

Austin Bus Trip – c/o Debbie Riddle, Texas Representative

Our chapter has developed a great relationship with our legislative members in the Texas House of Representatives and state Senate, and it was with unbridled enthusiasm that we accepted a personal invitation from State Representative Debbie Riddle from district 150 to tour the state Capitol building. Representative Riddle hails from a background of real estate, and is a champion for issues that help build and refine the laws surrounding our industry. She has spoken to our membership at luncheons and made it a point to assist our chapter in many ways. Plus, she's just a neat lady.

We quickly filled the bus with a contingent of agents and affiliates, and set off to Austin for the day. HAR supplied an awesome speaker and teacher for MCE along the trip – Mr. Bill Evans – who spoke to us about the imperative need to become more involved in the politics of our profession, and to take ownership of the awesome responsibility to protect our clients when it comes to matters of real estate.

Mary Papageorge from AMCAP Mortgage and Cyndi Rifkin from Allegiance Title co-sponsored this event, and made sure we had plenty to eat and drink along the way. The WCR Great Northwest Chapter supplied the bus as a part of our ongoing commitment to education, and away we went. Our first order of business was to collect our contingent of 20 starting in the Woodlands, with a quick stop-off in Cypress. Bill took over and provided our hours of MCE on the way.

Once we arrived in Austin, we were met by Representative Riddle outside the Capitol Building, and walked over to the TAR offices in Austin. We were treated to lunch and a personal tour of the Texas Association of REALTORS building where we were introduced to the power team of our TAR officers: Travis Kessler - President & CEO, Mike Barnett – COO and Vice President, Mark Lehman – VP of Government Affairs, Brandon Alderete – Director of Public Affairs, and numerous other officers and support staff that work daily to manage the daily business of running one of the largest lobby groups in Texas on our behalf. It was fascinating to walk the offices of these ambassadors and witness the proximity of power the TAR wields in our state government. Of notable mention was the continuous reminder from CEO on down that we were walking the halls of “our” building, and we were encouraged to explore it and learn more. There was a feeling of collective belonging, no matter how far removed you may be – every one of us made up a part of the whole.

Debbie, with her Chief of Staff Shelton Green leading the way, took us next to the Capitol Building. From the moment we were waved through security, we knew we were with the best tour guide we could possibly be. Over the course of the day, we were able to explore and hear first-hand from Debbie the ins and outs of the workings of our Texas Legislature. Representative Riddle opened doors and lifted velvet ropes that keep the typical tourist out, and took us onto the floor of the Senate and House of Representatives, the back room of the Treasury, and into the vaults. It is one thing to hear history reported by a tour guide, and another thing altogether to hear first-hand from the people who were there to make the history. Representative Riddle was a fountain of information and spared her entire day to make us feel welcome. One of the reasons she spent so much quality time for our group related to the fact that she was giving her final tour through the Capitol. After 14 years as the Representative of District 150, she was in the process of moving out of office, and shared how it was quite appropriate and befitting to have a team of REALTORS as her final tour group. She began her tour in Austin coming out of a career in real estate, and was ending her tour surrounded by colleagues and friends alike. She shared some of her favorite stories of intense legislative deals, and also her favorite place in the Capitol for a fantastic view.

Once our tour was over, we said goodbye and began another journey altogether. Back on the bus, we made pretty good time back towards Houston, until we hit the rain. The Massive May Storms had started, and we unfortunately rolled into Brenham directly behind the tornadoes and torrential rains, to find 290 and 36 completely underwater. We weren't going anywhere, and that right quick. It was only after we saw vehicles floating down 290 that we realized how bad things had very quickly become.

After a few hard and fast decisions about our predicament, we settled on seeking high ground in K-Bob's Steakhouse – our oasis on high ground. To this day, I want to thank the owner for allowing us to crash 20+ soaking wet ladies in his damaged restaurant – leaking ceilings and all – for who knew how long. We set up our soggy camp and waited out the storm. Scouts went to the store next door to scrounge up supplies (wine). Our driver, Sheila, was a trooper. She worked the phones with dispatch and kept working the solution. It wasn't until after 11pm and several detours when we finally made it back into familiar territory, some 6 hours late. But between the tornadoes, flooding, the drama, and crazy detours through high water, we had a great time learning more about each other, and forming the bonds that define what the Women's Council is all about.

I would do it all over again, but I would probably wear different shoes.

Bret Nordquist
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