

IN THE MOVE GROOVE

MAKING YOUR ASSOCIATION'S RELOCATION A STRATEGIC SUCCESS

IS IT TIME TO SHOP FOR YOUR ASSOCIATION'S NEW HOME? HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU MAKE YOUR NEXT BIG MOVE.

TEXT **APRYL MOTLEY** - APRYL MOTLEY IS SENIOR EDITOR OF ASSOCIATIONS NOW. E: AMOTLEY@ASAENET.ORG

Whether they desire more space, lower costs, or better locations, associations have no problem picking up and moving if the circumstances are favorable. Strategic relocations can result in cost savings, better work environments, and stronger alliances.

Seeing and being seen is an important part of how associations get their work done. Association leaders need access to the people and places affecting the industries and professions their organizations represent. With this in mind, **James H. Youngblood** knew it was time for **The Heart Rhythm Society**, formerly the North American Society of Pacing and Electrophysiology, to relocate its headquarters from Natick, Massachusetts, to the association capital of the world. *'After 18 months as CEO, I knew that we needed to move to Washington, DC,'* says Youngblood. *'Ten years ago the society started a health-policy initiative that required opening an advocacy office in DC, so the move had been discussed previously. But key staff members were not willing to relocate.'*

Youngblood took the helm in 2001 when the society's previous staff executive retired and the board was in search of someone to reposition the organization for the future. His first order of business was creating a new brand for the organization to increase awareness of whom it represented and what it did. *'When I joined The Heart Rhythm Society, then NASPE, I knew we were about to enter into a period of great change for the organization,'* says Youngblood. *'In my first three years as CEO, we changed our name, developed new governance policies, started a foundation, and hired new staff.'*

For Youngblood, relocating was another key element of the organization's strategic rebranding. *'It made logical sense to move to DC, where the society would be more visible,'* says Youngblood. *'The driving forces behind the move to an association town were to raise our profile, position ourselves to work with legislators and other associations, and gain access to a better pool of potential employees.'* The Heart Rhythm Society moved into its new offices in November of last year. Only five staff members, including Youngblood, relocated to the nation's capital.

'I knew that most of the staff wouldn't be relocating when we made the move,' says Youngblood. *'I began hiring senior staff in DC rather than filling vacant positions in the Massachusetts office. At the same time, we developed an internal communication plan that fostered ongoing contact with the staff, and we created incentive plans for them to stay with the organization through the transition, even if they weren't going to make the move. All but three staff members stayed with us until we relocated.'* Youngblood also started selling the idea of the move to the society's volunteer leadership almost immediately after his selection as CEO. *'It turned out to be a fairly easy sell,'* says Youngblood. *'The society's board has been very supportive throughout the whole process.'*

To facilitate the board's involvement in the relocation process, the society formed a relocation task force that included staff, board members, and other volunteers. The task force considered three other cities (Chicago, Boston, and Atlanta) before deciding to relocate the society to Washington, DC. The group evaluated each potential location using three agreed upon criteria: a large number

of nonprofit organizations were in the area; office space could be obtained at a reasonable cost; and the location enhanced the society's mission of advocacy, education, and research. Once the task force chose a new location for the society, Youngblood sold the office building in Natick and then worked with a leasing agent to negotiate the society's 10-year lease of office space at its current location.

Now that they're all settled in, does Youngblood have any regrets about the move? *'Only one,'* he says. *'We kept moving at full speed. In hindsight, I wouldn't have taken on so many new initiatives during the move. We actually increased the number of programs we were offering.'* In addition, Youngblood says he would have allowed more time for hiring staff.

'We are already seeing the benefit of being in this market,' says Youngblood. *'We've made additional contacts, and the number of times the society's been mentioned in the media has increased radically.'*

They didn't have to relocate to another state, but the full-time staff of four at the New Mexico Restaurant Association, Albuquerque, was more than ready to move to a more appealing location. *'The decision to relocate wasn't hard,'* says CEO Carol Wight. *'Our offices were located in a commercial area where we dealt with unpleasant odors and a nonworking air conditioner.'* Identifying a new location that was better for NMRA's image became an important part of the association's strategic plan. *'We wanted a more prestigious location where we would be more visible to our members and the community,'* says Wight.

To that end, NRMA's president (board chair) established a relocation committee. As the committee began looking at new office sites, key factors included maintaining the same square footage, ensuring easy access for members, obtaining kitchen and meeting space, and making full use of technology. Equally important was identifying how the move would be financed. *'We didn't have a lot of savings, so we ran a capital campaign, which raised \$75,000 for the down payment on the new building,'* says Wight. *'NMRA's board members supported the campaign wholeheartedly. In fact, they paid for the new boardroom.'*

'We really love our new space,' says Wight. *'One of the best benefits is that members can use our meeting space for free, and we save money by not having to go offsite to host our classes for 30 or fewer attendees.'* In addition, NMRA allows other local organizations to use the meeting space for a nominal fee, which has helped the association continue to build its network in the community. *'In our new offices, we have more visitors. Members actually drop by,'* says Wight. *'I think we're home for a while.'*

'We now have larger meeting space that is more easily accessible to our members and other groups,' says Price. *'As a courtesy, we allow affiliated organizations, such as the state dental board or district dental societies, to use our meeting space free of charge.'* Since relocating, the association has gained both financial and relationship-building

equity. *'As staff, we finally have offices we're proud to call the home of the association,'* says Price. *'And we think the members feel proud, too.'*

MOVING DOWN THE STREET

When you're running out of room, it's hard to envision a future of increased growth with more people and stuff to house. The senior staff of the Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association was in search of more space for less money, and they only had to move three or four blocks away from the association's old location to achieve that goal. *'We started investigating relocation options about two years before our lease expired,'* says Susan Medick. *'The pricing and configuration of our office space just wasn't working for the association.'*

However, while the association was growing and needed more space, AAIA's volunteer leadership was not in favor of purchasing a building and leasing a portion of the space to other organizations. *'We didn't want to be in the landlord business,'* says Medick. *'The board was also concerned about tying up our assets. We wanted to maintain a certain amount of flexibility.'*

As part of the evaluation process, AAIA's real estate agent moderated a focus group with senior staff to get their input on the move. *'We were also sensitive to the different departments within our organization that might have special needs,'* says Medick. *'So we talked with specific groups such as the membership service*

center and the graphic arts staff to make sure we addressed their concerns about a potential move.' Medick says it was 'a challenge to keep staff positive and excited during the relocation process,' but since the move in May, everyone seems to have adjusted well to their new surroundings—even those staff members who have to walk a little farther to the subway.

Medick cites more conference rooms and overall space for staff to work in cross-functional teams as an important aspect of AAIA's new offices. In addition, the move enabled the association to reduce its rental rate by 23 percent per square foot. Staff put those cost savings to good use when it was time to design the office décor. *'We're very proud of the industry that we represent,'* says Medick. *'We wanted to create a work environment that illustrates this to staff and members.'* So visitors shouldn't be surprised to see desks shaped like cars or license plates for nametags.

REVIEWING YOUR OPTIONS

Have you thought about relocating your offices? More important, could a move like the ones described here benefit your association strategically? Office space is more than just a building. It's a representation of the association as a whole - staff, members, and volunteers. Think about it. It just may be your move.

'Reprinted with permission, copyright October 2005, ASAE & The Center, Washington, DC.'

SHAKE UP YOUR MEETING SPOTS

CHANCES ARE THAT MOST OF YOUR MEMBERS HAVEN'T EXPERIENCED COSTA RICA, CROATIA, OR NEW ZEALAND

According to the results of a recent survey conducted by the United States Tour Operators Association, New York City, these countries won a three-way tie for the most popular new destination.

The survey found that more than 55 percent of USTOA's corporate members plan to add destinations to their current lineups

- pointing to a trend in using less traditionally popular international meeting destinations, often in what might be considered more 'exotic' venues.

Other popular spots in the survey were:

- + Ethiopia
- + Greece

- + Guatemala
- + Malta
- + Scandinavia
- + Slovenia
- + Tasmania

'Reprinted with permission, copyright ASAE & The Center, Washington, DC.'