

# ICSC GOVERNMENT RELATIONS CHAIR SPOTLIGHT



## Bill Tomala

Bill Tomala has served as the ICSC GR Chair for Florida since 2019 and has been a member of the Florida GR Committee since 2011.

### What motivated you to get involved in government relations?

I joined ICSC 15 years ago and I am fortunate to work for a company whose co-founding leader, Lonnie Peterson, understood the importance of joining ICSC. As a long-time ICSC volunteer, Lonnie also recognized the value of becoming involved with the organization. A testament to this is the University of Florida Lonnie G. Peterson Scholarship in Architecture that ICSC offers. Lonnie was my mentor, and there wasn't a person who didn't know him. He is the reason I became involved in ICSC's Government Relations as he would often say, "Because policy affects our industry." I started out volunteering and serving on Florida's GR committee and attending ICSC's "Day at the Capitol," where I saw how policy could impact our industry, and I've been hooked ever since. I now serve as the ICSC Government Relations Chair for Florida and as Florida's Marketplace Council member.

### What is your favorite hidden gem in Florida that most people don't know about?

Hmmm, this is a great question because I live in Florida, where there's lots to do! Beaches and theme parks, what more could one ask for—right? I guess I'd have to go with The Skunk Ape Headquarters. It's a roadside attraction dedicated to the elusive Skunk Ape, Florida's version of Bigfoot or the Sasquatch of the Southeast. It's located in the middle of nowhere, in a place known as Ochopee, FL, right in the heart of the Everglades. Seriously, I can't make this stuff up.

### Which ICSC meeting is your favorite to attend?

Absolutely, without a doubt, I would say my favorite meeting to attend is the ICSC Federal Fly-In in Washington, DC. It's a power-packed, nonstop, two-day behind-the-scenes event. Day one is filled with meetings, updates and various speakers discussing current legislation and policies directly affecting our industry on a national level. As if that weren't enough, the second day is packed with over 150 face-to-face lobbying meetings with legislators—both House and Senate members—who represent ICSC members' specific geographical areas. All of this is coordinated by ICSC staff, and all you need is a passion and a shared interest in seeing how our nation operates. The best part is you don't need any experience in government, and you won't be alone!

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT US AT  
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## What is your favorite thing about the ICSC@FLORIDA Conference?

My favorite thing about ICSC@FLORIDA is the people and the social networking aspect. It's more than just listening to panels and handing out your contact information. This event creates a great environment for forming valuable connections that may lead to future business opportunities. The fact is, no one's going to turn you away if you walk up, smile and say, "I'm so-and-so. Nice to meet you." Every new person you meet has their own network, and I've found that by attending this event and focusing more on what I can bring to the conversation, rather than what I can gain from it, I experience more success. In addition to creating new connections, it's always great to reconnect with the many long-lasting friendships formed over the years from attending this event. With ICSC, you truly get out of it what you put into it, and I wouldn't be where I am in my professional career without my involvement in ICSC.

## What is the best piece of advice you've ever received?

The best piece of advice I've ever received was often repeated to me by my grandfather. He would often say, "You know, it's not what you know, and it's not who you know—rather, *it's who knows you!* So, If you've done a good job in life, then your name will be known in a good way, and your reputation as an individual will follow in a good way." I often tell folks starting in commercial real estate and/or commercial development these words because our industry is a very small world. I give the scenario: You can name-drop all day long until you're blue in the face; however, I may actually know the person you're talking about. All it takes is for me to ask that person, "Hey, [insert name] was telling me they know you," and they reply, "[insert name] who? Never heard of them!" Well, you've just created doubt and lost credibility. I try to live by these words both personally and professionally. I'd like to think that those who "know" me will say, "I know Bill Tomala, and he's a straight talker who pulls no punches, tells you what you need to know, and not just what you want to hear. We can now make educated decisions!" If this holds true, then I guess I've done a good job in life.