



## Rebuilding the WIA: An Interview with Mike DiGilio

Moving into the second year of his term as the WIA's president, Mike DiGilio expressed enthusiasm for the future of the association and the wallcovering profession. While making the WIA better and stronger may bring back memories of *The Six Million Dollar Man*, the work already yielding results owes no thanks to bionics, although technology is involved.

DiGilio listed three major achievements for the association:

1. An enhanced and aggressive marketing effort
2. An improved website
3. A bigger, more modern convention.

"We've been rebuilding the association, including the organizational infrastructure, to revitalize it," DiGilio explained with a brief mention of the change in association management. He praised Executive Director Nancy Terry for her extraordinary efforts in rebuilding the WIA as a stronger organization.

### Building awareness

"The organization's been around for over 40 years and there are wallpaper manufacturers who have never heard of us," DiGilio said to illustrate the need for building name recognition within the industry. "Therefore, we need to build awareness."

Because marketing takes time to yield a discernible return on investment, the Board of Directors hasn't yet determined specific metrics that will indicate the level of the campaign's success. Regardless, he mentioned that the effort is already showing results, particularly with regard to increased convention attendance.

Tying into the beefed-up marketing initiative, the WIA boasts a new website. With improved, more intuitive navigation and a bold, attractive look, the website now directs visitors to the information they need without fuss or detours. The digital face of the WIA was designed with SEO ranking in mind, so people needing their walls covered can find member installers.

In addition to the new and improved website, the annual convention witnessed changes that brought it into the 21st century by taking advantage of today's digitally connected professionals. The event not only expanded from two days to three days and a single track to two simultaneously running tracks, but it also featured online streaming and online Q&A for each seminar, offering the opportunity for continued learning or reinforcement of information learned.

### Increasing membership through education

Like any trade or professional association, the WIA's strength and vitality rest upon its members. With the resurgence of interest in wallpaper and installers finding themselves busier than ever, the dwindling pool of

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**Mike DiGilio** (from page 1)

craftsmen causes concern. Representing the interests of installers and connecting them with manufacturers of industry products, the WIA is working on building membership through recruiting installers not already affiliated with the organization, those who want to get into the trade, and with manufacturers who can benefit from a network of skilled installers.

“We’re particularly focused on bringing in boutique wallcovering manufacturers that have great products which often have special installment requirements,” DiGilio said.

Discussion of the recruitment initiative led to the topic of the association’s lapsed certification program. DiGilio foresees revitalization of the program as more of a system of accreditation. Accreditation in the use of a certain product or in the competence of a particular technique never expires, he noted. He predicts the credentialing program being extended to the convention and locally hosted workshops as part of an ongoing continuing education program.

Learning specific products and techniques leads to mentoring by which newcomers to the trade can learn under the direct supervision of experienced craftsmen and earn a living while

they learn. A formal apprenticeship program is not feasible for the WIA, DiGilio admitted, and the traditional apprenticeship method of passing the skill and business from parent to offspring no longer serves industry need. Rather than apprenticeship, the WIA focuses on mentorship. He explained a mentorship arrangement currently active in the Chicago area.

One young installer who has experience as a painter is interested in building his expertise as a wallcovering installer. Local Chicago Chapter members call upon this person to help out on their projects. The arrangement provides the new installer with paid, on-the-job training in a particular aspect, such as textiles or a commercial application, and the installer gets a good helper and can complete projects in less time. The win-win arrangement should produce skilled installers who not only learn the how-to of the craft but also what it takes to run a business.

WIA faces the perfect storm. Through strengthening the organization through effective marketing, education, and membership recruitment, the association will emerge a respected force of skilled, creative professionals serving as the bedrock for a vital and fulfilling industry. ■



Wallcovering  
Installers  
Association

## New Members

*New Members September – October 2018*

**Barden’s Decorating, Inc.**

Tommy & Muffy Barden  
Powhatan, VA  
tommybarden2@gmail.com

**Bruce Peterson Wallcoverings**

Bruce Peterson  
Katy, TX  
lilpete2100@sbcglobal.net

**C. Crowder Painting**

Christina Crowder  
Hamden, CT  
ccrowderpaint@gmail.com

**Foothills Wallcovering Company**

Ryan O’Donnel  
Ft. Collins, CO  
ryanodonnell.2@gmail.com

**Herb Bauer Painting Plus**

Herbert Bauer  
Allentown, PA  
bauerpaint@gmail.com

**JB Wallpapering**

Javier Bonilla  
Flanders, NJ  
jwallpapering@gmail.com

**Manion Decorating**

Robert Manion  
Elmhurst, IL  
paint@bobmanion.com

**Many Colors**

Joel Shirk  
Cheshire, CT  
rpjoel@yahoo.com

**MMH Installations**

Molly Harrington  
Wyndmoor, PA  
mharrington04@comcast.net

**Revive Wallcoverings**

Diana Halverson  
Vancouver, CANADA  
revive\_wc@icloud.com

**Ron’s Wallcovering Installation**

Ron Casimier  
Columbia, TN  
casimier@bellsouth.net

**Super Walls Services Inc**

Paulo Echeverri  
Pembroke Park, FL  
superwalls@live.com

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# Breaking the Convention Mold

The “Unconventional Convention” exceeded expectations because, breaking the mold of past WIA conventions. For nearly a decade, the convention format defaulted to the tried and true, which turned stale and failed to interest current members or attract new members. Citing ongoing decreasing attendance with a low of only 72 attendees at the 2017 convention, Greg Laux stated, “If the WIA was to attract new members – and we did! – then we needed a new and far more dynamic sensibility for this event.”

Laux noted that this convention represented the first time the WIA engaged a professional marketing firm, HighRoad Solution, to build awareness beyond the association’s membership. He credited the firm for the significant number of walk-in and first-time, nonmember attendees at the convention. The WIA will also be using HighRoad Solution for overall marketing to promote the association and its members. Marketing, he mentioned, has grown so sophisticated that anyone not doing it full-time has difficulty keeping current with rapid pace of change and analytics.

The 2018 WIA Convention doubled the previous year’s attendance, confirming the convention committee’s wisdom in revitalizing the format. The new format featured flexibility. At times, general or “unified” sessions for the whole crowd split into two tracks running simultaneously. When the two tracks were in session, attendees could select from programs that better matched their interests and skill levels. Laux opined that the first-time attendees and new member attendees “felt more at home and comfortable with the tracks targeted toward different skill levels.”

As far as attendance numbers showed, the unified sessions had the biggest crowds. “If forced to choose [the] two [most popular sessions],” said Laux, “I would suggest that Heidi Wright Mead’s Bradbury & Bradbury, because it was literally a master class in how to install that wallcovering conducted by someone who has won Craftsmanship Awards for such work. [It] was considered to be valued because it revealed the specific steps for better process and higher



profitability. Similarly, Tim Little’s presentation about textiles and how to deal with unexpected elements was also viewed as directly valuable to improve the business practices for many installer attendees.”

He expressed no surprise in the “guru” level sessions attracting a larger audience than those targeted toward the newer apprentice level attendees. He also noted the benefits of having an actual carpenter participate in the “inner carpenter” exchange to discuss how they might approach panels of rigid material for installation. Online reputation management also generated an enthusiastic response, indicating a desire and need for educational sessions related to running a sustainable business.

According to the WIA’s business office, the 2018 convention had 11 WIA members attending for the first time, plus six attendees who were not WIA members. This success, Laux stated, confirms that the association’s outreach efforts are working. He urged members to continue the good work to continue promoting both the industry and the association.

The Unconventional Convention also embarked into uncharted territory. For an organization that remains based in old-fashioned products – let’s face it, wallpaper and paste have been around for hundreds of years – attendees glommed onto the introduction of high-tech with apps that allowed them to submit questions on

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**Convention** (from page 2)

their smartphones. Apps also enabled crowd ranking of questions, polling from sessions, and live video feeds that put expert presentations in front of the members without needing the speakers to be actually present in the conference rooms. Moderators kept sessions humming and fielded the most popular questions to speakers.

Comparing past conventions and the introduction of high-tech communication, Laux said, "Don't let history define you. Respect it, but don't be subservient to it." He urged members young and old to welcome new ideas and progress. He also encouraged chapters to hold "more social events to let members interact in groups" and to offer "a strong blend of advanced and apprentice courses."

The successes of the 2018 Unconventional Convention are on target for repetition in 2019. The Board of Directors will soon announce a new convention committee chairperson who will work with a reformed committee of WIA volunteers and a council of advisors who bring continuity and perspective to the task of organizing a convention program. ■



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATE MEMBERS**

**When you have a choice of vendors, remember to use WIA Associate Members first.**

- Advance Equipment Manufacturing Company
- AMBTRA, Inc.
- Atlantic Wallcovering and Décor
- Bradbury & Bradbury Art Wallpapers, Inc.
- Cavalier Wall Liner
- DesignTex Group (The Experience49)
- Eykon Design Resources
- Fabricmate Systems
- Fidelity Wallcovering, Inc.
- Gardner-Gibson, Inc.
- Heritage Wallcoverings Ltd. (Lincrusta)
- Hytex Industries, Inc.
- Jacaranda, Inc.
- Jack Loconsolo & Company, Inc.
- Koessel Studios
- Len-Tex Wallcoverings
- LSI Wallcovering
- Maya Romanoff Corporation
- MDC Wallcoverings
- Pacific Laser Systems (PLS)
- Painters & Allied Trades LMCI
- Phillip Jeffries Ltd.
- Presto Tape
- R37 Inc.
- Roman Decorating Products LLC
- Roos International, Ltd. Wallcovering
- Rust-Oleum Corporation, Zinsser Brands
- Steve's Blinds & Wallpaper, LLC
- Textile Wallcoverings International, LTD (TWIL)
- The Paint Store Online
- Thibaut Wallcovering
- Vahallan Papers
- Wallauer's
- Wallpaper Boulevard
- Wallpaper Direct
- Wallpaper Warehouse
- Williamson College of the Trades
- Wolf-Gordon, Inc.
- York Wallcoverings, Inc.

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# A Testimony to Skill and Savvy

The first day of the WIA's Unconventional Convention treated attendees to an amazing display of creativity, skill, and business savvy during the Craftsmanship Awards Luncheon. Chairman Jeanette Gilbreath presented those entries that best qualified in categories for commercial, residential, small spaces, and specialty installations.

The WIA accepts entries, submitted anonymously online through Jotform, from September through June. All members receive the opportunity to review the entries and vote their preferences. As added incentive to encourage participation, the WIA awards each first place winner free admission to the convention and second place winners receive one year of free membership.

Each category detailed first and second place winners, plus an honorable mention. The difference among entries within each category made selection especially difficult, like trying to compare apples with oranges to see which best exemplifies the idea of fruit. WIA members judged entries based on merits of creativity, technical difficulty, and organizational skill. Winners are listed below:

## Specialty Category

*Honorable Mention: Speakeasy Restaurant Installation of Historic Documents by Michael Baughman.* How do you turn odd-sized sheafs of 18th and 19th century documents into wallcovering? Just ask this installer.

*Second Place: Wallpapering Over Logs by Jeff Ragland.* This project entailed installing muslin over interior logs in the walls and ceilings of Arkansas' oldest dogtrot home.

*First Place: This Is What a Courtroom Is Supposed to Look Like! by Richard Wilson.*

This project finished the renovation of an 1871 courthouse, restoring a probate courtroom to glory and earning a judge's praise.

## Small Spaces Category

*Honorable Mention: Art Deco Media Room by Steven Kaye.* This installation entailed heavy duty clay adhesive and trimming around 48

inside corners of eight custom-made picture frame moldings.

*Second Place: Glittering Lincrusta Frieze by Shelly Wilkins.* Odd shape and a desire for glamour required ingenuity from this installer.

*First Place: Leather and Suede Garage Elevator Walls & Ceiling by Sandra Catlett.*

This installer rose to the challenge of turning a garage elevator into a elegant place where you want to be.

## Commercial Category

*Honorable Mention: The Gang's All Here by Lillian Weist.* This project challenged the installer's organizational genius to tackle a combination of tight deadline, extensive contract, large size, and organization of the team needed to get the work done.

*Second Place: Chic Black & White Living Room by Carolyn Greene.* A custom mural with tricky dimensions and a complicated pattern required close coordination with the printer and rehangng the same panels multiple times to get the installation just right.

*First Place: How High Can I Go? by Lillian Weist.* Another elevator project, this installation necessitated custom scaffolding, dealt with notification delays, and the help of a gentleman answering the call of a damsel in distress.

## Residential Category

*Honorable Mention: Lots and Lots of Rivets! by Chris Foret.* The installation of rivets on linen applied to a curved, 2-story wall posed technical difficulties and required heavy use of a laser level.

*Second Place: Guest Bedroom Retreat by Steven Kaye.* Installing wallcovering in an historic building came with walls being more than one inch out of level, which posed a significant challenge in aligning patterns.

*First Place: Seeing Spots! by Jeanette Gilbreath.*

The designer for this project specified spots on a textured paper, so with the assistance of laser levels and impressive expertise, this installer had to get the job done right on the first try. ■

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# Seizing the Opportunity to Give Back: An Interview with Kevin O'Donnel

Banking on loyalty built over 21 years of membership, last spring somebody thought Kevin O'Donnel of O'Donnel & Company, Miamisburg, Ohio a good bet for service as an alternate regional director for the WIA's Central Region. He agreed and accepted the challenge, being sworn into office at the association's annual convention in September.

"This is my opportunity to give back to the organization that's given me so much," O'Donnel said, noting his prior service as the president of the WIA's Miami Valley Chapter.

Bearing no resemblance to Napoleon, O'Donnel confessed that he entertained no aspirations toward advancing through board member ranks, but also admitted he was willing to consider continued service at a board level if the organization needed him.

"I'll let it roll and see what develops," he commented.

When asked about what he sees are the main challenges facing the WIA, he spoke of the labor shortage faced by the industry, a concern of most trades in the country. In that, he expressed solidarity with other skilled trades regarding the need to recruit young adults. O'Donnel added, "College isn't for everybody, and you can make a good living in the trades."

O'Donnel should know. He's been a paperhanger for most of his adult life and professed to be busier than a...yes, we'll say it...one-armed paperhanger. The recent surge in demand for wallcovering by designers and builders for wallpaper has created a strong need for wallcovering installers who suddenly find themselves short-handed and scrambling to hire helpers.

"We need to get young people hooked on the craft. We have a whole generation of young adults who don't even know what wallpaper is," O'Donnel said. "The

Board needs to convince members to go out and recruit apprentices."

He acknowledged that some members who might be less outgoing will find such promotion difficult and out of their comfort zone, but the effort is necessary. With the average installer sporting gray hair after a 20-year struggle during an extended lull in demand, the recent surge caught many of them by surprise. Now they have the challenge of trying to engage young people into a trade when they're struggling to keep up with the work pouring in.

It's an embarrassment of riches.

O'Donnel mentioned that the industry formerly enjoyed support from two trade schools which taught paperhanging, but a dearth of students closed those programs. Responding to today's real need, shows like This Old House and, of course, celebrities like Mike Rowe have established recruiting programs to attract new blood to the skilled trades. He thought that member offers to teach wallcovering installation classes at local vocational schools might yield some good results.

Please extend your welcome to the WIA's newest board member, Kevin O'Donnel. ■

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# Celebrating WIA's Guiding Lights

The Wallcovering Installers Association takes pride in recognizing not only those installers who demonstrate outstanding craftsmanship and professionalism, but also those who serve the association and the profession with dedication and integrity. Through their service, these people shine as luminaries within the association and inspire the rest of us to live up to their standards.

Although Anthony Russo, the chairman of the WIA's National Awards Program, could not attend this year's National Awards Banquet, WIA National Vice President, Steven Kaye took pleasure in announcing the award recipients at the WIA 2018 Unconventional Convention. Following are the recipients of the WIA's seven national awards:

**Outstanding Newsletter Award.** The awards committee judges chapter newsletters for creativity and efficacy. The WIA presents the award to the editor of the winning newsletter, who is responsible for both content and document design. The 2018 recipient of the Outstanding Newsletter Award is The Wall Paper published by Phil Reinhard of the Delaware Valley Chapter.

**Guy Cooper Golden Plumline Award.** Another WIA award honoring a chapter's achievements rather than a single person's, the Golden Plumline Award recognizes the outstanding chapter exemplifying excellent participation, strategies and initiatives for continued growth, dynamic educational and networking opportunities, and a membership who seek to excel. Through a combination of workshops, social events, and charitable assistance, the Chicago Chapter inspires us all.

**Bob Isenberger Paperhanger of the Year Award.** Named in memory of one of the WIA's most dedicated professionals, the Paperhanger of the Year Award goes to a WIA member who demonstrates the highest standard of professionalism in the industry during the previous 12 months. The list of nominees comprises a who's who in wallcovering installation with one name rising to the top: Jennifer Curtis.

**Innovative Service Award.** This award recognizes the individual responsible for an innovative program or service that advances the interests of the WIA. Thinking of expanding WIA's footprint on a global basis, Gary Stanley, this year's winner of the Innovative Service Award, has dedicated his time and resources to create a new WIA chapter in Australia.

**Skip Lowe Memorial Award.** Qualification for this award does not require installer membership in the WIA. Named for a past (and long deceased) executive director, this award recognizes the generous contributions of the organization or person instrumental in bringing industry suppliers and professional installers together. This year the WIA recognizes Bruce Bradbury of Bradbury & Bradbury for continuous support of the organization and the profession.

**Sam Kovnat Award.** In memory of a founding member of the WIA, the organization recognizes the extended and generous contribution of time, talent, and resources by an exceptionally dedicated installer who serves as someone for every member to emulate. A member since 2004, Scott Peto of Restoration Service of Ohio deserves the honor, recognition, and gratitude conveyed by this award.

**Patrician Niehaus Leadership Award.** Named after the first recipient of the award who was lauded for her exemplary leadership, this award testifies to the dedication and service rendered to the WIA in a leadership capacity. No one can deny that, for nearly 20 years, Susan Macuna's talents for organization, mighty work ethic, and outspoken demeanor get things done – and always to the betterment of the association and its members.

The WIA exhorts new members and those who have participated in the WIA for several years to congratulate these award recipients for their well-deserved recognition as movers and shakers in the wallcovering industry and profession. Make their acquaintance and learn from their example to build and strengthen what we do best. ■

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# Life Lessons of a Paperhanger

By Diana Halverson, Revive Wallcovering Installation



I attribute three elements to a career as a paperhanger:

1. My guru for introducing and teaching me about this wonderful world of paper;

2. The WIA for providing an amazing learning environment surrounded by inspiring and beautiful people who love what they do;

3. Having the guts to put myself out there and stand on my own two feet as me and trust myself.

Attending the WIA's 2017 and 2018 conventions and becoming a new member of the extended WIA family opened many new doors for me, both professionally and personally.

My experience as a new member has been overwhelmingly positive and fundamental. I really enjoyed attending the last two conventions: they were educational, fun, and well-organized with unbelievable networking and encouragement. I came home with new skills and new knowledge that I could implement on the job. What I learned helped me to work smarter, not harder.

My observations confirm this organization and trade are special. I'm so thankful to be a part of this group of professional wallcovering installers and look forward to seeing the industry grow. I see beauty in the kindness expressed, the multiple levels of skill, and different levels of expertise come together under one roof to openly share, learn, and support one another so the wallpaper industry stays strong. The WIA sets itself apart from other trade organizations by having skilled and creative installers who are up to date with technology and products, who allow one to brush up on his or her skills, and who have the opportunity to learn from others while perfecting one's skills. Those traits keep us loving what we do.

One convention theme I particularly noticed as an attendee, paperhangers take pride in their work. They have a passion to always create and deliver the best quality product. I don't think I've ever heard of another trade group coming together to collectively share their tips and tricks they've learned over the years to help each other succeed. Wallpaper installers respect each other and the products with which we work.

WIA's courses give me alternative options and ideas for working more productively and keeping up to date with the latest technology and paper trends, as well as staying relevant to the industry.

Last year when I attended my first convention, I arrived as an apprentice level installer, on the fence whether to open up my own company. I had no plan, no name, no business licence, no business sense – nothing. I came with a passion for something I discovered I loved doing, courtesy of my teacher who brought me into this world of paper and taught me all I knew. I went home from the first convention with a fire lit under me, busted my butt, hit the pavement running, worked on my skill set in my garage, jumped in with both feet, and challenged myself over and over again. The same process happened following the second convention.

Today, I'm grateful for my business and the friendships I've made along the way. I didn't get to this place by not falling either; I stumbled along the way. Nonetheless, I'm happy to be where I am at today, and I enjoy the service I provide to my clients. I look forward to next year's convention in Cincinnati!

To me, the WIA is like a big tree full of lush branches, and I am proud to be one more limb. I firmly believe that timing is everything, we learn our way of life from others, life is but one big lesson, and never compromise yourself, and live authentically and wholeheartedly! ■

