We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident

By Bob Harris, CAE

There are legal principles in the United States of America that support the vitality of nonprofit organizations. In accepting Association Trends’ 2012 Partner of the Year recognition, Bob Harris, CAE, reviewed these principles.

“We cannot assume that every country has similar mechanisms promoting nonprofit organizations,” he said. “We are blessed to have these rights in the USA.” Their combination is the platform upon which nonprofits are created, governed and sustained.

The following landmark events were reviewed by Bob in his acceptance remarks, beginning with the first amendment to the US Constitution:

1791 – Congress and the states adopt a Constitutional amendment providing for the freedoms of assembly, speech and the right to petition government. Today nearly every association reflects these freedoms in their mission statement: “To advance and protect our profession through advocacy…”

1894 – The income of charities could not be used to benefit any individual related to the organization. The principle is a U.S. standard where volunteers serve without compensation.

1908 – President Roosevelt seemingly references membership organizations in his statement: “Every man owes a part of his time and money to the business or industry in which he is engaged. No man has a moral right to withhold his support from an organization that is striving to improve conditions within his sphere.

1913 – The system of federal income tax is established, creating an exemption for certain organizations.

1917 – The Revenue Act allows individuals to contribute to exempt organizations and to benefit with an individual income tax deduction; further encouraging support of nonprofits.

1997 – States and federal government extend volunteer immunity to volunteers.

Not for Profit Corporate Status – Since the 1800s corporations have been formed to ensure perpetuity and to protect the directors, affording ease in establishing not-for-profit status at the state level.

Bob Harris provides board orientation and strategic planning. His website offers free resources at www.nonprofitcenter.com.