

Jerry Howard: Welcome to Housing Developments. I'm Jerry Howard.

Jim Tobin: And I'm Jim Tobin.

Jerry Howard: We'll start off first by thanking Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, not only for their sponsorship of our broadcast here, but their presence at IBS was unbelievable. They were everywhere, and they really support our industry. We're grateful for that, and we hope that our members will use them whenever they can.

Jim Tobin: Yeah, it was great to see them, like you said, all over the place in Orlando. Great leadership sponsor for many years, and proud to have him on board with us here at the podcast at Housing Developments.

Jerry Howard: Jim, it was a tremendous IBS, no matter what metric you use to measure our success. It is unquestionably well above what any of us could have hoped for.

Jim Tobin: I agree. With the energy in Orlando, and the convention center, and around town was unbelievable. I know going into the meeting, we expected success, of course. I think our conventions and meetings team and our sponsorship team had good and high expectations, but even those were exceeded. Give us a little taste of the numbers. You walked out of Orlando on Thursday afternoon.

Jerry Howard: Close to 75,000 people, when we had been anticipating maybe 50,000. That's the most important number. The exhibitors were thrilled with the quality of the leads that they got, and the number of exhibitors that are already talking about coming back next year has got the sales team working full speed before they even have time to recover from this show, so that's something. I think the biggest coup is adding the National Hardware Show as a company-date next year, along with the Kitchen and Bath Show. Our members are going to see the largest show they've ever seen next year, and it's going... I just can't wait. I'm totally excited about it.

Jim Tobin: Yeah. 10 years of Design and Construction next week, next year. Is that what we're celebrating?

Jerry Howard: Yes, sir. The 10th anniversary of Design and Construction week. It's fitting that the third largest show would come on board with us.

Jim Tobin: Yeah. That's going to be amazing. I mean, if we drew 75,000 people in Orlando, still in the throws of COVID... God, I hope a year from now, you're looking at six figures, no doubt, in Las Vegas, wouldn't you say?

Jerry Howard: Yeah, it was great. But to me, the best part, Jim, was seeing people I hadn't seen in two years. I mean, people from all over the country. It's just great to touch base live and in person again.

Jim Tobin: Yeah, and you could tell that the members felt the same way too, it was a sort of homecoming after two years and everybody came in and came out of Orlando healthy, and it really bodes well for the future. I think it speaks volumes of the health of the industry at the moment, the optimism move moving forward. If you weren't there in Orlando, you missed out, but you still have time to buy your tickets for Las Vegas next year. It's going to be spectacular. I know I'm looking forward to it.

Jerry Howard: Yeah. I mean, I almost wish we could open registration today for Las Vegas, but we still got ways to go. But speaking of Orlando, there were conversations there that really, I think, weave into our guest. And that is to say, talking about labor and the problems that we're having in our industry getting labor, and when we do get the right labor, we want to make sure that they are healthy people and that we can help them stay healthy. Our guest is someone who is really going above and beyond what an average citizen should do and going above and beyond what a caring human being would do. Don't you agree with that?

Jim Tobin: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, someone who's taken tragedy in their own life and turned it around into a positive and we're very fortunate to have a partner with our next guest. A partnership with our next guest, for victims of the opioid epidemic, but also working with us to make sure, like you said, our workforce is healthy and that our members recognize the signs and how to be compassionate and help their workers if they do find themselves addicted to this dangerous drugs.

Jerry Howard: It's not as if he was an underachiever in his career. Admiral Winnefeld was the second-ranking military officer in the United States, is being the number-two man at the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Admiral, thanks for being here.

Jim Tobin: Well, it's my, my pleasure to introduce Admiral James Winnefeld, who is a graduate of the Georgia Institute of Technology and who served in the United States Navy for the 37 years. He's held several of the high-level command positions in the United States Navy and retired in 2015, after serving as the ninth Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which is the United States number two ranking military officer. Admiral Winnefeld is currently published author and a director or advisory board member for companies operating in a broad spectrum of business sectors. And in 2020, he was appointed to serve as a member of the congressionally-mandated National Commission on Synthetic Opioid Trafficking. He and his wife are co-founders of the Stop The Addiction Fatality Epidemic, or SAFE Project. He currently serves as a distinguished professor at the Sam Nunn School Of International Affairs at Georgia Tech, where he is also a member of the Engineering Hall of Fame. He's a senior non-resident fellow of the of Harvard's John F Kennedy's School of Government, and he's Chairman of the Georgia Tech Advisory Board. And honestly, I probably... That has to be one of the most accomplished and longest introductions I've ever read. It is my sincere pleasure, Admiral, to welcome you to Housing Developments. How are you today?

Admiral Winnefe...: I'm doing really well, and thanks for that kind introduction, but what's not in the introduction is that I used to work construction in the summertime before I went to college. I really enjoyed building apartment buildings and being up on roofs, putting together rafters and plywood and fixing other people's mistakes, that sort... and making my own. So, I do have a little bit of experience in the construction industry. I really loved it.

Jim Tobin: Yeah. It's nice to hear a lot of it. You'd be surprised how many people we talk to eventually remind that they worked construction over the summer, sweeping up a job site, or actually like yourself, actually hammering nails. So, it's great to have, like you said, that you know the industry is even more important to our listeners. That's great. Thank you.

Admiral Winnefe...: Absolutely, and it's a pleasure to be here today. Thanks for having me.

Jim Tobin: Well, let's jump right into it. Tell us a little bit about the SAFE Project and why it's such an important project for you and your wife.

Admiral Winnefe...: Well, we started up the SAFE Project in the wake of the accidental overdose death of our son on his fourth day of college at University of Denver. He had been struggling with addiction. We put him into treatment and he did very, very well, but we didn't know he had an opioid problem because HIPAA rules would not allow us to know that. When he emerged from treatment, he was doing extremely well. He got his EMT qual and the like, but we unfortunately lost him. In the wake of that loss, we felt that we could crawl into a little ball of anger, grief, and shame, and we certainly don't blame anybody if they do that, and we do that ourselves sometimes, but we felt that with the connections we had made and sort of knowing how to get things done, that we would feel bad if we didn't try to take this thing on and put our arms on the oars of the big boat that's trying to reverse this terrible crisis.

Jim Tobin: Wow. That is... I'm so sorry for your loss. As a father of a teenage son and almost teenage daughter, I can't imagine what that must be like, but to be able to channel that grief into a positive result is must give you some solace over the years.

Admiral Winnefe...: It does. We wake up every morning as a team trying to save lives, and we do it in a variety of ways. We've got some wonderful partners out there. We're very proud to call the National Association Of Home Builder as a partner, and we think we're making some progress. It's gotten a lot worse over the last couple of years, due to two things: one, COVID has dramatically impacted mental health for Americans across the board. Anxiety, isolation, and the like, and at the same time, deadly fentanyl is coming across our borders in greater and greater quantities. Those two are combining to dramatically increase the overdose fatality rate, which is up to 100,000 people a year, about 60% of whom die due to an opioid addiction or an opioid event.

Jim Tobin: What has been the biggest challenge during the project's campaign? What has been the hardest to overcome? You talked about COVID and the challenge over the last couple of years, but what's been maybe the most surprising and durable part of this epidemic?

Admiral Winnefe...: Well, public enemy number one of this entire epidemic is stigma. Unfortunately, people do not understand that addiction is a disease. It's not a moral failing. There are plenty of people that fall into addiction starting with prescription medicine. And so, because of that stigma, it's hard to get resources behind it. It's hard to get people to go into treatment. It's hard to get people to support what you're trying to do, but at the same time, it's hard to find somebody who has not been affected in some way, shape, or form by this crisis, who has a brother, a mother, a friend, a cousin who has either is struggling with addiction or who they've actually lost. But stigma is the problem.

Jim Tobin: And so what can we do? What's advice to our listeners, NAHB, as you said, partner with you, but how do we talk about it more? How do we bring it out from the shadows and as a source of embarrassment and really talk about for what it is? Like you said, an addiction that needs to be treated and respected, and people need to be helped?

Admiral Winnefe...: Well, one thing I think is to learn as much as you can about the science of addiction. How it actually happens and why it happens, and that in the depths of addiction you're essentially helpless. The other thing is to just have a little courage and stand up and be open about it. We discovered... We took a risk in opening up about what had happened to our son, but it's amazing how many people will come up to you and say, "Thank you for being so open. We understand. We have a problem in our family with this." So, it's really just a matter of sort of courageously overcoming the stigma itself. And there are there stigmas out there in this world that people have overcome. We should get past this one as well.

Jim Tobin: Right. You mentioned your connection to the construction industry. Over the last several years, we've identified this as a severe problem in the industry with our workforce. Tell me a little bit about how you see this affecting the residential construction industry, and then what NAHB and partnering with the SAFE Project, how we're tackling this together.

Admiral Winnefe...: Sure. Over 20 million Americans are struggling with substance dependence, 60% of whom are employed in our workforce. When you focus in on the construction workforce, about twice as many in terms of percentage, of construction workers have a substance use disorder compared to the general population. It's 15% of construction workers, and I really give NAHB credit for facing that. Not a lot of industries have faced that. Many are in denial, and NAHB is taking it head on, which is so terribly important for your constituency, or this wonderful industry that you're in that builds homes. Together, we can take this thing on, and it's sort of a walk before you run. One of the things we're partnering with is getting

these drug disposal bags out, where if four out of five people who have become addicted to heroin started with prescription medicine, well, let's get rid of all the extra prescription medicines that are out there.

Most of those people got it out of a medicine cabinet, not necessarily from a doctor. That was handed to him by a friend. So, let's conquer that, let's get information out there so people understand how vulnerable they can be. Let's erase stigma and get people to actually ask for help, and then when somebody does ask for help, let's take care of them. Let's not just fire them or anything like that. Let's put them under our warm embrace and see if there's something we can do to help them. When they understand that, I think we can make some progress. So, very proud of what NAHP is standing up to do.

Jim Tobin: Thank you, but you're absolutely right. Recognizing that the industry does have challenges and a problem with opioids, and then finding a way forward. I can imagine there's a lot of industries out there that want to leave it, sweep it under the rug, and I would be remiss if I don't mention our colleague David Jaffe, who has been our staff lead on this, and really has embraced as a cause and really helped to drive the industry not only doing the right thing, but again, not being afraid to talk about it. So, thank you for your work with David, and it's really a... It's a great partnership.

Admiral Winnefe...: One of the things that we can all do is take what we call at SAFE Project the "no shame pledge", and you can find that no shame pledge at our website, which is safe project dot us. All one word, safe project dot us. And it's very simple. It says, "I understand addiction is a disease. I commit to learn more about the underlying factors, such as mental health challenges, that are involved in that disease. If I know someone seeking treatment, I'll work to assist them in finding treatment, and I understand that recovery is a lifelong journey and I'll do whatever I can to support people to succeed in that journey." It's a very simple pledge, and the pledge itself educates people that, "Hey, this is a disease, not a moral failing." And of course, in the construction industry, you do have people get hurt.

I almost fell off a roof one time. I can't imagine that would've been like, and so there're more... And lifting heavy stuff and just that hard physical work can lead people to having chronic pain, and having that chronic pain is one of the pathways into becoming dependent on those substances. The other thing is to educate people on this whole fentanyl business, where it used to be we were concerned, and we still are, about fentanyl being introduced into other drugs like heroin or cocaine, or amphetamines and that sort of thing. But its prevalence now is in counterfeit prescription medicine pills. So, if you have somebody who's suffering from chronic pain and they're having a hard time either getting a prescription or they're having a hard time paying for a prescription, and they revert to somebody who says, "Hey, I've got some pills here that you can get a much cheaper," there's a good chance there's fentanyl

on those pills. What you have to understand is you don't have to be addicted to die from taking a counterfeit fentanyl pill. You can die on your first try.

Jerry Howard: Wow.

Jim Tobin: I'm interested. You talked about it flowing across the borders, obviously an illegal drug trade. What's the solution to solving that problem?

Admiral Winnefe...: Well, it's very difficult now with fentanyl because such very small quantities of that drug are all that it takes to kill you. It's very easy to package in the mail or UPS or FedEx or something like that, and just ship it across the border. So, we're taking on this problem in a holistic way. We're trying to encourage the Mexican government to try to get rid of the labs that are making this stuff, as hard as that is. We're looking at technologies that can do a better job of detecting it when it comes through package handling services and the like, and of course, enabling law enforcement with their intelligence resources to try to shut down the people who are dealing this stuff as best they can. Then, of course, educating people in the first place so that we can try to reduce the demand side, not just the supply side, in order to alert people to the hazards of not taking pain medication under very controlled circumstances. There's no one lever that wins this battle. It's a whole host of things that we have to do.

Jim Tobin: Admiral, and all of our listeners out there, our loyal Housing Developments listeners, I encourage you to go to [safe project dot us](#) and look up, and take the no shame pledge, and make sure that your workforce knows that you're looking for the signs of addiction, that it's not a stigma, and that you as an employer, as the Admiral said, will give the treatment, the understanding, the compassion to help your workforce conquer this disease and addiction. So, with that Admiral, I want, I want to say thank you for joining us on Housing Developments. I want to thank you for your service and long career in the United States military, and your continuing service with your wife on this important topic. I'm glad we're in this together with you and thank you for everything you've done.

Admiral Winnefe...: Well, thank you, Jim, and thanks to Jerry Howard and the whole NAHB organization. It's just fantastic that you are stepping up to this challenge. You're doing right by your people, so thank you.

Jim Tobin: Thank you.

Jerry Howard: Admiral, thanks again for being with us. Whether people know it or not, America owes a double debt of gratitude to Admiral Winfield for his military service and for what he's doing here. We're lucky to have him, and I'm very proud that we are in a partnership with him.

Jim Tobin: Agreed, agreed. Yeah. Really moving interview and yeah. Just an impressive person throughout his career and now even more what he's doing. Yep.

Jerry Howard: Well, Jim, I hope you're going to take a day off this week and try and catch your breath. Again, congratulations to the entire NAHB team, the staff and the volunteers who made the IBS happen. We hit it out of the park. We really set the stage for an outstanding event in what we know will be the post-COVID times next year in Las Vegas, but we just can't wait to get it started. Before we sign off, Jim, let's give another shout out to Wells Fargo Home Mortgage. They were everywhere, and we really appreciate it.

Jim Tobin: Yeah. I can't thank them enough and also encourage our members to do business with Wells Fargo Home Mortgage. Great people.

Jerry Howard: Anyway, thanks for listening to Housing Developments. I'm Jerry Howard.

Jim Tobin: And I'm Jim Tobin. Until next time. Bye.