

2005-2006 Executive Director Report

by James R. Plasker



[Editors Note: A summary of this report was given by Mr. Plasker at the ASPRS Awards Luncheon and Installation of Officers on May 3, 2006 in Reno, Nevada]

As I begin my ninth year as Executive Director there are many highlights from the past year I would like to share with you. Before I start, let me express my continued appreciation for the support that the officers, Executive Committee,

Board, and the staff have provided during this important time in our Society's existence. Without the many extremely good ideas, and the extra effort afforded by each of these groups, the past year would not have been anywhere near as productive.

Let me also recognize, once again, a very special and significant milestone in this organization's history. While there were only three women who served as President of ASPRS during the Society's first 70 years, with the installation of officers today we will have more than doubled that number within a four year period, and we now have an elected officer group that is fully comprised of women. Congratulations to each of the new officers, and I most certainly look forward to working with all of you. And thank you too, for those who prepared the way, including Tammy Barnes, who would be so very proud if she were still with us today, and Marilyn O'Cuillan and Tina Cary who are both with us here in Reno this week.

This report, as in previous years, will highlight accomplishments and address issues related to finances, the headquarters office, computer and system modernization, staff development, programmatic changes, publications, and meetings and conferences. If I have not addressed an item of your particular interest, please let me know and I will gladly provide you with additional information.

Financial Issues

During 2005-2006, we continued to improve an already financially healthy organization. For the eighth year in a row we did not need to use the available line of credit during the traditionally low cash flow period in late summer. For the seventh year in a row we also did not need to utilize any of our operating reserve funds—in fact we continued to maintain our reserves at approximately the \$1 million level. We also continued to set aside funds for operating contingencies, capital investment, and to meet our quadrennial obligations to the International Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing as we look ahead to Beijing in 2008.

In addition, we made significant transfers of assets to the ASPRS Foundation, which I will discuss further in a moment, and to our inventory through our publications program. During this past year we continued to reap the financial benefits of conservative fiscal strategies, a successful annual conference in Baltimore, Maryland, and an excellent fall specialty conference (Pecora 2005) in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

During 2005, and again with the 2006 budget, the Board and leadership moved to set aside matching funds to support the increased emphasis on fully endowing our awards and scholarships through the ASPRS Foundation. Thanks to the generosity of our members we are well on our way to having a fully endowed awards and scholarship program, which is one of the most important programs we have.

The newest award we sponsor, the Robert N. Colwell Memorial Fellowship, which was given for the first time yesterday at the \$2000 level, is already fully endowed at the \$4000 award level for 2007. In addition, Jack Dangermond has donated sufficient funds to fully endow the ESRI Award for Best Scientific Paper in GIS, making it the first fully endowed "pass-through" award. The remaining "non-pass-through" awards and scholarships are currently funded at more than 50 percent of their full endowment levels, and we are well on our way to completing our interim goal of fully endowing all of our "non-pass-through" awards by 2009.

The vision of the Society's leadership since before I arrived has been to reinforce every aspect of this organization to minimize or eliminate any possibility of finding ourselves in a weakened financial position in the future. I believe the efforts to first pay off the building, and now to fully endow the awards and scholarships program, are both key components in reaching that vision.

Another significant element of that vision is the publications program. This past year we completed publication of the fifth and sixth volumes of the *Manual of Remote Sensing*, thereby converting a small amount of budgeted reserve funds to publications inventory. Interestingly, we also reached a milestone by having sold sufficient copies of the fifth edition of the *Manual of Photogrammetry*, published in 2004, to have completely recovered our publication expenses. Further sales of that *Manual* will only add to the bottom line, and reaching this milestone validates the Board's decision to use the Society's capital to publish these important works for our profession.

In other financial news, both accounts receivable and accounts payable remained essentially current throughout the year. Our budget and cash flow for 2006 look solid at this time, with the results of this Reno conference being important to our overall financial health. Publication sales have been and should remain steady, if not grow slightly, with the publication of several manuals. We continue to meet projections for dues revenue with renewal rates holding at approximately 90%

again in 2006, and we actually saw an increase in membership at the end of 2005 for the second time in a number of years. We think this is a sure sign that our continued emphasis on membership and recruitment is working. Advertising sales remain fairly good, but we watch them carefully and continue to take steps to control costs for *PE&RS* so the bottom-line impact of any decline in advertising is negligible.

Headquarters Status and Modernization

During 2005, the Renewable Natural Resources Center, on which the headquarters office building is located, continued to be the subject of interest for potential sale of the property. Such a sale could not be consummated without agreement of all equity-owning resident organizations, and any such agreement would need our Board's approval, along with the approval of the Boards of all other resident equity-owning organizations. Working with our fellow resident organizations, we have engaged the services of an expert real estate attorney and acquired a commercial property appraisal for the building as well as the center property. These actions have been taken in order to ensure due diligence has been completed and to be responsive should the situation arise. It is not likely that all residents would agree to such a proposal unless each organization was convinced that relocating was to their overall programmatic benefit. We continue to monitor the situation and keep the leadership fully informed as events unfold.

Our information technology improvement project this past year was to significantly increase our ability to serve our journal, *PE&RS*, online to our membership. Journal articles from 1996 are now available online, with those from 2004 to date currently available electronically to members only. We are examining options for scanning and posting earlier articles, with the goal of eventually having at least seminal articles in the field fully accessible electronically.

We have also addressed several security policy and management recommendations on our main website server which is located on the University of Missouri (UM) campus. We have developed alternative means of taking conference registrations, foundation donations, and new member applications online through the site in order to comply with UM regulations. These alternatives have been facilitated by the conversion of the main site to the same server platform as the headquarters systems and especially the e-serve host site. Conversion has been transparent to the users.

Staff Development

First, let me again remind you what a dedicated and hard working group the headquarters staff is—a situation with which both your officers and the Executive Committee are very familiar. They continue to work very hard to serve and support the Society's membership and the profession as a whole, and are a critical element in controlling costs and increasing revenues.

The current staff mix continues to be, I believe, the best it has ever been, with very compatible personalities and an excellent cross-section of expertise and experience. Two staff members reaching noteworthy milestones with ASPRS are Sokhan Hing, Membership Manager, with now more than 25 years of service, and Kim Tilley, Associate Executive Director and Director of Communications, who recently completed 10 years of service to ASPRS. The recognition each has received today is very well deserved, and ASPRS is clearly a better

place to work and a stronger organization due to the outstanding and very professional contributions of both of these individuals.

Although ASPRS is a small association with relatively limited growth potential, the only significant staff change this past year was the hiring of David Holt as Financial Manager, replacing Lindey Brown who departed for a similar position significantly closer to home. David came to ASPRS last September with good experience both in non-profit and commercial finances as well as service with one of our sustaining members. I believe this staff stability is another strong, if intangible, asset in support of ASPRS. Please join me in recognizing the dedicated efforts of all of the staff, many of whom are here with us in Reno and including those not mentioned here, for without them very little would be accomplished.

Program Initiatives

This past year has again seen a number of very important developments in our Awards and Scholarships program. I already mentioned the addition of the Colwell Memorial Fellowship, which has grown from zero to over \$100,000 in endowed funds in the span of less than one year. This is truly a testament to the importance many of Dr. Colwell's former students placed on the educational underpinning for their careers, and represents an outstanding example of how the ASPRS Foundation can work quickly and flexibly to ensure these opportunities are fully developed. Dr. Don Lauer, an ASPRS past president and currently Treasurer, is to be highly commended for his leadership effort in establishing this award, and is certainly deserving of the Outstanding Service Award he received earlier recognizing his contributions.

We also have the occasion today to recognize the second winner of the BAE Systems Award for best paper by a young author. That award was initiated in 2005 after initially being conceived during the 2004 Istanbul ISPRS Congress. Today we recognized with Outstanding Service Awards both Dr. Stewart Walker, for his vision and efforts to initiate this award, and BAE Systems, Inc., for their support of this award along with their support for the latest printing of the very popular Career Brochure. Again, both are certainly deserving of this recognition and I would like to add my personal thanks for all of the support they have provided.

As mentioned earlier, the recent donation by Jack Dangermond, ESRI, to fully endow the Best Scientific Paper in GIS is yet another excellent example of how we continue to work with our sustaining member community to solidify our pass-through award offerings and ensure they will continue long into the future. This is especially important for those awards which recognize key contributions to the profession or discipline. Working together we should be able to develop a strategy to ensure their longevity.

For the fourth year, we have made student travel grants to encourage participation in this conference by our future professionals. Although this program was originally developed under the IGIF, the past two years we have supported the awards directly and will continue to do so through the ASPRS Foundation. In addition, we are actively seeking corporate support for this program. This award provides two worthy student volunteers to the annual conference with a travel reimbursement that significantly offsets the cost of attendance at this important event, as well as student memberships for each grantee. We intend to continue this practice into the future and, depending on the availability of funding, may increase the offering.

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We are especially pleased to have the parents of Ken Osborn with us today. Mr. and Mrs. Osborn were unable to travel to Baltimore last year to witness the initial award of the Kenneth J. Osborn Memorial Scholarship, but their presence here in Reno is very special to all of us who worked so closely with Ken. The decision by the U.S. Department of the Interior to award their highest service recognition, the gold Distinguished Service Award, to Ken posthumously and to present it to his parents during today's awards ceremony was especially touching. Ken had such an impact on our profession, particularly as he worked to resolve so many difficult geospatial information-related issues critical to the United States in such a collegial and collaborative manner. Ken will always serve as a role model for those who follow in his path.

During 2005, and again in the 2006 operating budget, the ASPRS Board has continued its matching policy for individual and regional donations. Thus every dollar contributed by an individual and/or region is doubled by this effort, and where regions elect to also match donations every individual contribution is quadrupled—a very significant statement of support and commitment by the Board to the future of the Foundation and our Awards and Scholarships program.

As to External Affairs activities, we continue to address numerous issues and proactively work to respond to areas of concern to the overall community. Consequently, we continue to grow in relevance as an organization, with the combined voice of our membership being heard on a wide variety of subjects including mid-resolution imaging, licensure, certification, disaster response, and the industry forecast.

With the current Landsat satellites (5 & 7) closing in on the end of their consumables (fuel), mid-resolution land imaging data continuity is a critical issue. We have continued to press both the legislative and executive branches of government to address the interim and long-term programmatic needs for a mid-resolution Earth observing program. We are committed to maintaining an active role advising decision makers through the transition to a fully operational program. We also are continuously monitoring the budget situations in several federal agencies, including NASA, USGS and NOAA related to both the Landsat issue as well as other important programs. We continue to express concern in situations where Congressional actions would negatively affect our profession, particularly in the research and commercial areas.

We have nearly completed work on Phase IV of the Ten-Year Remote Sensing Industry Forecast effort originally begun under the Space Act Agreement with NASA Commercial Remote Sensing Program. The most recent effort is targeted at the mid-resolution segment, and is being accomplished with the support and assistance of both NOAA and USGS. A final report on Phase IV will appear in *PE&RS* later this summer (editor's note—this report is expected to appear in the August issue of *PE&RS*).

ASPRS continues to work with the National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying (NCEES), and the Colonial States Board of Land Surveyor Registration (CSBLSR), in fully implementing the revised Model Law for Surveying. Specifically, ASPRS has most recently concentrated on development of appropriate examination items and strategies to support the licensure of photogrammetrists. CSBLSR has undertaken the exam writing effort, and ASPRS is working very closely with them to ensure full access to licensure by practicing professionals. NCEES is fully supportive of the CSBLSR effort, and has provided partial funding to effect the exam development. This is important as

the long-term strategy remains for NCEES to adopt the exam items as their own and utilize them in a modular examination. States adopting aspects of the model law in the past year include Virginia and Oregon. Several additional states are considering similar changes including, we understand, Washington, New York and Alaska.

The ASPRS Certification Program continues to do well, with implementation of the technologist certifications fully underway. The Board at this meeting will consider changes to the certification program process (editor's note—this change was approved by the Board in Reno) to enable graduates of select geospatial educational programs to take the examination and become provisionally certified. The modified process will encourage greater participation in the Certification Program by upcoming professionals and should increase the visibility of the program both within ASPRS and throughout the broader community.

As the hurricane events of late summer 2005 dissipated, it became apparent to our community that there were significant challenges in the coordination and dissemination of huge volumes of imagery data to support geospatial analyses of the impact zone. ASPRS took the initiative to convene a group of mostly government (at all levels) users in January 2006 to begin a lessons learned activity. Following that workshop, a number of key issues were identified and this week a follow-on workshop was held, with participation expanded to include the commercial data provider sector. From these workshops we expect to develop a set of recommendations for consideration by the community. These will be published in a future issue of *PE&RS*, along with being posted online.

The Education Initiative originally articulated by the ASPRS Education Committee in 2002 continued to receive a major boost with the development of the fifth year of a multi-million dollar multi-year grant to the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) to deploy a model curriculum for remote sensing. ASPRS continues to serve in an advisory capacity to Ole Miss and many ASPRS members have participated in the development the modules which comprise the model curriculum. Ole Miss is a Partner in Education with ASPRS, and is here again at this conference to demonstrate several of the fully developed modules.

The focus by the Board and leadership on the membership recruitment and retention issue continues to be outstanding. A third-party membership marketing survey, in progress during last year's conference, was completed in summer 2005 with the Board's receipt of the final report. We have subsequently implemented a number of the recommendations, and a paper summarizing their findings was published in *PE&RS*. While we will always lose a few members each year due to occupational changes and changes in the industry, we believe that by providing quality service to the members, and being highly relevant to the profession and in the community we can maximize our retention and continue to attract new members. Several of the new formats you see at this conference are a direct result of the report and the Membership Committee's ongoing efforts, including the networking "Hot Topics" sessions and the student advisory council concept. Changes have also been made on the main website as well as in *PE&RS* in response to feedback received from the membership during the survey process.

Our goal remains to grow our membership numbers, and in addition to what the leadership, staff and outside contractor are doing or have done, we need help from every member in each of the sectors. Please take a moment to make the most important contribution you can achieve for the Society—by recruiting a member or two. Better

Publications

This has been another very important year in our publication program as we published two volumes (5 and 6) of the *Manual of Remote Sensing* “in-house” without an outside publisher—the first of the remote sensing volumes for this edition to be produced in this manner. Both of these volumes are on sale this week in the ASPRS booth. The 5th edition of the *Manual of Photogrammetry*, published in 2004 in a similar manner, has now sold sufficient quantities to fully recover the cost of production, with all remaining sales resulting in direct revenue at the bottom line. Work continues on additional volumes of the *Manual of Remote Sensing*, including volume 7 on hyperspectral imaging and a revision and update of volume 1 on sensors and platforms. In addition, we are working on a second edition of the *Digital Elevation Manual*, with the goal of having it available for distribution at the Fall 2006 (San Antonio) “Measuring the Earth” conference.

As mentioned earlier, we are also well along toward publication of the *Manual of Geographic Information Systems (GIS)*, with incoming President-elect Marguerite Madden serving as Editor-in Chief. There is no similar publication in the field, and we believe it will not only contribute significantly to the science and the profession, it will also help reinforce the Society’s position with the GIS community, a vast and growing sector. The Board has approved a very impressive and solid outline for this manual, and the hard work is well underway with the goal of completing the manual for publication in 2007. This remains the most important new initiative we have undertaken in many years. We expect the *Manual of GIS* to be completed in 2007, and to be a significant factor in reaching further into the GIS community as we work to grow membership.

Our world-class journal, *PE&RS*, continues to do very well in technical content, while remaining financially stable. We have maintained the number of pages to ensure a reasonable flow of refereed journal articles and in many cases increased the number where special subject material warrants. We continue to develop additional general interest material for the front portion of the *Journal* and, as mentioned earlier, we have expanded the amount of journal material available online, to include at least ten years of archives. The *Journal* is one of the most significant benefits for most of our members and the ability to handle increased material, both in the peer reviewed section as well as the general articles, is very important to its vitality. We continue to seek ways to increase the amount of material available in the non-peer reviewed section. Any and all suggestions and assistance in this effort will be appreciated.

Meeting and Conferences

It is clear now that the 2005 Annual conference in Baltimore, Maryland was an outstanding success, both technically and financially. The proceeds from that conference clearly helped us make it through 2005 in excellent financial condition, and a great deal of the credit for the success must go to Jim Hipple and the local committee.

This 2006 Annual Conference appears to be a strong meeting with many good presentations and a strong exhibit. While it is too early to judge its financial success, George Hepner, Alan Mikuni, Patricia (Trish) Foschi, Robert Ramsey and the rest of the local team appears to have done an outstanding job.

The Pecora 2005 meeting last fall in Sioux Falls was technically and financially very successful, with Jim Sturdevant and Committee doing an outstanding job. In addition, the USGS EROS Center staff was a very gracious host to the conference for an evening of “Prairie Fest” fun and technical tours. We are off to San Antonio this November for the next in the very successful series of DEM conferences.

Next Spring we travel back to Tampa, Florida for our 2007 annual conference. This venue was the site of the outstanding first stand-alone ASPRS conference in 1998. The Florida Region will once again host the conference and Gary Florence and his local committee is already hard at work on the event. Future annual conferences in Portland, Oregon (2008) and Baltimore (2009) are in various stages of planning and development. Baltimore 2009 will be the Society’s 75th anniversary and we anticipate a number of special activities, which we will begin planning in the very near future. We are certainly looking forward to each and every one of these venues.

In summary 2005-2006 has been yet another very good year for ASPRS. We continue to make excellent progress on the road to financial strength—and seeing the Foundation effort fully underway and growing increasingly strong is very encouraging. We also see increasing interest in our awards and scholarships program, and believe that will help us grow into the future. We continue to provide strong support to the community in outreach, publications and continuing education.

As I say each year, my goal in taking this position was to find a way to have fun—and this past year has been yet another year of great fun! Thank you for all of your support—I look forward to a very productive 2006-2007.



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