



President's Message

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Dear Friends and Fellow Planetarians

I am writing to you as I fly over the farmlands of northern Illinois, heading home after another great regional conference. Like all of you, I look forward to the opportunity to get together with colleagues and enjoy the inspiring lectures, the insightful papers, the helpful workshops and the latest vendor updates.

Probably, the most important part of each conference is networking with other planetarians, to discuss common joys and tribulations, to talk about our profession, to connect with old friends and make new ones, and just to have some fun. Networking occurs at meals, between paper presentations, at hospitality suites and at other times...

Many of us work alone. My planetarium in Moorhead, Minnesota is 60 miles from the closest planetarium in Valley City, North Dakota. Rarely do I get to see fellow planetarians face-to-face, so I really enjoy the opportunity to get together at conferences. I guess that's why I ended up getting only three or four hour of sleep a night at the last three conferences that I attended!

One planetarian told a fellow airline passenger, "I'm going to a family reunion with a couple hundred of my best friends!" I encourage each of you to make the effort to attend your regional conference. You will be richly rewarded.

Conferences also give you the opportunity to share with others by presenting a paper or a poster. There are many people who work behind the scenes to make our regional affiliates and their conferences a success.

All of us have benefited from the labor of others over the years, and eventually there comes a time for each of us to give back to the professional organizations from which we have received so much. One way to do that is to volunteer your time as a committee member or to run for a position as an officer. Or you might choose to write an article for your affiliate's publication. There are a myriad of ways to serve your affiliate and IPS.

A gift from the Western Alliance

I want to share a story from the Western Alliance Conference (WAC) this past July. WAC is the meeting of the four regional affiliates from the western half of the U.S. One morn-

ing, the presidents of the four regionals gathered for breakfast and invited me to join them. There was extra money in one of their account and there was some discussion regarding what this money should be used for. Various ideas were proposed, but no decision was made at the meeting.

Later that same day, I gave a paper and a small number of people were present in the room. Have you ever presented a planetarium show to a small number of people? Perhaps you felt a little disheartened, as I have felt in such a situation. However, regardless of the number of people in the audience, I try to proceed with the same enthusiasm that I would if the theater were filled.

It's not quantity, but quality

As I was reminded at WAC, it isn't important how many people are present, what's important is that you have the "right people." Maybe a program that you present to an audience of one person might spark a life-long interest in some aspect of science, history or another subject presented in your theater. Perhaps you are educating a future scientist, a cosmonaut or an amateur astronomer.

To get back to my story at WAC, the attendance at my paper presentation was small and I was a little disheartened, but I went ahead and presented what I had planned. At the end, having a few extra minutes, I decided to show an interview with Jacob Ashong about the Ghana Planetarium project. His enthusiasm is catching. If you haven't seen the video, you can watch it on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmKcOzTc_Bg.

As I was playing the movie, someone in the audience remarked to the president of one of the regionals, "Hey, that's what we can do with that extra money! We can give it to Jacob." The presidents conferred and decided that they would make a sizeable donation so that Jacob and Jane Ashong can come to IPS 2012. Once again, I was reminded that it's not the number of people that is important, it's that you have the "right people." In this case, the presence of just four people in the audience led to a generous gift. I hope that many of you will have the pleasure of meeting Jacob and Jane next July at our conference in Baton Rouge.

By the time you read this message, I will have attended the regional conference of the Association of Brazilian Planetariums in Fortaleza, Brazil. When I received the invitation to deliver the opening address, I considered several different topics. What message might I give that would be relevant to their particular conference? What message did I want to give to them in my role as president of the International Planetarium Society?

I thought of several topics and rejected them. As I ruminated, I realized that I started working at a college planetarium in August of 1970, at about the same time that IPS was forming. I decided to present a brief history of planetariums, with a focus on the past forty years that I have been involved in the profession. I plan to give a personal perspective and perhaps at the end, speculate about the future of our profession. How we can professionally prepare for that future? I will write on the same subject in a future president's message.

Lessons from IPS history

Once I decided on my topic, it was time to do some research. The book *Theaters of Time and Space: American Planetaria, 1930-1970* by Jordan D. Marche II was a valuable resource. I was especially interested in the Conference of American Planetarium Educators (CAPE) that was held at the Abrams Planetarium in East Lansing, Michigan.

Approximately 300 planetarians met October 21-23, 1970. This was the organizational meeting that led to the formation of the International Society of Planetarium Educators (ISPE), later renamed the International Planetarium Society.

I interviewed several planetarians who were at the meeting and asked John Hare, the IPS historian, if I could see the IPS archives related to the CAPE meeting. When the archives arrived, I didn't have the opportunity to look at them immediately, but holding that FedEx box in my hands gave me a sense of awe. Here I was, holding documents from the very earliest years of our Society!

It is important not to forget those early years and where we came from. Our organization truly does exist due to the labors of many people over the past four decades.

I was not disappointed when I opened the box and perused the materials. Here was the actual brochure that advertised the meeting. It was a simple tri-fold brochure made of yellow paper with black print. Inside the brochure were listed some of the opportunities that the conference would present. They were:

Attend three days of activities specifically designed to augment your functions as a planetarium educator

- Meet and exchange ideas with colleagues throughout North America.

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- Hear prominent speakers presenting topics of special interest to the planetarium community.
- See the products of manufacturers of planetarium related equipment.
- Participate in decisions important to the future of planetarium teaching.
- Should a North American association of planetarium educators be organized?
- Should a North American planetarium journal be published?

I browsed through the 16-page program for the conference and found many of the same topics that are discussed at our conferences today. The folder that held some of the archives had a picture of the Michigan State University campus and inside were old, faded Xerox copies, and mimeographed sheets with their wonderful blue color that I remember so fondly from my primary school days.

There were postcards and a complete list of attendees at the meeting. Some of them are still in the profession and attend conferences. Most of them have retired or passed away, having left their mark on our profession.

As I looked through the list, I was surprised to see the name of my college mentor, Emil C. Miller, the director of the Luther College planetarium which now bears his name. I hadn't even known that he had attended the CAPE meeting during the first semester of my freshman year.

The CAPE participants unanimously decided to organize a North American planetarium association and to publish a journal. A constitutional committee with participants from each of the seven existing regional affiliates was formed to write the by-laws of the newly formed society. This task was completed in March 1971 and the by-laws were approved by a majority of the regionals by July 1971.

Depending on how you look at it, we could

say that IPS started in 1970 with the vote to organize an association of planetarium professionals, or we could say that it started in 1971 when the by-laws were written and ratified.

Reading through the documents in the CAPE archives and the early issues of the Planetarian, the early leaders of our Society seemed to favor, in my opinion, the latter viewpoint. If that is the case, 2011 is the 40th anniversary of IPS. Another committee worked to start the journal and the first issue of the Planetarian was dated June 21, 1972.

Although our Society, at its inception, used the word "international" in its name, it only existed on one continent. Eleven years ago, in the December 2000 issue of the Planetarian, President Dale Smith gave an overview of the state of IPS and detailed how we had grown from a regional affiliation of North American planetariums to a more global Society.

When Dale wrote his message there were twenty regional affiliates. Unfortunately, two of those affiliates have become inactive and are no longer part of IPS. Four new affiliates have joined IPS during the last eleven years, with most recent addition of the Chinese Planetarium Society (CPS) in July of this year. This brings the total number of IPS affiliates to twenty-two.

Dale wrote about the possibility of future affiliates in the rest of the world. Some of the areas he mentioned have formed affiliates that are now part of IPS, e.g. Spain, Brazil and China, but there are not yet affiliates in other areas he stated, e.g. the continent of South America, the Mideast/Arabic nations, Eastern Europe or Southeast and eastern Asia.

Signing off

I wish you a productive 2012 and hope to personally see many of you at the IPS 2012 conference. ☆