Did you miss the hardwood event of the year? The Washington, D.C. NHLA Convention brought together more than 1000 of the industry’s decision makers and opinion leaders. Besides being fun and educational, it was quite a show. It’s safe to say General Colin L. Powell, USA (Ret.) and Colonel Oliver North both were big hits as keynote speakers as expected, far better than my own talk.

General Powell, who enthralled the crowd of more than 800 packed into Opening Session, brought a personal perspective with his views on a rapidly changing world. While obviously not an expert in the forest products industry, there are probably few people who have a firmer grasp of the world’s economic and political future.

“The hardwood industry is not immune to the rapid changes in the world,” General Powell said. Rather than shying away from change, the tactic embraced by the now defunct Soviet Union, the hardwood industry can succeed and even prosper by embracing that change.

Colonel North echoed many of the same themes but with a different focus. The world’s economic balance is shifting from America and Europe to America and Asia. He also reminded us to hire returning servicemen and women. What better way to find highly qualified employees?

No one would deny these are challenging times, but the “Legends of Lumber,” who were the surprise hit of the convention, had many words of wisdom for all of us. They urged that we modernize; be leaner, more efficient; use technology. Compete globally. Despite tough economic times, all of the legendary leaders shared optimism about the future.

Your association is embracing change, looking for more ways to bring value to our members. In 2008, we will be upgrading our website, adding educational webinars and promoting the NHLA grades in China.

Over and over during convention, the question was heard “How can NHLA top this?” Well, the Association is already working on next year’s convention in San Francisco, the “Global Gathering of the Hardwood Community.”

Instead of fearing tomorrow, we are leading change. NHLA can be your resource to prosperity.

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