 15, and Ben, 13, also help with the business as needed, from filing to unpacking lamps to helping orchestrate grand openings.

The Leaches' free time is spent together as well, involved in common interests. With an ancestry rich in ranching, the Leach family spends many weekends training, riding and showing horses; Leach himself frequently competes in team roping events at regional rodeos. The family also raises Longhorn cattle, which they use for roping practice and, eventually, for dinner; in fact, Leach offers his fellow workers quarters of beef at cost.

No stranger to politics

LEACH'S FAMILY-STYLE way of doing business might come across as a modern-day, heartland-of-America fairytale, the moral of which goes something like, nice guys do finish first. But don't mistake Leach's solid principles and upbeat outlook for naiveté. He has a firm grip on the issues and challenges facing the RTO industry, as well as a

plan for dealing with them—and it begins on Capitol Hill.

"This is a very, very important time for our industry," Leach says. "We're edging ever-closer to having a federal law protecting rental-purchase dealers and customers [HR 996/S 884, the Consumer Rental-Purchase Agreement Act], and I think it's going to change the landscape of this industry. Our industry isn't safe until we have that legislation. We live with an ever-present fear that somebody could walk into

committee and served as co-chair of the APRO political action committee with colleague Mamie Harper. Their joint objective is to persuade every member and as many of their workers as possible to contribute to the APRO PAC, a first step toward strengthening the industry through political participation.

"Developing political relationships is critical," says Leach. "My relationships with my elected officials has given me such a perspective on the industry and it's paid me tenfold

"What I know about people in this industry is, they're willing to help. All you have to do is ask, and they'll put aside whatever they're doing—even at their own expense—to help do whatever is necessary. As president, I'd like to ask more."

Nebraska or any other dealers' state, change their state law and put them out of business. We can't let that happen. This bill is the first order of business."

Leach is no newcomer to the political side of the industry. He is a former member of APRO's government relations committee, past chairman of the legislative conference committee and personally has gathered six congressional and two senatorial co-sponsorships for HR 996/S 884.

Leach also chaired the membership

rewards in my pride of this industry. It's been amazing to me how willing politicians are to help when they see it's the right thing to do. And when they become our allies, it's important for us to become allies of theirs. If you love the industry, then you should take care of it. And this is taking care of it at the highest possible level."

APRO leadership is preparing to develop a new five-year plan and, beyond approval of the Consumer Rental-Purchase Agreement Act, Leach wants to see the RTO industry make significant progress in the areas of public image, state association revitalization and further support for the customers who support APRO dealers.

As past chairman of APRO's ethics committee and a former member of the public relations committee, Leach wants to see the rental-purchase industry's image continue to improve; he believes it begins with each dealer and his or her own personal integrity.

"The best piece of advice I've gotten from my dad is to always conduct myself in a way that I and the rest of the family would be proud of, both personally and professionally," Leach says. "We're all going to make mistakes



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF LYNN LEACH

and if you tell the truth about them and make decisions based upon the best interests of everybody, then you can never get too far off-course."

Leach also would like to advance APRO board member "Tiger" John Cleek's efforts to breathe new life into dormant state associations, with the ultimate goal of establishing a hearty, dynamic industry presence and organization within every state where rental-purchase dealers live and work.

"Most store-level personnel can't be involved in the industry at a national level," says Leach. "But they can be very active at the state level. And the greater involvement they can have in the industry, the greater pride and ownership they'll have, the better they'll run their stores and the better the industry will become."

Additionally, Leach wants to explore ways to give back to the RTO industry's faithful customers. He favors fellow board member Shannon Strunk's idea for an APRO scholarship program.

"I think education and bettering people in their position, giving them an opportunity to apply for a college scholarship that would give them a leg up that they didn't have before is a program I'd like to see initiated and watch rental-purchase customers benefit from," Leach says.

Looking ahead

AT THE END OF THE PROVERBIAL DAY, Leach can't help but return to his family-centered beliefs and values. The legacy he'd most like to leave as APRO president is a broadening of the circle—a commitment to shaping APRO into an association of inclusion.

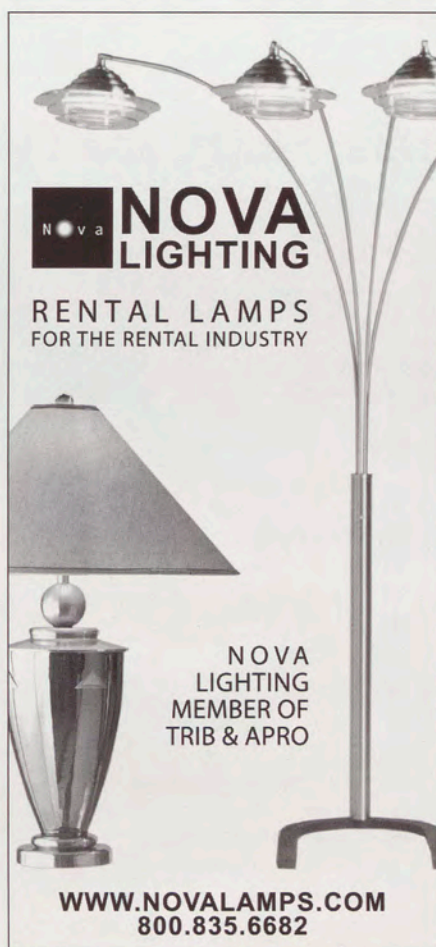
"I'd like to see APRO grow and include even more people to create even more opportunities for involvement," says Leach. "What I know about people in this industry is that they're willing to help. All you have to do is ask and they'll put aside whatever they're doing—even at their own expense—to help do whatever is necessary. As president, I'd like to ask more. I want to include more people and ask more of them to make our industry an even better one."

So dealers who'd rather reap the

rewards of APRO membership passively or anonymously, beware: You're part of the family and Lyn Leach is about to do a little good old-fashioned bar-raising. And with Leach's pumped-up, hunkered-down, give-and-you'll-receive mentality—along with his sheer exuberance for his profession—he just might lift you over.

"For me, the rental-purchase industry is not just a job, it's not just a career. It's a life," Leach says. "The truth is, I get up every day and throw my hands in the air and say, 'Yes! I'm proud to be in this, I'm fortunate to be in this. I just love what I do.'"

Kristin Card is a free-lance writer.



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All in a day's work



**PROFILES OF
THIS YEAR'S
RENTAL-PURCHASE
EMPLOYEE OF
THE YEAR AND
CUSTOMER OF THE
YEAR AND THEIR
RUNNERS-UP**

For the past four years, APRO has held an annual nationwide contest searching for a rental-purchase employee and customer who clearly stand apart from their peers in their work ethic and through community involvement. Entry forms are sent out in the spring asking for nominations and by early July, a panel of judges culled through the most compelling stories to select two individuals who serve as examples to their peers, friends and families.

By Julie Sherrier | Illustration by Larry Goode





Each winner deserves this special recognition for not only what they contribute to the industry, but also for their humanitarian deeds that have nothing to do with rent-to-own. These individuals truly characterize the many different types of people who work within the industry and the wide variety of compassionate customers we serve.  APRO presents a choice of a travel package for two to the annual convention or its equivalent to each winner. Awards are presented during the Association's annual convention, which was held August 12–15 in Reno this year.  Here are the year's winners and the runners-up:



**2003 APRO
EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR:
ANTHONY ROBINSON
RENT-A-CENTER
LAKEWOOD, CO**

When people refer to single parenthood, the image that comes to mind is usually that of a working mom. Anthony Robinson, 36, of Lakewood, CO, presents a sharp contrast as he is a single parent of four girls and a boy. Robinson is a busy account manager at a Rent-A-Center store who makes his customers—and his kids—feel that they are his first priority. Of course, his children are the ones who really come first, but don't tell his customers that.

"As an account manager, I have my own set of customers who know they can call on me personally when they need me. I am on a first-name basis with my customers and am dedicated to giving the best customer service I can," says Robinson.

When asked how he manages to balance his long hours at the store and managing the lives of his children, Robinson is quick to respond. "I drop them all off at school in the morning and take a late lunch break to pick them up when school is out to bring them home and get them started on their homework. I buy lots of frozen foods in case I'm not home from work at dinnertime to cook for them," he says.

Robinson's daughters are T'shinae, 11, and Jacorie, 5. He adopted his sister's daughters, Mary, 17, and Champagne, 14, who were left without a home after their mother died from cancer two years ago. Robinson's son's primary residence is with his mother.

"I had to step up and be responsible rather quickly," says Robinson. "My choices became pretty easy to make. I could have gone the route of gangs and drugs, but I knew I wasn't going to let my kids go down that path with me."

Robinson made a choice early on when he took part in Street Beat in Denver, a program for at-risk or troubled youth. "We had a dance troupe and used to perform all over Denver," he says. "I went there as an

opportunity after high school and became a member and then an instructor."

While his responsibilities as a primary provider grew, Robinson continued to work with troubled youth at Street Beat. His mentoring role often followed him home as he counseled children and parents over the phone. "I wish I was still in that business, but the funding was cut," he says.

Today, Robinson works at the Lakewood Rent-A-Center and recently moved his family to a better home in nearby Aurora, CO. His dream is to one day open a small restaurant.

"My focus is the kids because they need somebody," says Robinson. "That's my drive to keep going. I don't have that 'quit' in my system."



Anthony Robinson (center) is presented with the 2003 Rental-Purchase Employee of the Year award from Rent-A-Center's Chris Korst, APRO's 2002–03 President Gary Romine and Rent-A-Center's Matt Harveson and Mitch Fadel.

 **EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR FINALISTS** 

**Kent Hoffman,
Full-O-Pep Appliances, Martinsville, IN**

Fast thinking is what helped quite a handful of Martinsville, IN, townspeople after a tornado ripped through the town in September 2002 and left many homeless. Full-O-Pep Appliances' Ken Hoffman spent countless hours organizing, promoting and finding products from Full-O-Pep's 33 store locations throughout the state to hold a benefit auction for the tornado victims. The auction raised \$11,000 of which 100 per-





cent was donated to the local chapter of the Red Cross and to the Martinsville Tornado Relief Fund.

Hundreds of people showed up for the auction and were extremely relieved to be able to replace their furnishings at such good prices. "We heard a thousand thank you's that day and many of the people said they would never forget that Kent and the staff were there for them. Full-O-Pep and the rent-to-own industry are grateful to Kent for his hard work, kindness and

was hired at Baber's in 1991 in an under-performing store. Under his leadership, that store became one of the most profitable and Williams developed a reputation as a manager who took care of his customers and developed a loyal customer base.

Due to his excellent leadership skills, Williams was promoted to district manager and earned the honor of "District Manager of the Year" two years in a row. Not only is Williams a corporate leader, but he is also

"My focus is the kids because they need somebody. I had to step up and be responsible rather quickly. My choices became pretty easy to make. I could have gone the route of gangs and drugs, but I knew I wasn't going to let my kids go down that path with me."

his 20 years of service to the industry," says Full-O-Pep General Manager David P. David.

Hoffman and his wife, Peggy, are also supporters of hospice and have been known to make anonymous contributions to families in need and to help out their own neighbors and families during hard times.

Tracy Lewis, Kelly Rentals, Danville, LA

Tracy Lewis, district manager at Kelly Rentals in Danville, LA, is one of the company's only employees who regularly attends the annual APRO Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., in order to promote the industry's federal legislative agenda. He has been instrumental in generating co-sponsorships for both HR 1701 and HR 996 from Congressmen from Virginia and North Carolina.

Lewis was the second person hired at Kelly Rentals in 1984. He has moved up the ranks from account manager to district manager. The store values Lewis' 19 years of service to the company and credits its success to Lewis' positive attitude and solid work ethic. His honesty, patience and respect for others are virtues contributing to the fact that he has never received a customer complaint.

Lewis and his wife, Diana, also are affiliated with a local chapter of Domestic Violence Emergency Services. Lewis recently participated in DOVE's annual fund-raising event to help support its efforts in the community.

Danny Williams, Baber's, Columbus, MS

Known affectionately by employees in his district as the "Tasmanian Devil," Danny Williams sweeps into his stores like the whirling cartoon character in his zeal to improve the store's performance. Williams

a compassionate and caring community and church leader. He is a deacon of his church, a choir member and a Sunday school teacher. He has gone on mission trips to Maryland and West Virginia to help build a new church and to assist the needy.

Williams also has lent a hand helping his neighbors in Columbus in the aftermath of two devastating storms by working endless hours sawing and removing trees off houses and helping with repairs. He participated in the industry's Habitat For Humanity Austin build several years ago, braving 90-degree heat to construct "The House that APRO Built." And, last but not least, Williams helped a fellow employee by replacing household items anonymously when that employee lost his home to a fire.



**2003 APRO
CUSTOMER OF THE YEAR:
DONNA BROWN
BABER'S
TUPELO, MS**

Baber's customer Donna Brown firmly believes that she survived a very difficult childhood in order to share her story with others. "God left me here to tell my story," says Brown. "I want to help other people because I've been helped."

A minister and evangelist, Brown was raised by an alcoholic mother who was unable to hold down a job and, eventually, a home. "I had to overcome a lot of anger from my childhood," she says. "Just because you're a minister doesn't mean you have it all together. We all have to overcome things."





Donna Brown (second left) with her husband, James (center) is presented with the 2003 Rental-Purchase Customer of the Year award from APRO's 2002-03 President Gary Romine and Cynthia Baber-Strunk and Shannon Strunk.

Brown is a frequent, longtime customer at Baber's in Tupelo. "She's a great customer," says store manager Edith Mills. "She is friendly, smiling and always pleasant to be around," says Mills. Over the years, Brown has rented to own a washer, two dryers, living room furniture, a home entertainment system, electronics and jew-

cancer and may not have long to live. Preparing for the worst, she recorded audio messages for her only son for the special events in his life such as high school graduation and marriage in the event that she would not be there.

While fighting and surviving cancer, Lawson has raised her son and helped to care for her ailing father, grandmother and other family members as well. She currently awaits the birth of her third grandchild. She is quick to credit her faith and God for helping her get through the tough times. "None of this would have happened without God on my side," she says.

Johnnie Davis, Baber's, Natchez, MS

Johnnie Davis is a single mother and a frequent, longtime Baber's customer who is very dedicated to her raising her children. She never complains and always has a smile, reports the staff at the Baber's store in Natchez, MS. Davis is always looking out for someone else. For example, she works for the Stew Pot, a local charity, to make sure that no one goes without a

"I had to overcome a lot of anger from my childhood. Just because you're a minister doesn't mean you have it all together. We all have to overcome things."

elry. "The people at Baber's are honest and treat me with respect," says Brown. "Because of Baber's, I now have something to leave behind for my children," she says.

Brown also works at a local Red Lobster restaurant, but her true calling is helping others in need. It is not unusual for her to get a call to come to the hospital to visit someone who is ill. She is a regular visitor to nursing homes to cheer up the elderly. She exudes a calm, warm presence and offers comforting prayers to those in need of healing. Brown has spent a great deal of time counseling a young mother struggling with drug addiction and has even taken on the responsibility of helping to raise this woman's child.

Through her generosity, insight and caring, Donna Brown is truly a shining star in her community.

hot meal. While she is scheduled to leave at 2 p.m. every day, she stays to start the next day's meal. She truly exemplifies a generous community spirit.

Hursey Willingham, Baber's, Tupelo, MS

Hursey Willingham has been a dedicated customer at Baber's for many years. He says he likes doing business with the staff at Baber's because he knows he can get exactly what he wants when he wants it. Almost everything in his home has been acquired through the Tupelo store. Willingham and his wife, Gracie, have been married for 26 years and have three children and three grandchildren. Willingham has worked at Cooper Tire for 15 years and is a lead supervisor. He also is a deacon at his church.

Customer of the Year Finalists

Melinda Lawson, American Rentals, Columbus, IN

Melinda Lawson was the first customer at the American Rentals store in Columbus when it opened in 1982. Lawson is proud that her entire home is furnished with products from the store. Four years later, Lawson receiving devastating news that she had

As you can tell, choosing a winner from this exemplary group of contestants presented a tough challenge. All of the entries do show us the wonderful variety of people associated with this industry. With employees and customers like them, the industry has more than enough reason to celebrate and honor those who bring just that little bit of extra care and concern to their communities. ■



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**Negligent hiring of
rental store employees
and the necessity of
criminal background checks**

employee

CRIME AND



BY ED WYNN III

Negligent hiring lawsuits are on the rise. For example, an employee commits some heinous crime against a customer, another employee or some random third party and the company gets sued by the injured party because the company did not use proper care when hiring this employee in the first place.

The plaintiff will argue that the company should have uncovered the employee's troubled past, which would have revealed that he was dangerous and likely to inflict harm in the future. These lawsuits attempt to hold employers liable for the criminal conduct of employees. Plaintiffs make the argument that the employer acted negligently when hiring the employee who committed the wrongful act and therefore must pay for what the employee did even when the act was not directly related to the job.

In the rental context, if a customer or a customer's

property is injured during a collection effort by a company employee, the rental company can expect, among other claims, one for negligent hiring. These kinds of lawsuits are on the rise due to an increased concern over workplace safety, generally after 9/11, and repeated stories of employees "going postal" during the 1990s and, lately, corporate scandals involving white-collar criminals that have crumbled empires.

The law does not yet require that employers guarantee that its employees will always act properly, but it does require employers to act reasonably when hiring employees. Today that includes conducting criminal background checks on certain job candidates.

employer PUNISHMENT

New developments in the law

The Texas Legislature recently passed a new statute in this area with implications for rental dealers everywhere. The new statute requires Texas rental dealers and all other merchants who send employees out to deliver, install or repair items in a person's residence to obtain a criminal background report from the Department of Public Safety on all such employees. The criminal background checks are required to go back 20 years for felony convictions and 10 years for misdemeanor convictions.

If the company conducts the search and it comes back clean, the law then provides that in the case of a lawsuit for negligent hiring brought against the company, a rebuttable presumption arises that the company did not act negligently when hiring the employee. There are various record-keeping requirements concerning the information collected by the employer. There are no penalties in the statute for failing or refusing to conduct such background checks other than the loss of the presumption in a lawsuit.

At least one other state, Florida, has had a similar statute in place since 1999. In Florida, for the presumption to arise, the employer must do four things: 1) obtain a criminal background check on the employee; 2) make a reasonable attempt to contact "references and former employers"; 3) require the employee to complete a job application that includes questions concerning convictions of a crime; and 4) obtain a driver's license check if such check is relevant to the work to be performed. This Florida statute applies to all employees in the state.

Similar statutes have been on the books around the country in selected industries that deal with employees who work with especially vulnerable people—children, the aged and the infirm. Specific industries are also covered—e.g. the nuclear power industry, various licensed industries, certain airline personnel and other sensitive industries.

The broad scope of the Texas and Florida statutes portend similar statutes in other states in recognition of the rise in negligent hiring lawsuits. The issue of whether a company is liable for the acts of its employees can be a tricky one. The legal standard—the question a jury will get in a case against the company—is whether the employee, when the injury was inflicted, was acting "within the course and scope of the employment," in which case the company must pay for the damage, or whether the employee was "was off on a frolic of his own," in which case the company is not ordinarily liable.

However, an injured plaintiff may still be able to tag the company, where the money is in such a case, if the plaintiff can prove that the company was negligent when it hired the employee. In the negligent hiring lawsuit, the employee's conduct is less at issue than the company's conduct when it hired the employee. If the company hires an ax murderer and knew or should have known of the employee's past when it hired him and then sends him out to chop wood, it becomes foreseeable that trouble will ensue.

The negligence standard against which hiring practices

are measured changes over time. In the pre-Internet era, criminal background checks were expensive and time-consuming. In those days, companies probably had to have some knowledge of a suspected criminal past before the duty to explore further would arise.

Today, criminal background checks at every level are relatively inexpensive and can be done in a matter of hours. There are still competing privacy issues at work, but privacy rights are rapidly giving way to societal concerns over security and that is clearly where the law is heading.

States compile and keep information on criminal convictions different ways. Some have centralized databases kept by law enforcement agencies; others keep the information at the county level, court by court. Some maintain records at both levels. Statewide databases have timeliness and accuracy issues and the most complete and accurate information can usually be found at the county level. Of course, county by county searches cost more and take more time.

Rental dealers should be aware that while their rights to run criminal background checks on job applicants are unfettered in most states, there are restrictions in several states, the details of which are beyond the scope of this article. By way of quick example, California employers cannot inquire about marijuana convictions more than two years old. Dealers in the following states will have to consult their state statutes for limits on their ability to conduct criminal background checks: Alaska, California, Georgia, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Dakota and Utah.

There are still competing privacy issues at work, but privacy rights are rapidly giving way to societal concerns over security and that is clearly where the law is heading.

Playing by the rules

If rental dealers understand the advantages of conducting criminal background checks at least on employees who will be going into customers' homes, then there are some rules by which they must play. It is primarily the Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act that will apply, assuming that the rental company uses a third party to conduct the checks instead of going to the state registries or county courthouses using its own employees, in which case the FCRA does not apply. The definition of a "credit check" under this federal law includes a criminal background check. (For a partial list of companies offering criminal background check services for employers, see the sidebar.)

In a nutshell, the FCRA requires that dealers get a job applicant's consent to run a check. The dealer must make a clear and conspicuous disclosure that a credit report may be procured. The disclosure must be separate from other information in the application packet. The dealer must notify the applicant separately within three days of making the request

for the information if the dealer does run a report. In addition, before taking any adverse action based in whole or in part on information received, the dealer must give the applicant a copy of the report and a copy of the applicant's rights under the FCRA in the form prescribed in the law. The notice the applicant gets must include the name, address and phone number of the company furnishing the report to the dealer.

Failure to comply with the requirements for conducting criminal background checks can result in liability for the company.

Here are some tips for conducting criminal background checks properly.

★ Get complete information on the job applicant. This will include the full legal name and any other names the applicant has used, date of birth, social security number, driver's license number and times and places of previous employment. Get this information in writing and have the applicant verify that it is accurate. Get the applicant's consent to run a criminal background check and make that consent continuing so that additional checks can be run in the future, if the need arises.

When researching criminal records, dealers want to make sure that the information received does, indeed, apply to the applicant. And the information does not always match up perfectly. The more information about the applicant that the dealer can provide, the better the check will be and the better the opportunity for the dealer to investigate discrepancies between the information provided by the employee and the information contained in the background check

★ Be sure that the application asks about criminal conviction history, both misdemeanor and felony, and state on the form that the criminal history information provided by the applicant will be reviewed for its relation to the position and length of time since any convictions. Dealers can use this information to gauge the honesty of the applicant.

It may not be a good idea to inquire only about felony convictions. Often fairly serious criminal charges can be pled down to misdemeanor charges by aggressive defense lawyers, so that violent behavior of the type rental dealers need to screen for carefully may end up as a misdemeanor conviction, especially the first time.

★ Be cautious asking about arrest records. The EEOC has determined that an employer's use of arrest records, distinct from records of criminal convictions, has a discriminatory

effect on minorities (more people of color are arrested than are white people). Therefore, the employer may be risking claims of discrimination if he is making employment decisions based on the arrest records of job applicants.

★ Allow a job applicant the opportunity to explain the results of the criminal background check and any discrepancies between the report and the application. In this information age, not all of the information collected and stored on individuals is completely accurate. Rental dealers will not want to act on inaccurate information and should be willing to investigate further when the background check shows something different from what the applicant has provided. The applicant may be lying, which will eventually be uncovered, or there may be bad information in the system, which needs to be corrected.

★ Be reasonable in assessing information in the criminal background report. There may be information in a report that will make an employee too risky to trust with a delivery position, but a conviction for a hot check written seven years ago may not rise to that level.

★ Have a written policy within the company concerning criminal background checks and ensure that the policy is applied consistently. If the staff in charge of hiring can pick and choose upon whom they run criminal background checks—for example, only when something does not “add up” or “feels suspicious”—the company will be open to charges of discrimination.

Rental dealers add to the safety of their employees and customers by taking what has become a fairly inexpensive step in the hiring process by running criminal background checks on employees who will be going into customers' homes. There will still be judgment calls that need to be made. There are good employees out there with checkered pasts and it is not suggested that anyone with a criminal past should forever be barred from working in a rental company. We have trouble enough finding good employees without invoking such a strict rule. Running the checks, however, will give dealers additional valuable information with which to build a reliable workforce. ■

Ed Winn is APRO's general counsel. His e-mail address is edwinn@e-by-law.com.

CHECKING OUT THE CHECKERS

There are literally scores of companies offering inexpensive, instantaneous criminal background checks of job applicants on a nationwide basis. As with all vendors, rental dealers should check references and “try it before they buy it.” There is no magic in what these companies are doing. The information they collect

ing is public information. The service they are providing is the accumulation and cataloguing of the information in quick and easy-to-use formats. A good company will acknowledge coverage of the activity by the FCRA and offer assistance in complying with this statute. A good company will offer references of satisfied cus-

tomers—lots of industries are regularly conducting criminal background checks on most job applicants. A good company will stand behind its work. Here are a few companies that offer criminal background services. APRO does not have any knowledge concerning the reputation or trustworthiness of any company on this list:

For a list of companies, see http://dmoz.org/business/business_services/security/investigation/employment

THE 2003
APPRO
★
RENO
REVIEW

A LOOK BACK AT APRO'S 2003 CONVENTION AND TRADE SHOW

BY JULIE SHERRIER

A

PRO 2003: Ridin' High in Reno, the Association of Progressive Rental Organizations' annual convention and trade show, welcomed about 950 rental dealers and vendors to John Ascuaga's Nugget hotel in Reno in August. Here are some of the highlights of this year's show:

- ☛ **2003-04 APRO President Lyn Leach took over the helm from Gary Romine, who served as president for the 2002-03 year.**
- ☛ **There were 205 booths in the exhibit hall representing 110 companies. "This year's trade show was a sell-out, packed with exhibitors from previous years along with a sprinkling of new exhibitors displaying products that attendees were happy to see. The show provides a great opportunity for the dealers to see what is new in products and services," says APRO Marketing Director Cindy Ferguson.**
- ☛ **The Lifetime Achievement Award was presented posthumously to former Rent-A-Center CEO Ernie Talley. The President's Award of Excellence was presented to APRO's Government Relations Director Ron Waters. The Rental Dealer of the Year award was received by Shannon and Cynthia Strunk of Baber's, based in Pascagoula, MS. The Vendor of the Year award went to John Foster of Alliance Computing Technologies, based in Tampa, FL, and the 2003 State Association of the Year was awarded to the Ohio Rental Dealers Association.**
- ☛ **Keynote speaker Frank Maguire shared his wisdom with attendees, saying that how employers treat their employees is exactly how their employees are going to treat their customers.**
- ☛ **The 2003 Rental-Purchase Employee of the Year was awarded to Anthony Robinson, an account manager with Rent-A-Center in Lakewood, CO. See page 34 for details.**





GENERAL SESSION



Far left: keynote speaker Frank Maguire presented his "Absolutes" and led the crowd in a hand-holding moment. Above left: Employee of the Year Anthony Robinson with Rent-A-Center's Matt Harveson. Above: Customer of the Year Donna Brown.

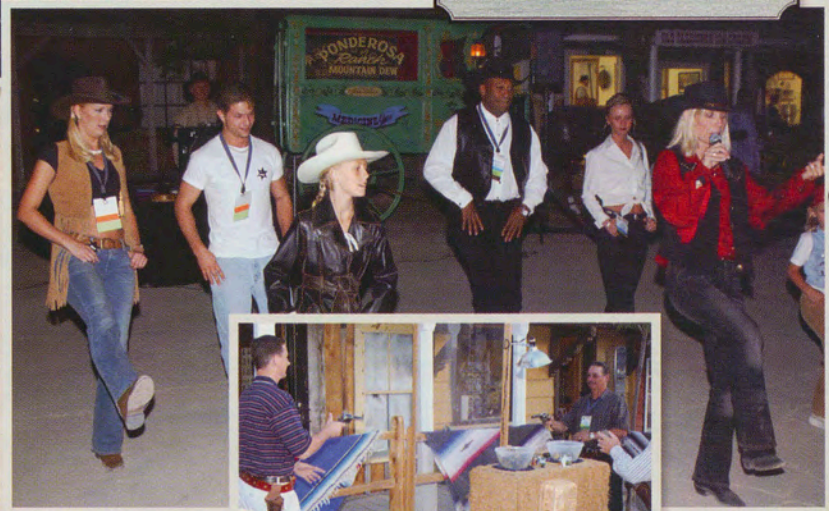
GOLF



This year's Tom Kitchens/Joe Eason Golf Tournament's first-place team: Kevin Wolfe, Scott Young, John Cleek Jr. and Ann Cleek. The tournament, held on the Lakes Course at Reno's Red Hawk Golf Club, was a great success, with more participants than ever before.



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 RES Accessories

Rental and Sales Software Systems
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 Thomson
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TREASURE HUNT DONATIONS

The following companies donated products for this year's trade show treasure hunt:
 ABS Artistic Jewelry
 Alliance Computing Technologies

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 Benefit Marketing Solutions
 Bonnie the Flyer Specialist
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 Maytag Appliances
 Office Star Products
 Protect-A-Bed
 Rent 'N' Roll, LLC
 River City Bank Dollar\$\$\$ Direct
 Sandberg Furniture
 Ther.A.Pedic
 United Distributors
 Zenith Corp.

2003 BUDDY AWARD WINNERS

The APRO “Buddy” awards are presented every year to those outstanding individuals and organizations that have raised the level of what can be done to better the industry for everyone. At the annual APRO Awards Banquet, held August 15 at John Ascuaga’s Nugget in Reno during the 2003 APRO Convention and Trade Show, the recipients of the Lifetime Achievement Award, the President’s Award of Excellence, the Rental Dealer of the Year and the Norm Smith Vendor of the Year were named.

APRO LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD: ERNIE TALLEY, RENT-A-CENTER

The 2003 Lifetime Achievement Award was presented posthumously to former Rent-A-Center CEO Ernie Talley. One of the industry’s founding fathers, Talley passed away on Saturday, June 21, after being admitted to the hospital for a stroke. Talley had been battling cancer for a few years.

Talley was laid to rest on June 24, 2003, in the small



Michael Talley accepts Ernie Talley’s Lifetime Achievement Award on behalf of his father.

community of Pilot Point, TX, north of Dallas. This farming and ranching community seems to have carried Talley full circle from his early days in Yardelle, AR. Yet along the way, this unassuming man made his mark in this world, changing the lives of many.

It’s been said that all roads lead to Rome. In rent-to-own, it seems all roads lead back to Ernie Talley. Talley began building the first chain of RTO stores in the 1960s, sold them and got out of business by the mid-1970s and re-entered RTO in the 1990s with what was Renters Choice and later became Rent-A-Center. Nearly every major dealer who has contributed to furthering the RTO industry sprang forth from Talley’s employ, including Tom Devlin, Chuck Sims and Bud Holladay.

With his reintroduction to the industry, he led the effort to bring rent-to-own into the public-trading arena—another very signifi-

cant milestone for the industry. His success with running a publicly traded company has turned heads from Wall Street to Congress. His company grew (twice) from a multi-store chain to a leader in the industry. He embodied the history of RTO and his company represented the future and commitment to APRO and the industry.

Talley received the APRO President’s Award of Excellence in 1998 and retired as CEO from Rent-A-Center in October 2001.

He is survived by his wife, Mary Ann, sons Michael, Mark and Matt, sister Barbara Cole, daughter-in-law Kathy and grandchildren Benjamin, Regan and Madison.

PRESIDENT’S AWARD OF EXCELLENCE: RON WATERS, APRO

One of the highest honors an APRO member can achieve is the President’s Award of Excellence. This is presented to the person who exemplifies the best in the industry through involvement and support of industry goals. This award can go to anyone who represents what the industry strives to be as a whole.

This year, the award was presented not to a rental dealer, but to APRO’s Government Affairs Director



Ron Waters. Waters has tirelessly promoted the industry’s legislative agenda not only in Washington, D.C., but also throughout the country. One of his more remarkable political achievements on behalf of this industry was his work with Rep. Charlie Gonzalez, a Democrat from San Antonio. Gonzalez’s father, the late Henry B. Gonzalez was easily the most outspoken critic the industry has ever confronted. When Charlie Gonzalez ran and secured the seat left

behind by his father, Waters worked hard on educating the younger Gonzalez on RTO issues. Today, Gonzalez is a co-sponsor on the industry-supported bills in the past two Congresses.

Waters has logged more than 100,000 miles a year in travel since he has been with APRO. He has attended more fund-raising dinners and parties than any individual rental dealer. He has shown great patience with politicians and rental dealers alike as he has worked hard to keep rent-to-own businesses safe since he began working for APRO in 1989.

RENTAL DEALER OF THE YEAR: SHANNON STRUNK AND CYNTHIA BABER-STRUNK, BABER'S

The Rental Dealer of the Year was awarded—for the first time—to a husband-and-wife team: Cynthia Baber-Strunk and Shannon Strunk, owner/operators of the 45-store Baber's rental-purchase chain based in Pascagoula, MS.

Cynthia currently serves as president of TRIB—The Rental Industry Buying Group—and has been very active civically. She is a past president of the Pascagoula Area Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis Club, Civic League and the local PTA. Cynthia is the former Cynthia Littlepage, a native of Butler, AL.

Shannon Strunk rose through the ranks of Baber's to become its president. He is currently president of the Alabama-Mississippi Rental Dealers Association, having



recently reorganized his state and Alabama into a strong two-state association. He is currently serving his third term on the APRO Board of Directors. He was instrumental in pushing through Mississippi's rental-purchase legislation and is chairman of the APRO public relations committee. He most recently founded the APRO Charitable Foundation and the APRO Scholarship Fund.

Together in June of 2000, Shannon and Cynthia bought the rest of the company from other family members and continue to run the family-owned business. This husband-and-wife team joins an elite group of rent-to-own owners/operators who exemplify the dedication to furthering the interests of the industry, superior customer relations and ethical business practices.

VENDOR OF THE YEAR: JOHN FOSTER, ALLIANCE COMPUTING TECHNOLOGIES

The Norm Smith Vendor of the Year Award is given to an outstand-

ing associate member who has supported the Association and its activities. This year, John Foster, owner of Alliance Computing Technologies, received this award. Foster has been an active member of APRO since joining in 1994 and has served on the APRO Vendor Advisory Committee for four years.

Alliance Computing Technologies is going into its sixth year as an exclusive technology supplier to the rent-to-own industry. Providing hardware solutions with high-end products such as Hewlett-Packard, Compaq and Dell, along

with 24/7 toll-free customer service support, Foster has created a successful company with a great reputation.

In addition to supplying the industry with cutting-edge technology, Foster has gone the extra mile every year by providing the registration computers and support for the APRO staff during the Association's annual convention and trade show. He and his wife have also made the annual trek to Washington, D.C., to attend the industry's annual legislative conference to lobby for federal legislation.

Last but not least, for the past four years ACT has been the sole sponsor and supplier of the now invaluable Internet Café in the exhibit hall during the APRO Convention and Trade Show. Foster and his associates arrive early for the show every year to set up a bank of computers for attendees to surf the Web and/or check their e-mail.

It is this kind of support and involvement that John Foster was honored with the 2003 Vendor of the Year award.



STATE ASSOCIATION AWARDS

STATE ASSOCIATION OF THE YEAR: OHIO RENTAL DEALERS ASSOCIATION

The State Association of the Year award was presented to the Ohio Rental Dealers Association. The criteria for this award includes the following: the state association has a well-

the current board, as well as the state association's previous leadership, Ohio membership includes virtually every dealer in the state except for Aaron's. ORDA is the industry's third largest state rental dealer association in terms of RTO stores, members and customers. In the spring of 2003, ORDA

golf, free seminars, free food and free hotel stays at its fall meeting last year to encourage attendance. More than 100 showed up for the two-day event.

Future goals of the association include the creation of programs ranging from a college scholarship award to the elimination of dealer dues altogether. This is the second time ORDA has won this award. The first time was in 1996. ORDA was named "Most Improved State Association" in 1992 and received a "Continued Excellence" mention in 2001 and 2002.



"Tiger" John Cleek, left, presents the 2003 State Association of the Year award to Ohio's Ernie Lewallen, Amy Zeller-Fankhauser, Tony Craig, Ron Wilson and Rich Anderson.

defined leadership structure, including periodic election of officers; a continuity of organizational structure with annual or regularly scheduled meetings; and, most importantly, the State Association of the Year must have sustained membership support over time and demonstrated strong legislative and educational performance.

Under the guidance and leadership of ORDA President Ernie Lewallen and

expanded its board of directors to 11 full-time members.

Over the past year, ORDA has made substantial gains in boosting its "war chest" without raising membership dues through the creation of a special vendor program. ORDA's "Vendor Partners" sponsor the group's meetings, golf outings and other events in exchange for a product and sales pitch to a captive audience of rental dealers. As a result, ORDA has been able to provide free

late 1980s until the mid- to late 1990s, according to three-term ARDA President Geron Vail. ARDA then began to lose members and interest. "Those of us who were new to the industry saw a need to revive the association, so we began, over the past four to five years, to hold seminars, produce some newsletters and are now experiencing good, strong support," says Vail.

This past year, ARDA held its first trade show, complete with 15 booths and seminar speakers. Approximately 80 attended. Also, ARDA created an advisory board to tackle the problem of leadership succession. The advisory board grooms people who are interested in participating in the association, but who aren't necessarily ready to handle the responsibility of serving on the board. A "step-up" system moves at least one member of the advisory board into the bottom spot on the ARDA board of directors every two years.

On the slate for the future for ARDA members is exploring the possibility of holding a legislative conference in Little Rock.

MOST IMPROVED STATE ASSOCIATION OF THE YEAR: ARKANSAS RENTAL DEALERS ASSOCIATION

The Arkansas Rental Dealers Association was very active in the



Arkansas' Geron Vail accepts the award from "Tiger" John Cleek (left).



Texas' Kelly Sayre accepts the award from "Tiger" John Cleek (left).

LEGISLATIVE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD (FORMERLY THE FIREFIGHTER OF THE YEAR): TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF RENTAL AGENCIES

The winner of the newly coined "Legislative Achievement Award" goes to Texas rental dealers for their recent victory in changing the state's rental-purchase law. Texas dealers lobbied the Texas Legislature to amend the state's rental-purchase law to change the existing seven-day grace period on weekly rentals to three days and included capping the loss damage waiver at 10 percent. These changes will provide a much improved working environment for rental dealers in Texas. With Governor Rick Perry's signature, the new changes took effect September 1, 2003.

TARA Chairman Mamie Harper and President Kelly Sayre would like to recognize members Robert Briley, James MacAlpine, Danny Yarbanks, Kent Lycka and

thanks also to Rent-A-Center General Counsel Chris Korst, for all the hard work required to change the law. It was a true team effort that secured this legislative victory.

2003 CONTINUED EXCELLENCE AWARDS

- ☛ California Rental Dealers Association
- ☛ Colorado Rental Dealers Association
- ☛ Florida Rental Dealers Association
- ☛ Illinois Rental Dealers Association
- ☛ Indiana Rental Dealers Association
- ☛ Missouri Rental Dealers Association

MEET THE 2003-04 APRO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Every year during the annual APRO Convention, APRO members elect eight candidates to fill positions on the board of directors. The board has a total of 16 directors (plus a vendor member and an immediate past president). Board members serve staggered, two-year terms and half of the positions become open each year at the convention, in addition to any vacancies that need to be filled.

APRO's 2002-03 President Gary Romine handed over the gavel to Lyn Leach of Ace Furniture & TV Inc. in Malcolm, NE, who will serve as APRO president for the 2003-04 term. The new executive committee is as follows:

- ☛ President: Lyn Leach, Ace Furniture & TV, Malcolm, NE
- ☛ First vice president: Shannon Strunk, Baber's, Pascagoula, MS
- ☛ Second vice president: "Tiger" John Cleek, Cleek's Rent-To-Own, Columbia, MO
- ☛ Secretary: Kevin Quinn, KLQ Enterprises, dba Quality Rentals, Tacoma, WA
- ☛ Treasurer: Larry Carrico, SKC Enterprises Inc., Mt. Vernon, IL
- ☛ Immediate Past President: Gary Romine, Show-Me Rent-To-Own, Farmington, MO

The remaining 2003-04 APRO board of directors is as follows:

- ☛ Robert Briley, Rent City Superstores, Abilene, TX
- ☛ David P. David, Full-O-Pep Appliances, Bloomington, IN
- ☛ Gary Hughes, AAA Rent to Own, Clarkston, WA
- ☛ Chris A. Korst, Rent-A-Center, Plano, TX
- ☛ Jeff L. Lebakken, Lebakken's, Eau Claire, WI
- ☛ Ernie Lewallen, UHR Rents, Cincinnati, OH
- ☛ John Rogers, High Touch, Wichita, KS
- ☛ Mamie Harper, Fiesta Rent to Own, El Paso, TX
- ☛ Kelly Sayre, Alliance Rental Centers, Denton, TX
- ☛ Michael J. Viveiros, Rainbow Rentals, Canfield, OH
- ☛ Mark Windsor, National TV Sales and Rentals, Lebanon, MO
- ☛ Amy Zeller-Fankhauser, City Rentals, Defiance, OH

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WHO'S WHO IN

Computers

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Alliance Computing Technologies Inc. *+^

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813/936-0165, ext. 312;
fax 813/209-0184
jfoster@actsmart.com
www.actsmart.com

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Contact: Jay Nardone
3655 Atlanta Industrial Dr., Ste. 100
Atlanta, GA 30331
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fax 404/696-4870
jnardone@esend.com
www.bdilaguna.com/rto

ByteSmith Inc. *+^

Contact: Paul A. Boucher
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Tacoma, WA 98444
253/539-1099; fax 253/539-1045
bsi99@bytesmithinc.com
www.bytesmithinc.com

Dell Computer Corp. *+^

Contact: Rex Herron
One Dell Way
Round Rock, TX 78682
512/728-5401; fax 512/283-2117
Rex_Herron@Dell.com
www.dell.com

High Touch Inc. *+^

Contact: John Rogers
2020 N. Amidon St.
Wichita, KS 67203
316/832-1611; fax 316/831-5555
johnr@hightouchinc.com
www.hightouchinc.com

Ideal Software Systems Inc. *+^

Contact: Steve Lenhart
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Meridian, MS 39303
601/693-1673, ext. 153;
fax 601/693-2302
slenhart@idealss.com
www.idealss.com

New Age Electronics *

Contact: Eric Kirkendall
21950 Arnold Center Rd.
Carson, CA 90810
310/549-0000, ext. 387;
fax 310/549-2479

Rental Information Systems Inc. *+^

Contact: Larry Burns
P.O. Box 1165
834 Jeanette
Magnolia, AR 71754-1165
800/863-7394; fax 870/234-3797
sales@rentinfo.com
www.rentinfo.com

Rental & Sales Software Systems *+^

Contact: Ellison Crider
711 N. Carancahua St., Ste. 1500
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361/993-1790, ext. 2119;
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www.rsss.com

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Dubuque, IA 52003
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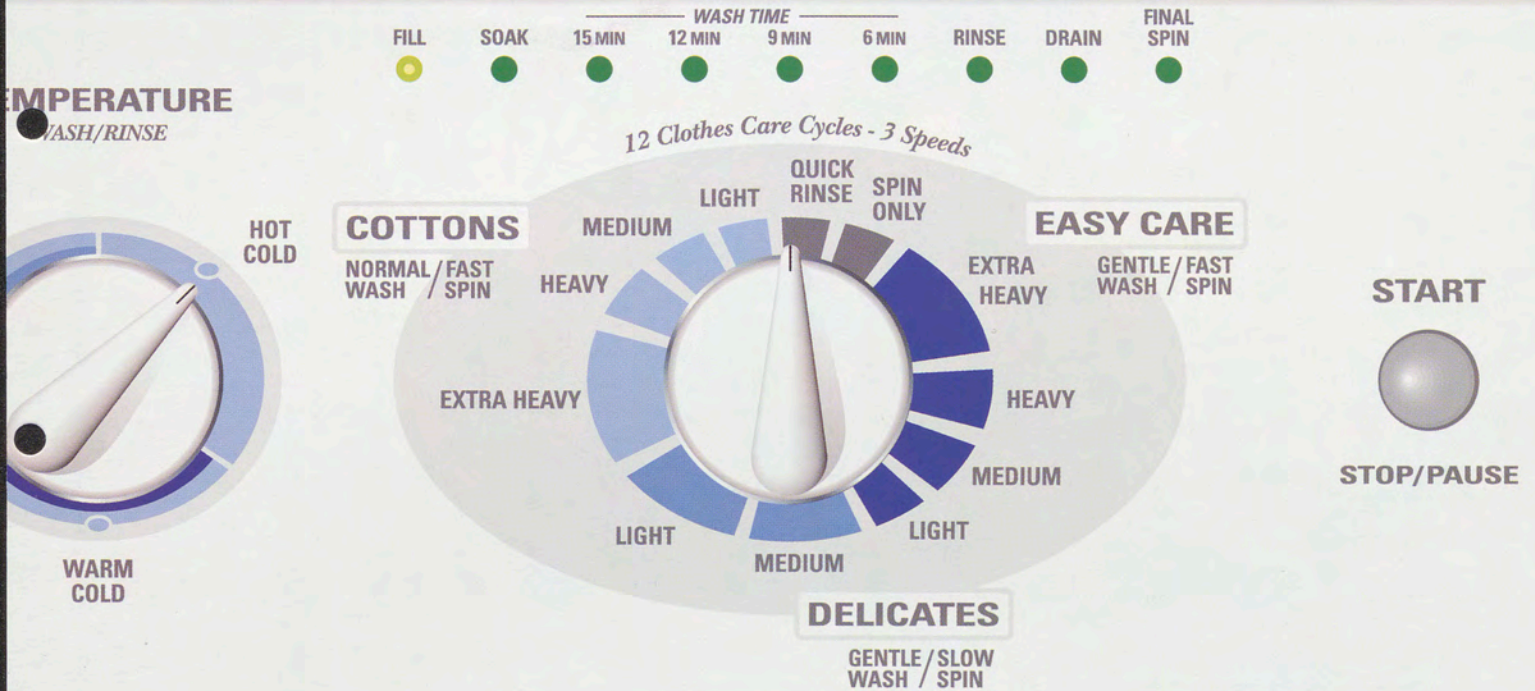
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ray_oribello@twinhead.com

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