

# VISIONARY GROWTH THROUGH THE YEARS

BY WILLIE WELLS

This year marks a monumental milestone as the Houston Business Roundtable (HBR) celebrates 50 successful years as an association in industry where owners and contractors promote best practices to improve performance in safety, health, environment, productivity, and costs.

I have spent my career focusing on improving protocols and supporting innovation in industry. I entered the workforce as a craftsman, followed my passion with a move into Health & Safety, and began my involvement with HBR over 30 years ago. In 2019 I was honored to be selected as Executive Director and am committed to leading this organization into the next chapter.

On July 19, 1973, asset owner companies established the Houston Business Roundtable to collaborate on a set of industry standards for end users. The rich history of HBR is highlighted with improvements and expansions in the early 1980s when emphasis shifted to the construction industry's cost-effectiveness. At this point, HBR expanded to include Maintenance, Turnarounds, Project Engineering, and focused on the improvement of work practices and efficiencies.

HBR soon included contractors as well service providers as subscribers to assist in the collaborative efforts to improve. The emphasis on the need and importance of HBR's purpose grew exponentially after the fateful petrochemical refinery explosions in 1989. Understanding the significance of sharing knowledge across industry professionals, HBR began concentrating on safety best practice sharing.

As a result of the devastating explosions of 1989, OSHA developed 29 CFR 1910.119, the Process Safety Management (PSM) standard (issued in 1992), which covers the manufacturing of explosives and processes that included requirements for access to industrial sites. This move helped to mold the direction for HBR. Thirty-six years ago, in 1987, HBR hosted the inaugural Safety Excellence Awards to recognize the organizations exhibiting the best safety practices. Through this event, and all the collaboration leading up to announcing winners, industry leaders acknowledged an improvement in the attention to safety in the workforce.

A couple of years after the very first awards banquet, HBR established a task force to come up with a reciprocal training process for asset owners in Houston. Volunteers from various organizations came together to embark on this project, and ultimately the Houston Area Contractor Safety Council was born from this group. Luis Aguilar was hired as the very first employee in 1990, you might recognize him on stage today. Luis has led the evolution and modernization of the council into what we know as the Health and Safety Council today, and we are proud they contribute as our generous co-hosts tonight.

Not long after, the Houston Business Roundtable partnered with Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) and created a workforce development committee that helped establish the Construction & Maintenance Education Foundation (CMEF), and the Safety Health and Environmental Resource Committee developed and launched the contractor POF (Pre-Qualification Form).



## HOUSTON BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE

The POF set standards and expectations for what it takes to even be considered for contracting jobs in the industry. When drug use became an issue HBR formed NABSC, the North American Background Screening Consortium, and NASAP, the North American Substance Abuse Program. In the 2000s, the Project Management Committee was conceived to share work practices for organizational stakeholders such as plant managers, maintenance managers, and construction managers.

HBR committees also include: (with other committees being established)

- Crane, Rigging & Lifting
- Industrial Cleaning
- Workforce Development

At the helm of this association, I will continue to foster the creation of committees to address Key/Critical/ Crucial? topics in various industries. HBR will see increased workforce development involvement and opportunity to address environmental concerns. As industry needs shift and grow, HBR will continue to be the resource for asset owners in the gulf coast region and beyond. We have exciting things planned as we expand our presence in current industries, seek out new industries to collaborate with and extend our geographic reach.



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