

# Living Legends:

## June Somers, CAE



Jumping from association member to director was successful due to GSAE support

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON

**SHE MAY HAVE** "retired" five years ago, but June Somers, CAE, president of Georgia Society of Association Executives (GSAE) from 1990 to 1991, is busier than ever. "I'm volunteering for four different associations, including my property owners' association and my women's golf association," she said. "Once someone finds out I managed an association, they sign me up for a position."

Somers joined GSAE in 1983, soon after she had created her own job in the banking education association for which she was volunteering. "I was working in the education department of a bank and volunteering for the association," she explained. The association's only paid staff person was a secretary, and Somers believed much more could be accomplished with an executive director as well. After writing the job description and making the case for an executive director to the association's steering committee, Somers applied for the job.

"I didn't know what I was doing, but I left a secure bank job to take a chance with the new position at the association," said Somers. "One of my friends at the bank told me the first thing I needed to do was contact GSAE about becoming a member." She took the advice. "I couldn't have done my job without GSAE. I had the training experience and people skills to hold the executive director position, but I learned about association finance, membership, bylaws and legal issues through GSAE."

Because her philosophy is that you must get involved in an association to benefit from

it, she immediately became involved in different committees. "The education committee was my first involvement, and it was fun and easy for me because it was my love," said Somers. "The membership committee was the most challenging because it was something I was just learning."

The membership committee worked hard. "We were trying to find ways to get members to recruit other members, and we spent a lot of time working on ideas to increase membership. Of course, we had fun. In fact, one committee member dressed in a pink gorilla suit as part of a skit to encourage member recruitment." The hours spent together resulted in lasting friendships she will never forget.

During her presidency, a task force on diversity of membership was developed. "We looked at special interest groups and vendors whose business was related to association members' business," explained Somers. Although the affiliate membership category was formed to accommodate these members, the board opted to keep one meeting each month designated as members-only. "We would have roundtable discussions to address association management issues. These were great meetings to bring up ideas and discuss implementing these ideas." By setting aside one meeting specifically for association directors and staff, GSAE was able to meet all its members' needs.

"One interesting thing about my year as president was the elimination of alcoholic beverages at meetings," said Somers. "We believed that as a professional association,

we didn't send a good message by serving alcohol at our luncheon meetings." This was a reflection of changing times, she explained. "DUI [driving under the influence] laws were getting tougher and we believed we needed to set a good example to the community." The change "caused a lot of chatter," but GSAE set an example for other professional associations.

Somers said her ability to develop a mutual friendship and respect between herself and another member made her association an example for other state chapters. "I was executive director of the Atlanta chapter of the American Institute of Banking (AIB)," she said. Her association offered similar services and competed for the same members as the Georgia Bankers Association, so when it became apparent that it was better to merge into one association rather than watch one or the other fold, Somers and Joe Brannen (GSAE president from 1992 to 1993) began merger talks.

"The merger was a business decision that made sense, and because Joe and I had worked together through GSAE, it was a smooth transition," said Somers. "My association's merger became a role model for other AIB chapters throughout the country." Unfortunately, other chapter directors did not have the same type of relationship with the directors of their state's banking association. "I saw too many AIB chapters fold because they could not make the mergers work. They were too competitive. We looked at the merger as something good for both associations." ●

## GSAE Living Legends

As a continuation of GSAE's 90th anniversary celebration, we want to share some of the "lessons learned" from the volunteers who contributed to GSAE's great success. Through this year-long series, we will spotlight, in their own words, the past leaders of GSAE – our Living Legends.

# Living Legends:

# Ann Cox, CAE

Diverse membership and opportunity to learn prompted GSAE membership

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON



WHEN ANN COX, CAE, executive director of the American Association of Occupational Health Nurses (AAOHN), moved from the university setting to her association, she quickly realized that she needed to learn more about association management.

"I started with AAOHN 25 years ago and have served in four different positions," said Cox. "I joined GSAE in 1983 because working in an association was very different from my previous position," she explained. "I was pleasantly surprised to find something in GSAE that I've never found in other associations. GSAE is a group of people who believe in supporting others in the field and once I joined, I had a network of colleagues who generously shared their knowledge and experience," she said.

Cox's involvement in GSAE began with her involvement on various committees and then her election to the GSAE Board of Directors. She served as president of GSAE from 1991 to 1992. "I remember that people were surprised that we had two women presidents back to back," she said. [Editor's note: June J. Somers, CAE, served as president from 1990 to 1991.] Cox also has served on the GSAE Foundation Board of Trustees and has expanded her association involvement to include the national association, the American Society of Association Executives, which is now known as ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership. Cox not only worked with the ASAE Foundation

but in 1995 also served as the first woman chair in 33 years. "I had the confidence to pursue national leadership roles because I developed my leadership skills in GSAE positions," she said.

"My most important contribution to GSAE has been my role as mentor to other members of the association," said Cox. "Everyone who joins GSAE has the opportunity to contribute to the organization from day one. It is up to GSAE leaders to encourage members to get involved."

Not only has Cox learned from other members of GSAE, but she also pointed out that GSAE itself is "an excellent model of an association" that has grown and changed to meet the needs of members. People have more demands made on their time now, so GSAE has changed the way it uses volunteer leaders by having staff members handle day-to-day tasks. GSAE has made use of technology to improve communications and how association business is conducted, she said.

An association's success is dependent on the development of relationships, but technology can augment an association's relationship with its constituents, Cox said. "When I started with my association, I handwrote everything, then typed it. Computers, e-mail and the Internet have given us other tools that can be used to enhance our services."

Although the use of technology in meetings, communications and educational pro-

grams continues to grow, it can be overwhelming, admitted Cox. "Even with the added value that these tools offer members, there will always be the desire for face-to-face communications, so meetings that give people a chance to interact are still important."

"GSAE is a unique association because its members come from many different industries, fields and professions," said Cox. This diversity is important to members because people join GSAE to learn about managing associations, not to learn more about the industry or profession that their association represents, she said. "Even though my association is healthcare-related, I can get good ideas from an association outside the healthcare field."

GSAE's ability to attract association staff members and managers from different fields also will enable the association to continue growing and becoming stronger, Cox said. "We do need to embrace a larger community of nonprofit organizations that represent disease-specific or healthcare fields in order to grow. We also need to recognize that not all organizations have the resources to participate in and support an association such as GSAE, so we need to be realistic about potential for growth," she said.

As for her own experience with GSAE, Cox said, "It's been a wonderful experience with the best group of people I have ever met." ●

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# Living Legends:



# Joe Brannen, CAE

Association executive looked to GSAE to teach him skills for his job

**BY SHERYL S. JACKSON**

**ONE OF THE** first congratulatory telephone calls that Joe Brannen, CAE, president of the Georgia Bankers Association (GBA), received after he was hired to head up GBA was from Abit Massey, CAE, a member of GSAE since the 1960s and president of the association in 1969.

Remembering the phone call, Brannen said, "Abit called to congratulate me on the new position and to tell me that the first thing I had to do was to join GSAE and the American Society of Association Executives. He told me that these were two organizations that would make me successful."

Brannen was grateful for Massey's advice regarding his new position, partly because he was so new to the association world. "Even today," Brannen said, "I wonder why the association [GBA] selected me for this job!" The position with GBA was Brannen's first association job. Previously, he had spent eight years on Senator Sam Nunn's staff. "I guess the association board members thought I would be a good choice because government relations is a big part of the job," Brannen said. "I did not know about government from the perspective of a federal legislator's staff member, but not from the perspective of a lobbyist."

Because he had been on a U.S. senator's staff, Brannen relied on relationships he soon developed with other GSAE members to learn about state politics. "I knew nothing about the

state process, but GSAE gave me contact with people who could help me learn," he said.

In other ways, too, Brannen made full use of his GSAE membership. "I took advantage of every educational opportunity GSAE offered," he said. "I attended every monthly meeting and went through the Certified Association Executive [CAE] program," he said. The CAE course was a 12-week class in which he learned about educational and legal issues related to associations and other issues that were new to him, he said.

Brannen was president of GSAE from 1992 to 1993, after serving on a variety of GSAE committees and on the board of directors. Recalling his time on the board of directors, Brannen said, "It was a very hands-on board of directors because we did not have a full-time GSAE staff at the time. We all were willing to offer each other help with GSAE responsibilities, and when the nominating committee approached me about becoming president, I accepted."

One of Brannen's accomplishments as GSAE president that he is most proud of was ensuring that smaller associations received increased access to GSAE programs. "We spent time recognizing the diversity of our membership," he said. Because of the significant growth in the number of smaller, single-issue, all-volunteer-run associations that joined GSAE during the early '90s, Brannen's goal

was to increase these associations' access to programs. "We worked with the smaller nonprofits to make sure that they did not feel threatened or left out of the process by GSAE," he explained.

During Brannen's presidency as well, GSAE went on the road by moving some meetings out of Atlanta, thereby making meetings easier for members of associations located outside of Atlanta to attend, said Brannen. "We are a statewide association, so we need to move meetings outside of Atlanta," he said. The first GSAE annual meeting held outside of Atlanta was in Savannah, he said, which was just one of the locations where GSAE hosted a meeting during his term.

An important part of Brannen's involvement with GSAE was not just the preparation and knowledge it gave him to do his job within his own association, but also the confidence it gave him to take on leadership positions in other organizations. His experience as GSAE president taught him a great deal. "My peers asked me to chair the State Association Division of the American Bankers Association, to head up the State Bar Foundation and to serve on the board of the state YMCA," he said. "Without the confidence and experience that I gained in my leadership positions in GSAE, I may not have been offered these positions or accepted them if offered." ●

# LIVING LEGENDS: STEVE MONA

## *Fond Remembrances of GSAE*

BY MARY LOU JAY



**BEFORE STEVE MONA** moved to Georgia in 1983 to head the Georgia State Golf Association his focus had been on the game itself.

"In my previous two jobs with the Northern California Golf Association and the U.S. Golf Association, I didn't really gravitate towards the association management component of my job," he says. "But when I became the exec, I realized that I was going to have to master two areas if I were to do anything of import. One was the pure business elements of the job—budget, strategic planning, personnel management and all that. The other was the association side of it. Although I had worked with the board in my previous two jobs, I wasn't staying up at night worrying about board matters."

Then **Sharon Hunt**, who worked with GSAE's management firm at the time, left a GSAE brochure in his office. "I attended a GSAE luncheon and was seated between two industry giants — **Abit Massey** and **Bill Kelly**. Abit convinced me that I needed to join."

Mona learned a great deal about association management as he served on various GSAE committees, on the board and as an officer. "I became GSAE president in June 1993," he recalls. "In August 1993 I was approached about becoming CEO of the Golf Superintendents Association of America in Kansas City. I wasn't looking to leave, but I did end up accepting that position, starting in January 1994. **Wayne McMillan**, who was GSAE president-elect, filled out my term and his as well."

During his 14 years in Kansas, Mona was president of the Kansas City Society of Association Executives and also served on several ASAE committees and its board. But to his regret he's had little time to participate in ASAE activities at any level since he became CEO of the World Golf Foundation in Florida in 2008.

"The role of the World Golf Foundation is to bring the golf industry together and to focus on initiatives designed to enhance the growth and interests of the game of golf," Mona says. WGF's three brands include The First Tee, which introduces young people to the game of golf; the World Golf Hall of Fame; and Golf 2020, which functions as the sport's trade association, communicating information about golf's economic, environmental and charitable impact to Congress, policy makers and influencers.

"The beauty of our organization is that we don't have a membership base per se so we are free to focus on the things that contribute to the greater good of the industry," he adds.

Mona still has ties to GSAE; **Joe Brannen**, president of the Georgia Bankers Association, remains a close friend.

He also recalls with appreciation everything he gained from his years with GSAE.

"I'm not sure that the people in Georgia realize how good GSAE is," he adds. "Pound for pound, I'd put GSAE right at the top of the local societies. It's a real gem of an organization." <

# Living Legends:

# Wayne McMillan, CAE



35-year member says his major contribution is encouraging others to participate

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON

**ONE OF THE** biggest changes that Wayne McMillan, CAE, chief executive officer of the Bobby Dodd Institute, has seen during his 35 years as a GSAE member is the increase in female membership and involvement.

"When I first joined the association, it was a male-dominated group, but the membership is now more diverse, with women holding key leadership positions," said McMillan. "I'm not surprised to see women succeeding in this field because association management is all about managing relationships and women are excellent at helping different groups of people work together," he said. Not only is the association more gender diverse today, but, McMillan said, the membership is also representative of different ages and levels of professional experience.

McMillan has served in almost every leadership position available in GSAE during his membership, including as president from 1994 to 1995, but he said that his most important contribution to the association is not a particular position he has held, but a belief that his role is to help develop GSAE leaders of the future. "As members retire and become less active in the association, it is critical that the association have others members who are involved and ready to take leadership roles," he said.

"I grew up during a time when it was common for young business people to be involved in their community and volunteer

time for different business or philanthropic organizations," said McMillan. "Today's young people in their 20s and 30s, as well as the next generation, do not automatically have the mindset to get involved, so it is up to me and others in the association to be role models," he said. It is hard for young people to juggle families and new careers, but he has tried to set an example for the young association professionals he meets to demonstrate that not only can volunteerism be a part of their professional lives, but it can also enhance them.

"Within my own organization, I try to make it easy for all of our employees to give back to the community," said McMillan. "We encourage employees to get involved in professional organizations and we pay for professional certification courses."

"People need to learn how to be leaders within their jobs, their professional field and in organizations, and the only way to learn is to take on a leadership position," said McMillan. Because most younger employees don't get opportunities for leadership positions in their workplaces, associations such as GSAE give them the opportunity to learn from others and take risks that might not be practical at work, he pointed out. "If you try something in a volunteer position and you fail, you're not jeopardizing your job, so you're more willing to take risks and learn from mistakes,"

he said. "All of this learning gives you more self-confidence in your abilities when you are at work."

Another reason that McMillan encourages all young professionals to get involved in associations is so that they can get a different perspective. "We all can get myopic if we only focus on our own organization and our own job. Volunteering in another organization provides a reality check to remind you that there is more going on in the world than just your job," McMillan explained.

Although he won't name any one position that he's served as more important than another, McMillan does admit that there was one leadership role that he thinks of as his favorite position. "In the late 1980s, I served as chair of the membership committee," he said. "This was a new experience for me and it gave me a chance to be very creative." McMillan and his committee came up with the theme "Achieve Professional Excellence" for GSAE's annual meeting and developed the tag line "Going APE for GSAE."

The tag line opened up a lot of opportunities for fun throughout the annual meeting and McMillan said, "I can honestly say that with the theme, a pink gorilla suit and a room full of people, I have never had that much fun in front of strangers!"

# Living Legends:



# Carnie Wall, CAE

Past president sought challenges in her leadership positions

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON

"USE GSAE TO stretch your talents and challenge yourself" is the advice Carnie Wall, CAE, GSAE president from 1995 to 1996, gives all GSAE members. She is comfortable advocating this goal for GSAE participation because this has been her goal throughout her own membership.

"When I first joined GSAE in 1980, I was so new to association management that I really didn't know what I was doing," said Wall. But in a short amount of time, Wall not only learned what she needed to know for her job, but she was also looking for volunteer positions that could give her a chance to learn how to handle responsibilities she did not have in her day-to-day job.

"The committee work that sticks out in my mind as most educational was the staff management committee," said Wall. "Our job was to evaluate the job performance of the executive director, who was an employee of the management firm we used," she explained. When Wall served on the committee in the early 1990s, part of the evaluation process was trying to decide if the association should move to its own staff or continue with the management company. "During the evaluation process, we learned that even though our executive director was only assigned to us part-time, the actual work she did for us was even greater than part-time," said Wall. Because the committee members recognized the value of both the individual in the executive director position and the benefits of re-

sources offered by the management firm, they recommended staying with the firm at the time.

Wall's work as president of GSAE actually began during her year as president-elect. "We were at a point where we needed to conduct a thoughtful, comprehensive strategic planning process, so I oversaw this process during my year as president-elect," Wall said. Having the president-elect handle this responsibility made sense, since the implementation of the plan was scheduled during her year as president.

Using a market research firm to gather information through surveys and interviews, Wall's committee obtained input from GSAE leaders and members. "Our strategic plan was very ambitious," she said. The three-year plan identified major objectives broken down into one-year goals. "Our primary purpose was to make sure that all plans for the association were aligned and moved the association in the same direction," she explained. Alignment is difficult when an organization has so many different active committees in place, but a strategic plan clarifies overall objectives and keeps everyone focused on the same goals, Wall said. The objectives were focused on increasing member satisfaction and participation.

In addition to implementing the strategic plan, Wall also coordinated the hiring of GSAE's first full-time staff member during her tenure. "We thoroughly interviewed the

candidates, and it was a difficult choice to make," she said. "We had great candidates apply for the position."

Another change that occurred during Wall's term as president was the revision of the membership category for non-association members. "We changed the name of *sponsor membership* to *corporate membership* and gave them privileges that included attending all of our meetings," she explained. Previously, corporate members could only attend certain meetings, but GSAE leadership believed that it was important to open up all meetings to all members because corporate members added value to the meetings and to members' networking efforts.

Wall is impressed with the improved quality of programming of the GSAE meetings that she has attended over the years of her membership. "More speakers outside the association world are presenting at meetings and conferences," she said. "I think it is important that we look outside our own world for ideas that might be helpful to us." The different perspectives from non-association management representatives are a good complement to the real-world experiences shared by fellow GSAE members, she explained.

"I can't imagine not being a part of GSAE," said Wall. "This is not a job you can do in isolation from others, and GSAE has so many good thinkers that you always have someone you can go to for ideas, support or feedback." ●

## Ann McClure, CAE: Into the Unknown—with Confidence



"In many ways, McClure's term as president is a master class in what to do when faced with uncertainty: embrace it, learn the way the sea rolls, and create a course rather than following one."

**DURING THE TERM** of President Ann McClure, CAE, in 1996 and 1997, GSAE took a great leap of faith.

GSAE had experienced nearly two decades of stable operations under an association management company (AMC), but with the growth of the organization came a shift to a more staff-driven model, and the board decided the time had come to hire a full-time executive director whose job it would be to run the staff operations of GSAE and whose employer would be GSAE itself. In 1996, Ann Guiberson was hired as the first full-time GSAE executive director, followed soon after by Diane James, CAE.

Along with the transition from being managed by an AMC to being staff-led came a host of complexities to manage. McClure, having had a great deal of success in association management, was the perfect person to lead the transition. After seven years as the executive vice president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, McClure accepted the

position of managing director at the International Gas Turbine Institute. "I went from a national perspective to a global one, which rounded out my professional experience and left me with rich career experiences," she says.

Experience notwithstanding, the experience ahead would be challenging. Says McClure, "Without hesitation, I can say my biggest challenge as GSAE president was a two-pronged one: identifying responsibilities that could be transferred from volunteers to (drum roll, please) the first full-time GSAE staff, and finding ways for association leaders to make full use of the mushrooming technological advances." Tying everything together that year "took many hours from multiple GSAE leaders," she says.

McClure's presidency was marked by a strong interest in emerging technology and its potential applications in the lives

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### 1980s and '90s

> **1984** – GSAE's first public service event was a Rainbow Rally at Stone Mountain.



> **1985** – The GSAE Foundation was officially chartered.

> **1987** – GSAE funded the book, "A Coming of Age: A History of the Profession of Association Management," published by ASAE.

> **1989** – GSAE established the Corporate Representative of the Year Award.

> **1990** – Thirteen new CAEs made up the largest GSAE class in history.

> **1993** – GSAE Foundation Chair Alan R. Johnson, CAE passed away unexpectedly. The young father was later memorialized with a GSAE award in his name.

### **“While We Live, We Serve:” The Legacy of Jim Loyd, CAE**

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Services Atlanta, owned by GSAE Past President **Stewart Huey**, who introduced him to GSAE. Accepting that position let Loyd apply his firsthand knowledge of the tire industry and also develop the servant-leadership required of great association executives. “As a GSAE member, I began volunteering and became more involved,” says Loyd, who gradually took on higher leadership roles. “I didn’t set out to be GSAE president when I began volunteering. I volunteered because I cared, and I tried to instill that spirit in others.”

Our association community is about service and about connecting with other people,” he continues. “My entire life has been driven by volunteering and helping where and when I can, so the association community felt right to me.”

Outside of his professional life, Loyd has spent more than 30 years with Buckhead Baseball, a youth baseball league in Atlanta, as a coach, manager, and umpire. Thanks in part to his influence, many young players grow up to become adult volunteers like him. “The Presbyterian College motto, *dum vivimus servimus*—while we live we serve—has guided my life,” Loyd says. “The reward in association management has been similar. Seeing the spirit of volunteerism continue with new leaders was my confirmation of a job well done.” <

### **Ann McClure, CAE: Into the Unknown—with Confidence**

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of GSAE members. In 1996, the internet had only 10 million users, but forward-thinking leaders such as McClure already saw its potential in the association world, which exists, much as the Internet, to do one thing: connect.

“I selected Augusta as the meeting site because the city was developing a hands-on science and technology venue, Fort Discovery, directly along the river and near a fine hotel,” McClure says. “Technology! We were in early stages and needed to know more about how to involve the members we served in our jobs. With the idea of using the web to connect with members and communicate with each other, the Annual Meeting theme was ‘Connections,’ before our newsletter had that name.”

In many ways, McClure’s term as president is a master class in what to do when faced with uncertainty: embrace it, learn the way the sea rolls, and create a course rather than following one. “Looking philosophically at organizations like GSAE, there seem to be perpetual challenges: getting new members involved, finding new avenues of communication, evolving relationships with corporate members, what have you,” she says. “But every year new leaders bring a new brush to paint the scene with fresh, new colors, keeping the organization vibrant, leading its members on ever-changing paths to being leaders of knowledge and growing confidence.” <

## 2000s

> **2002** – The GSAE Foundation Internship Grant Program was established, and *connections* magazine was launched.



> **2007** – GSAE celebrated its 90th anniversary and named “90 Movers and Shakers” in the association community.

> **2009** – The GSAE Leadership Academy launched, and the Benson Skelton Award was renamed the Skelton-Massey Award to honor two legendary recruiters in our community.

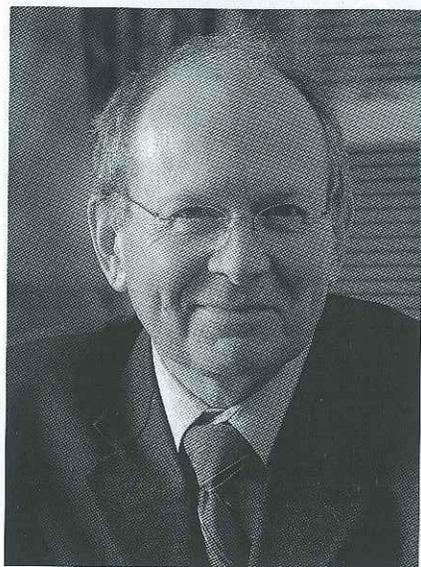
> **2014** – The Emerging Leader Award was renamed the Sharon Hunt Emerging Leader Award.

> **2015** – The Corporate Supplier Award was renamed the Peggy Seigler Corporate Member of the Year.

> **2017** – GSAE celebrates 100 years!

# Living Legends:

## Tom Redmon, CAE



Looking outside his industry for ideas helped one executive

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON

**UNLIKE MANY GEORGIA** Society of Association Executives (GSAE) members who joined because they were new to association management, Tom Redmon, CAE, was an experienced association director when he joined GSAE in 1991.

"My entire career was based in educational associations," Redmon explained. "I joined GSAE to network with other association leaders to see how associations that were not related to education handled different issues." Being able to talk with association executives in other industries gave Redmon ideas that transferred well into his educational association. "I could not focus only on education if I wanted to stay up to date on all issues facing associations, so educational meetings and networking with others helped me better plan for my own association," he said. "The Certified Association Executive (CAE) program also provided extra training that improved my ability to manage the association."

His quick rise to GSAE president in 1997-1998 was the result of "undeserved luck," according to Redmon. "I joined committees that interested me, such as the program

committee, the strategic planning committee and the governance committee, to give myself a chance to learn more about running associations, but I also learned a lot about GSAE in the process," he said.

Understanding GSAE was important when Redmon served on and chaired two search committees for two different executive directors for the association. "Our overall task was to ensure a good fit for the organization," he explained. "This is a challenge because GSAE isn't just an association, it's an association of associations." This means that GSAE's staff and volunteer leadership should always set an example of how a good association is run and this always adds pressure, he added.

"One achievement of which I am proud was the shift from a program-driven budgeting process to a strategic goal-driven budgeting process," said Redmon. Rather than listing programs that the association wanted to provide and then figuring out how the budget could support all of the programs, budgeting now starts with the strategic plan and prioritizing programs that will help the association meet

its goals, he said. This ensures that each program is funded appropriately to ensure success and keeps the association on track.

A theme during Redmon's presidency was synergy. "I wanted to make sure that associations worked with each other to identify and resolve issues," he said. Today, improved communications tools, such as Web sites and e-mail, offer associations more flexibility and improved communications, he pointed out. "I'm glad that associations have adopted technology to better serve their members."

Technology and better communications may help GSAE with challenges Redmon foresees for all associations, he said. "The next few years will test all associations' ability to survive financially," he warned. "The networking that GSAE provides will help association executives come up with solutions to problems they've not experienced."

Though Redmon has now retired from association management after 21 years, he recommends GSAE membership as "a connection to great people and great ideas." ●

# LIVING LEGENDS: Cynthia Mills, CAE, CMC

Inclusion of multiple members strengthened GSAE activities

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON



**"AN EXTRAORDINARY COMMUNITY."** This is how **Cynthia Mills, CAE, CMC** describes the Georgia Society of Association Executives (GSAE). During her term as president of GSAE (1998-99), Mills sought to foster and enhance the sense of community by involving members in efforts to plan for the future and address tough issues.

"I joined GSAE in 1993 after moving to Georgia to work for an international association," Mills explains. A personal invitation from GSAE member **Rachel Ann Shattah, CAE, CMP** was the reason Mills decided to attend a meeting and eventually join. "[Shattah] radiated enthusiasm and excitement about GSAE as she told me it was the place to connect with peers in the association industry."

Her first volunteer position was on a technology committee.

"I had a lot of knowledge I knew I could share with others, so it made sense to join the committee," Mills explains. After her first volunteer experience, she quickly became involved in different roles.

Although she was an active volunteer from the beginning of her membership, Mills was surprised when **Carnie Wall, CAE** (GSAE president, 1995-96) asked her to serve as president. "I was floored when she approached me and said that my association needed me!" Mills exclaims.

Because her presidency led up to the year 2000, she pulled GSAE leaders together to work on the association's strategic plan.

"Our world was changing so quickly, it was apparent that a traditional strategic plan might not be the best thing for us," Mills says. "Instead, I set out for us to develop a more creative problem solving process that involved a list of strategic questions."

These questions and their answers resulted in a flexible strategic framework in which the association could move forward.

To keep the strategic plan current, Mills created a Leadership Summit Steering Committee—a think tank of past and current GSAE leaders. "These GSAE gurus would wrestle with strategic issues and provide their perspectives to help us lead the association," she says.

The year of her presidency also was a year in which the focus on ethics that began with **Tom Redmon, Ed.D, CAE** (GSAE president, 1997-98) continued with an ethics study that identified the issues GSAE members found most challenging.

"We revised GSAE's Code of Ethics to strengthen our accountability to each other and our profession," she says. GSAE representatives were asked to present the study results and Code of Ethics at an American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) conference to show other chapters how to approach the issue.

"I was proud that our chapter became a model for other associations and that our members were recognized for their cutting-edge thinking." <



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# Living Legends:



## Dale E. Brown, CAE

Involvement in executive searches gave new insights

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON

**NOT ONLY DID** his involvement in Georgia Society of Association Executives (GSAE) help **Dale E. Brown, CAE** with his job at the International Association of Financial Planners (IAFF) when he first joined in the early 1990s, but the experience he gained was invaluable when he started a new association, the Financial Services Institute, Inc. (FSI), five years ago.

"Over my time with GSAE, I had an opportunity to be involved in a wide range of activities," said Brown, president and chief executive officer of FSI. Throughout the years, Brown volunteered for many different committees and positions. "I started on the education committee and continued in several positions up to my board positions."

Brown said that it was easy to volunteer for GSAE because he knew that his efforts were "helping to make a difference." He explained, "the great thing about GSAE is that it has never been a complacent or stagnant association. The leaders and members are in constant pursuit of ways to improve the association."

This focus on continuously improving the organization was demonstrated during his years as president-elect and president from 1999 to 2000. "When I was president-elect, **Cynthia Mills** was president, and then we continued to work together as she served her past-president position while I was president," he said. During these two years, they worked together to move the GSAE board toward a more strategic focus.

"We were moving from an association management company staff model to our first full-time GSAE staff, so we needed the board to focus on long-term strategic issues rather than day-to-day operations," Brown explained. "By using an outside facilitator during a series of strategic

planning sessions, the board was able to concentrate on the job of strategic planning and move away from its previous roles," he said.

GSAE leaders and members have always been willing to "roll up their sleeves" to work for the association, said Brown. "It was a privilege to serve as president, but I've continued to work with GSAE in several different roles," he said. As a member or chair of the search committee for recent executive directors, he learned even more about the nuances of association management and the traits that make successful managers. "My participation in the executive searches gave me insight that I use today."

"GSAE has a rich history and heritage," said Brown. "The association has been able to build upon its success, but association leaders have also been willing to make tough decisions to ensure future success."

According to Brown, an example of a tough decision was the evaluation of the GSAE Foundation. "For years, the Foundation was an important fundraising mechanism for the association, but the event-based fundraising approach consumed a lot of staff and volunteer time," he said. The willingness of GSAE leadership to rethink tactics enabled the association to restructure the Foundation without sacrificing the achievements of past leaders. "To admit that a key part of the organization required restructuring and to be able to do this without abandoning the principles on which the Foundation was organized is admirable," he said.

Brown encourages people to get involved in GSAE for several reasons. He explained, "The greatest benefit is the opportunity to be with people who face the same issues you face every day and to develop a close network of friends in the industry." ●