



# SHIP Caucus at Conference



By George Romagnoli

**T**he year was 1993, and local governments were feeling their way around the brand new State Housing Initiative Partnership (SHIP) Program. The state's new housing program was something that local gov-

ernments had never seen before – a truly innovative flexible program that was meant to meet a local area's need, not loaded down by decade's worth of federal rules and regulations. Not only homeownership and rehabilitation activities were eligible, but also rental activities and foreclosure prevention.

The Tampa Bay area was rich with over a dozen large SHIP recipients that wanted to share ideas and programs. Howie Carroll from Hillsborough County took the lead in forming the West Coast SHIP Steering Committee. The first few meetings showed that even though governments were from cities and counties, rural and urban areas, they all had similar issues and problems. This group has met regularly and continuously since then.

The Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHFC) took note of this group, and the State's SHIP Administrator met regularly with them over the years to bounce ideas, rule changes, and Annual Report revisions. Many of the policies and directions that SHIP has taken has been because of these discussions. The group was able to give the State real life examples of issues they had to face. This interaction led to unusual case in state



*George facilitates the SHIP Caucus at the Florida Housing Coalition Conference*

government – a true partnership. Unlike other state agencies, FHFC does not promulgate rules and policies with out talking to SHIP Administrators first – and usually their first stop is the West Central Florida SHIP Steering Committee.

The group also formed the nucleus of the group that organized the state-wide SHIP Administrators Roundtable. There is no doubt that the opportunity to meet and discuss common problems and tasks helps all SHIP Administrators improve their programs.

This experience was the reason that all SHIP Administrators were invited to caucus by region on the first day of the Florida Housing Coalition Conference. Groups were formed in Central Florida, Northwest Florida, Northeast Florida, Southeast Florida and the West Coast reorganized and elected a new Chair. The West Coast group decided to expand beyond SHIP, and invite all government agencies to join them to discuss common housing experiences.

As SHIP Administrators from other areas met, they found that they too had common issues that they faced, developers, builders Realtors, and not-for-profit agencies that crossed municipal lines, and regional issues that they faced together. All agreed to meet in the near future.

As Humphrey Bogart said in Casablanca, ***“I think this is the start of beautiful friendship.”***

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The SHIP caucus was one of six that were held at the Florida Housing Coalition's statewide conference on the afternoon of the first day. The other five were Foreclosure Counselors, Habitat for Humanity, Florida Legal Services Statewide Affordable Housing Lawyers, the Florida Alliance of CDCs, and FAHRO/FRA.

This was the first year we incorporated a formal caucus time at the conference, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Some groups will continue to meet throughout the year and we will include the caucus time again at next year's conference on September 20, 2010. Let us know if you are part of another group that would like a caucus at the conference: [info@flhousing.org](mailto:info@flhousing.org).