

Foundation's Work More Important than Ever

By Jerry Heppes Sr., CAE

I am starting my 31st year with DHI

and could not be more excited about the future of our industry and members. Boy has our story evolved since the early years of my career, from hum to compelling.

In my early years, I can remember answering questions as to who our members were and receiving a lot of blank stares. It was almost as if they couldn't wait to change the subject—doors and hardware were not very interesting to most people. I received the same reaction whether at a cocktail party or on Capitol Hill.

That has all changed, and it started in 1999 with Columbine, one of the most horrific active school shootings in our history. Out of that event, a lot has changed with school security. School administrations began to develop evacuation plans, and products began to advance in our industry. More importantly, society began to feel differently about safety.

Another life changing event was September 11th, when we were violently attacked on our soil. Add to the list the killings at Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, churches in Charleston, S.C. and Sutherland, Texas, and a concert in Las Vegas. Sadly, my list is not complete but poignant, none the same.

Today, when I tell the story of what my members do, it is told differently and receives a completely different reaction. I explain that my members help protect lives and make people safe and secure. They are experts in balancing life safety and security in schools, hospitals and office buildings.

When talking about DHI and life safety and security, I will typically ask if people remember the day the World Trade Center was attacked and people rushed to exit the towers

before they collapsed. Everyone has a memory of that day. When I explain that in just over an hour, 98.6 percent of the occupants, below the impact of the planes, escaped safely due to well-maintained door openings to stairwells, they start to understand my point and the importance of DHI members.

I then frame the story contrasting 2001 with the 1993 bombing of just one building that took over eight hours to evacuate. The difference was an underlying commitment by the building owners to ensure the proper products and solutions are used and maintained: the products and solutions our members provide in every building every day. These days I receive a very different reaction—a look of concern and appreciation for our industry. Storytelling is a powerful communication tool, and I love telling our story!

I often get asked, what does the Foundation do with the annual contributions? The answer is quite simple. We tell your story over and over and over to critical audiences. We tell your story using a variety of vehicles such as video, audio, social media, dedicated websites, webinars, education sessions, professional listings of our certified members, specific campaigns, and recently, in a radio interview.

For example, *Opening the Door to School Safety* is a campaign that we launched in 2017. We were concerned about the use of barricade devices and felt as the industry experts, we had to take a stand. We explain that it takes experts to design a proper door assembly; otherwise, dangerous products can end up being employed.

This time last year we launched one video; this year we're building a movement! Visit <http://www.lockdontblock.org> for dozens of resources, including

content from National Association of State Fire Marshals and Partner Alliance for Safer Schools. The message was delivered in a variety of ways, including:

- Magazine advertorial for 7,500 school superintendents (AASA)
- Email from AASA CEO to 7,500 school superintendent members about Lock Don't Block
- New Facebook campaign to 100,000 school administrators across North America
- Radio interview for school superintendents
- Webinar for school superintendents and their security teams

The Foundation delivered your story by co-sponsoring and delivering dozens of classes about fire door inspection requirements in healthcare and is now working with FDAIs to deliver this education locally. We partnered with NFPA to deliver nine classes on fire door inspections in 2017 to hundreds of end users, and now NFPA has an FDAI on staff. They now understand your story. And finally, we awarded more scholarships for DHI education than ever before.

This is how the Foundation tells your story and we need your help to continue this work. Please support the Foundation by contacting me with your pledge so we can continue to tell your story!



JERRY HEPPESS SR., CAE, is the CEO of DHI and the Door Security & Safety Foundation. If you'd like to comment on this article or any others in the December issue, email dgable@dhi.org.