

# Steel City Advocacy

*SMC Business Councils fights for small businesses in Pittsburgh and beyond*

**By Rob Yunich**

*Director of Communications*

Advocating for small business health care initiatives is a never-ending fight on the local and national level. As one of NSBA's priority issues, the organization focuses on that battle on a daily basis.

In Pittsburgh, SMC Business Councils—an affiliate of NSBA—is entrenched in a similar struggle. SMC has taken the lead on numerous health care-related issues throughout Pennsylvania and beyond. It is this issue, among others, that links the two organizations.

"Health care costs are and have been a top concern for small business in recent years," SMC President Cliff Shannon said. "The opportunity to work with colleagues from NSBA and its affiliates has been hugely important to understanding a complex issue and conjuring up workable solutions."

Shannon made a memorable presentation during NSBA's Health Care Summit in February, during which the organization unveiled its Health Care Proposal. Shannon cited statistic after statistic showing just how broken the American health care system is right now, and proposed solutions for fixing it.

"The SMC board laid out health care costs as our top priority in 2004 and it remains in that spot," Shannon said. "We challenged our staff and membership to really make a difference, which has led SMC to take a series of unusually-bold steps, build non-traditional alliances, and embrace positions and solutions that depart from decades of political lip service."

As part of its dedication to health care, SMC switched the entire focus of its magazine, *Dynamic Business*, to the issue. And this year, it received two awards for its health



PHOTO BY ROB YUNICH

Marilyn Landis (right), who serves as SMC's vice-chair/chair elect and NSBA's vice chair of advocacy, pauses for a moment at NSBA's recent board meeting with fellow NSBA Board Member Lois Riske, SMC's immediate past chair.

care coverage—the APEX Award for Publication Excellence in Crisis Communication and the Magnum Opus Honorable Mention for Editorial on a Single Issue. The magazine was founded in 1945 as *The Smaller Manufacturer* and was renamed in 1987.

But health care is not the only issue on which SMC advocates. The organization pushes for free trade, the viability of U.S. Small Business Administration lending programs, and the end of lawsuit abuse. Additionally, SMC joins NSBA in support of the Fair Tax and repeal of the federal estate tax (also known as the Death Tax), among other issues.

On the state level, SMC continues to monitor manufacturing, the capital stock and franchise tax, the corporate net income tax, as well as product liability and tort reform.

## HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

SMC was founded by 16 smaller manufacturers in April 1944, about seven years after NSBA (then called

the National Small Business Men's Association) was created. The 16 manufacturers originally organized to get war contracts, which were being given to big businesses.

"They wanted a piece of the action and they were very successful," Shannon said. "At war's end, the 16 made the association permanent and we've been growing and expanding every since."

The group's original name was the Small Manufacturer's Council and SMC kept that name until the 1980s. During that decade, manufacturing began to decline and the organization's board wanted to expand to include all small businesses.

In December 1994, the organization's membership was divided into councils—service, manufacturing, and commercial—to more adequately reflect its diversified membership base. To reflect its new focus, the group switched its name to its current incarnation—using the first letters of each council to create the initials SMC.

Today, SMC represents more

than 4,000 members in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia. Through its membership in NSBA, SMC ensures that it takes a proactive stance on the national level—actively participating in numerous Washington, D.C.-based events such as the White House Conference on Small Business and NSBA's Washington Presentation.

The Washington Presentation, in fact, was what originally brought NSBA and SMC together. In May 1968, SMC's then-Chair John Hannon sent its then-President Emeritus Leo McDonough to the Washington Presentation—sponsored at the time by the Smaller Business Association of New England (SBANE), another NSBA affiliate. McDonough then recommended that SMC send a delegation to the event and SMC has been sending one ever since. In 1986, after many connections through the Washington Presentation and other events, NSBA and SMC officially joined forces.

#### DISTINGUISHED LEADERSHIP

Shannon became president of SMC in 1996 after a distinguished political career. Immediately prior to joining SMC, Shannon served as chief of staff for U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-Texas), who currently is in her third term.

Shannon previously worked as chief of staff for Sen. John Heinz (R-Pa.), who served in the Senate from Jan. 3, 1977 until his death on April 4, 1991. Shannon led what turned out to be Heinz's last re-election campaign in 1988. In fact, Shannon worked for Heinz for the first two years of his term, serving as his community relations representative.

SMC volunteers share an equally-impressive resume. Its newly-elected chair, Jonathan Hall, serves as president and chief executive officer of Hall Industries, Inc., a company he founded in Ellwood, Pa.

The firm designs, redesigns, and reengineers special products—including a test track and test vehicle in

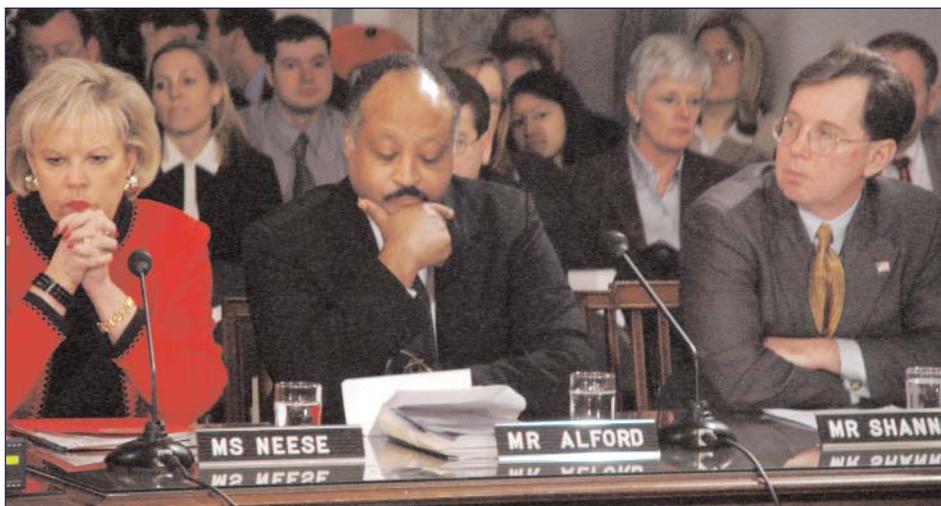


PHOTOS COURTESY SMC BUSINESS COUNCILS

*ABOVE LEFT:* Jonathan Hall of Ellwood, Pa., was inaugurated at the SMC Chairman's Banquet on Sept. 17 at the Rivers Club. With him to celebrate was his wife, Beth.

*ABOVE RIGHT:* Hall pauses for a moment with outgoing SMC Chair Lois Riske (center) and featured speaker Tim Murphy, who represents the Keystone State's 18th district in the U.S. House.

*BELOW:* Cliff Shannon (right) has served as president of SMC since 1996. Previously, he served as chief of staff for Sens. Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-Texas) and Sen. John Heinz (R-Pa.). He has testified on the Hill numerous times, here speaking about health care.



NSBA FILE PHOTO

San Diego. Hall also serves on the NSBA board.

SMC's immediate past chair, Lois Riske, owns General Cleaning, Inc., a contract cleaning firm specializing in commercial accounts. The company was founded by her father and uncle in 1934 and has remained under family ownership the entire time. Riske also is an NSBA board member, and previously served as NSBA's vice chair of government relations, vice chair of membership, and chair of the 2001 Washington Presentation.

SMC Vice Chair-Elect/Secretary Marilyn Landis founded Basic Business Concepts, Inc. in 2001. The company provides support to keep

businesses financially-balanced, on-track, and growing. These include chief financial officer-level services to small businesses and business brokerage services. Landis currently serves as NSBA's vice chair for advocacy.

The organization's fourth NSBA board member is Victor Tucci, owner of Three Rivers Health & Safety, Inc. in Pittsburgh.

For more information about SMC Business Councils, visit its Web site, [smc.org](http://smc.org), or its Blog, [smcbusinesscouncils.blogspot.com](http://smcbusinesscouncils.blogspot.com).

SMC staff member Mary Heindl contributed to this story.

Look for more profiles of NSBA's affiliates in future issues of the *Advocate*. ★