On behalf of Brenda and myself, welcome to New Orleans, The Big Easy. Brace yourself for the next few days. They will be full of information, education and, of course, maybe a little fun. Despite all the items I just mentioned, the basic thought in many minds is, “Why do I need to come to the trade show and convention? Information and education are available locally without the cost and time away from my business.”

The answer is something I have witnessed on a personal basis for the last almost 30 years of involvement in AWCI, but has been reinforced manifold over the last two months. The answer, in a word, is relationships. Over the years, I have made many friends and established long-term relationships with contractors, manufacturers, suppliers and others who know me on sight and on a first-name basis. During my career, the relationships have paid huge dividends in times of crisis with labor issues, material shortages and just knowing there is someone else who has or had the same problems I face daily. Contractors out of state or across the country have little problem assisting me because we are not direct competitors. This counsel by itself more than pays for the time and money spent traveling to the AWCI meeting and shows.

However, as AWCI’s president, I recently had the opportunity to travel with other AWCI members to represent the association to other trade groups in Europe. We have met with those groups in both business and social environments. In all cases, both sides have benefited from the meetings more than was thought possible. On a more personal note, I have found that all people in our industry have similar personal and professional problems regardless of location or culture. Andrew Meason, the president of the Federation of Drywall and Plastering Contractors of the United Kingdom, gave this same message at their recent awards luncheon, which we attended in London. He was amazed that a contractor in the U.K. would struggle daily with exactly the same problems as a contractor in the United States. Just that knowledge seemed to reassure Andrew that we are all truly alike no matter how different we seem.

Once again, the answer is relationships. If you are one of those in attendance here in New Orleans, take the opportunity to develop a few of those relationships in the next few days. If not, mark your calendar for the next event so that you too can begin to grow those relationships that will pay lifelong benefits, both personally and professionally.