

# BANKER & TRADESMAN

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**PROFILE IN COMMERCE:** *Raymond J. Wiese*

## NARI President Seeks to Dispel Remodeling Industry Myths

By Aglaia Pikounis

ONLY A FEW WEEKS AFTER BEING NAMED PRESIDENT of a local remodelers' group, Raymond Wiese already has a good idea about what types of issues to include on his agenda.

Wiese, who has run his own remodeling business for more than a dozen years, believes there are many misconceptions about the industry that need to be cleared up and it's up to the remodelers themselves to educate consumers about the work they do.

As the newly elected president of the Eastern Massachusetts chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry – a 300-member group – Wiese is hoping to enhance communication with consumers and remodelers to dispel the myths and share more facts about the industry.

"For me, it's really about getting the word out to the industry," said Wiese, who acknowledges that the remodeling industry doesn't have a "great reputation" at the moment. "We have a membership of 300 [but] there are thousands and thousands of remodelers working in eastern Massachusetts and they need to learn better practices. Building science is changing all the time."

Zeroing in on critical issues affecting the industry – whether it's government regulations or the most effective type of insulation to use – is going to be important for the industry, he says.

"I want our association to be able to talk about issues like green building and products that will sustain the house itself for a longer period of time," said Wiese.

### An Early Start

Wiese's journey into the remodeling industry started early. The Natick resident said he had an interest in plumbing and electric work back in his teens and during early



Raymond J. Wiese was elected president of the Eastern Massachusetts chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry last month.

adulthood. In his 20s, after four years in the Army, Wiese held a variety of jobs, at one point driving an oil truck to put himself through college.

He also worked on construction sites. In 1992, Wiese started his remodeling business, The Wiese Co., out of an office in Wellesley.

Today, his award-winning company is based in Natick and handles everything from small bathroom makeovers and deck installations to major home expansions in affluent Boston suburbs like Weston, Wellesley, Newton and Wayland.

Last year, the company completed 22 projects, with the average remodeling job costing \$350,000. The company had more than \$3.5 million in gross sales last year, a 45 per-

cent increase from 2004, according to Wiese.

The remodeling industry itself has enjoyed tremendous growth in recent years, as consumers took advantage of low interest rates and rising real estate values. But with the residential real estate market softening considerably, industry experts are anticipating that remodeling activity will slow.

Nationwide, remodeling activity is expected to grow 5.5 percent this year compared to last year's 6.5 percent growth, according to Wiese.

The real estate market slowdown will "definitely have an impact," said Wiese. "Certainly, the last six or eight months have put people on pause."

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However, Wiese said that many metropolitan areas will weather the slowdown because of their older housing stock and limited supply of homes.

"We're sitting on a large pool of aging housing stock, which is going to mean that our industry will ... stay strong even if new home sales wane," he said.

Wiese said he believes owners of older homes, with formal living rooms and decentralized kitchens, will continue to update their homes to reflect today's lifestyles.

"People are still spending a lot more on their home because they want the home to be the center of what their activities are," he noted.

Wiese joined the local chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, or NARI, in 1997 after his insurance agent urged him to become involved. Wiese was part of the group's Membership Committee for four years, helping to expand membership from 100 to just over 300 today.

A certified design professional through the National Kitchen and Bath Association,

Wiese is also a member of the Builders Association of Greater Boston and the Boston Society of Architects.

Before becoming active in remodeling, Wiese sold real estate in the early 1990s for about four years. He still has his real estate license.

Having moved to six different homes in the last seven years, Wiese and his wife, Terry, have witnessed and experienced the steep appreciation in home prices firsthand. The couple purchased a home in Sherborn in 2000 and saw the value of the property jump more than 30 percent in the 14 months they owned it.

In addition to Sherborn, the couple has lived in Plainfield, Mansfield, Wrentham and Wellesley. Earlier this year, they purchased a home in Natick.

In the years he's run his remodeling business, Wiese has had to deal with significant changes in the industry – including soaring insurance costs and a greater number of regulatory restrictions.

The permitting process has become much more complicated in Massachusetts, accord-

ing to Wiese, with each town having its own regulations and rules on building and remodeling activity.

Wiese recalls how a community group tried to block a home expansion he was completing in Newton about five years ago. He had been hired to add 900 square feet to a 1,300-square-foot home. When he arrived at the home one day, he saw city officials and members of a community group meeting about freezing construction because the expansion was too large.

"I think that municipalities ... have a lot of reign in Massachusetts so there's not a more even permitting process across the state," he said.

The discrepancies from town to town ultimately end up hurting consumers, according to Wiese, because contractors who are not accustomed to a town's permitting and approval process may not be willing to do work in that community. That means there could be a limited number of remodeling companies serving a community.

"I would definitely like to see a more streamlined process in this state," he said. ■