

SERVING THE GREATEST GENERATION



Thoughts by J. Smoke Wallin, Chairman WSWA

My grandfather died last month. It was sad for all of us in the family and many others whom he touched, but he was 87 and lived a full life. E. Woodley Kalehoff was in the Navy during WWII, but was always first and foremost a musician. He was in the Navy band, and became the pianist for the White House for both Roosevelt and Truman. He played his entire life in churches across America, including the Ocean City Tabernacle in NJ and Churches in Homestead, FL and Laurel, MS, until the last couple of years when he was unable to move adequately to perform. He left a legacy of talent in the family and imparted upon all of us a sense of what "perfect practice" can bring, whether in music or in life. Practice gets you far, but as he would say, "perfect practice gets you to Carnegie Hall."

I was thinking about the people of his generation and the generation following him and what role the beverage industry plays in their lives. They have seen the fall of Nazism, Communism and the rise of terrorism. And now we have all seen the fall of Saddam Hussein.

We live in interesting times. It is a time for both important accomplishments and worries. Many of the men and women who achieved greatness in the 20th century are still with us and moving towards retirement age. Many will choose assisted living. Some, like my grandfather, will choose to live with loved ones. In any case, as industry leaders, we must consider our industry's role in the lives of this generation. Indeed, we have a duty to not only insure responsible access to our products but also to promote the beneficial use of our products.

Americans in assisted living today are typically the only group outside of under-21 year olds who have to "sneak a drink" in a "brown bag." These great citizens who have contributed immensely to society and who are accustomed to living a "good life" are "underserved." In a quick review of Indianapolis, of the top 25 assisted living facilities, only one touted their happy hour as a special service. In talking to retailers, I identified some who serve this market by providing products and helping to make the happy hours work. This is both a moral obligation and a business opportunity for all of us in the industry. How great would it be for our grandparents (or us) to be able to continue the quality of life we have come to expect and have certainly earned.

Given that sentiment, I put forth the following action items for all of us to consider:

- Take a quick survey of all the local facilities where people are retiring. Do they have a license? If not, do they have an open attitude toward the responsible and managed consumption of beverage alcohol?
- Given that information, what can we do to improve the situation? Can we help them get a license? Are there impediments to getting such? Can we help organize their buying from retail outlets, our products, for a positive life experience?
- Encourage DISCUS through Century Council to fund and seek out the research necessary for seniors to know what is appropriate and how their prescription drugs relate to moderate consumption of alcohol beverages. This is a project they should undertake for the benefit of society and the industry. It is also one in which the major Pharmaceutical companies will have an interest. I can easily see an Eli Lilly having a strong interest in making sure their patients choose to take their medication instead of skipping it for a drink, given the dearth of information about what is safe. Today's seniors are more likely to choose to sneak a drink and skip their medicine than otherwise. This is not good for anyone.

Let me know your thoughts on this matter. This can be another great way in which to change the terms of the debate in our communities regarding alcohol's responsible role in society. I look forward to working with you in making progress on this front and others.

Yours

J. Smoke Wallin
Chairman WSWA
EVP National Wine & Spirits
Chairman & CEO eSkye Solutions