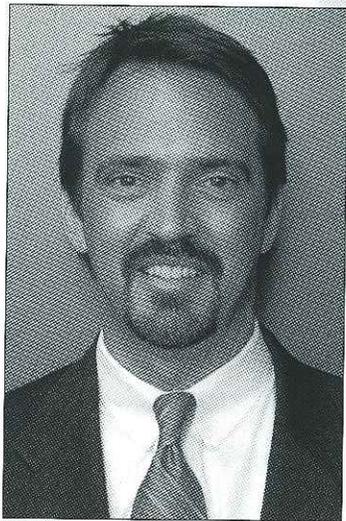


Living Legends:



Barry E. White

No introduction needed
Active in TSAE, he knew about GSAE's importance

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON

WHEN BARRY WHITE, president and chief executive officer of the Augusta Convention & Visitors Bureau, first moved to Augusta, GA from Tennessee, he knew what he had to do to succeed.

"I had been very involved in the Tennessee Society of Association Executives, so I told my boss that I was going to join the Georgia Society of Association Executives (GSAE)," explains White. "I knew that GSAE membership would be good for me as a way to gain access to meeting planners who might consider Augusta as a location for their meetings," he says.

In addition to the fact that GSAE involvement would help him better do his job, White aspired to become an association executive director and he knew that GSAE would give him the professional learning opportunities he needed to develop those skills. "The combination of professional development programs, peer learning and networking helped me prepare for the position I now hold," White says.

When he first joined in 1992, White focused on volunteering for committees on which he felt comfortable. "I had experience planning meetings so I first volunteered for the annual meeting committee," explains White. "After I became more familiar with GSAE, I began to volunteer for committees that challenged me to learn new things."

During his presidency in 2000-2001, White and his board members enhanced corporate member relationships. One of the issues they addressed was the solicitation of corporate sponsorships. "We consolidated all of the corporate sponsorships into an annual sponsorship for several reasons," he explains. "First, GSAE benefited by being able to budget for the year, already knowing what the corporate sponsorship donations would be," he says. "Secondly, the corporate members benefited because they were solicited once during the year rather than every time an event or project came up."

White is still active in GSAE because he believes networking and an opportunity to learn from peers is important in anyone's career. "GSAE is a good organization because the staff and leaders are not afraid to take conservative risks to enhance member services and set an example of the best way to run an association," White says. "Of course, GSAE membership is composed of high-level, high-achieving individuals who set the bar for performance high so it makes sense that GSAE's performance meets high expectations." He says that he is proud to be a part of an association that "wants to be on the leading edge and look toward the horizon for issues to address."

Tim O'Donnell, CIC:

A Leadership Sum Greater than the Whole of Its Parts



O'Donnell was able to translate his success at PIAG to GSAE, where, together with Moody, he helped raise the high standards of GSAE even higher, to ensure its relevancy into the new millennium.

LEADING AN ASSOCIATION is not like leading any other organization on earth. As many have found out—often the hard way—association management is a distinct discipline of its own, and the challenges an association executive or elected leader face are unique to associations. Many say that if you want to measure the health of an organization, you need to look no further than to the relationship between the chief staff officer and the chief elected officer: the former is responsible for implementation, and the latter—with the rest of the board of directors—for strategy and vision. So, simply put, if your chief staff executive and your chief volunteer officer don't work well together, your organization could be in trouble. But when they do work well together—or even better, when they work phenomenally well together—it sets the tone for operational and strategic excellence and helps ensure the organization's longevity.

Tim O'Donnell, CIC, who was president of GSAE during the critical years of 2001 and 2002, said that the success the organization enjoyed during his tenure owes an awful lot to the great working relationship he and then-executive director, **Jim Moody, CAE**, cultivated.

"Jim was a tremendous resource," O'Donnell said, noting that both he and Moody obtained the Certified Association Executive (CAE) designation from the American Society of Association Executives (now ASAE: The Center for Association Leadership). Both

O'Donnell and Moody intimately understood the specific challenges that associations face, helping them develop an agile GSAE, ready to meet new challenges.

As GSAE president, O'Donnell brought a wealth of knowledge gained from working for the Printing & Imaging Association of Georgia, where he was vice president of insurance. "This was the only position I ever held while in the association management field," O'Donnell said. "I spent most of my time administering the organization's self-funded group health plan and insurance agency."

O'Donnell, who left PIAG in 2004 to work in the insurance industry itself, learned a lot about how to successfully run an association during his tenure there. To successfully manage one of the organization's key programs, O'Donnell had to learn everything there was to know about how PIAG worked and, more generally, how associations themselves worked. O'Donnell was able to translate his success at PIAG to GSAE, where, together with Moody, he helped raise the high standards of GSAE even higher, to ensure its relevancy into the new millennium. During his tenure, GSAE also saw its first out-of-state meeting, held in Biloxi, Mississippi.

When asked what he cherished most about his time as GSAE president, O'Donnell said, without hesitation, the interactions he had with staff and members. "They worked very hard and always found the answers for any issue we encountered," he said. "The year flew by." <

Living Legends:



Clare B. Reagan, CAE

Different committee work
taught a wide range of skills

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON

AN EMPLOYER-PAID MEMBERSHIP and the promise of a plaque on the wall may have been the reason **Clare B. Reagan**, CAE, executive director of the Georgia Veterinary Medical Association, first joined Georgia Society of Association Executives (GSAE), but these are not the reasons she remained a member.

"I was working in the banking industry as a manager of training and development and volunteering with the Georgia Bankers Association when the association leadership decided to grow its education department," said Reagan. "I don't believe anyone starts their career with plans to go into association management, but when I got the call asking if I was interested in the job, I saw it as an opportunity I had to take."

On the second day of her new job, Reagan was told about GSAE and encouraged to join with the promise that the association would pay her membership and that they gave nice plaques that could be hung in her office. "I cannot fathom how anyone can be an effective manager in the association world without GSAE," she said.

"I deliberately chose to volunteer for committees that had nothing to do with my day-to-day job," said Reagan. Public service, holiday luncheon, finance, membership, sponsorship and the annual conference committees were a few of the committees on which she served or chaired. "I did help with the education committee, but I saw GSAE as an opportunity to learn skills I wouldn't learn in my job," she explained. "I wanted to be well-rounded."

"My presidential year was magical," Reagan said. "When I first joined GSAE, we were totally volunteer-run, and then over time we added staff." Over the years, the staff took on more responsibility,

which, Reagan pointed out, had the negative effect of reducing the pool of leaders that the organization was developing. "The pendulum had swung from completely volunteer-driven to staff-driven," she said.

By developing partnerships between staff members and volunteers, the pendulum moved back to the middle where volunteers had the opportunity to gain the skills and experience needed for future GSAE leaders, but they also enjoyed the support of staff members. "At the same time, we continued to emphasize the board members' role as strategic leaders rather than operational leaders," she said. "One hour of every board meeting was devoted to a strategic issue discussion," she explained. Board members were divided into groups of three, and then assigned different topics to research and present. "The constant focus on strategic planning is one way to ensure the future success of GSAE," she added.

Following her year as president, a task force charged with developing a way to develop future leaders gave past leaders a chance to identify activities that would ensure a steady source of leaders for GSAE. "The GSAE Leadership Academy kicked off earlier this year with 15 members in the first class," Reagan noted. "The curriculum is taught by past leaders and is the perfect way to put past and future leaders together to share knowledge."

Reagan has worked for different associations since her first association position, but she said that without her GSAE experience, she would have never moved from a senior-level specialist to the executive director position she now holds. She added, "GSAE is one of the loves of my life!"

LIVING LEGENDS: DANIEL F. VICKERS, CAE

Local network helped him grow his own organization

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON



In July 1997, **Daniel F. Vickers, CAE**, recommended to the board of the Podiatry Institute that the association undergo a peer review by a team of ASAE professionals for one reason: Growing pains.

As Vickers explains, he was a member of ASAE and knew that evaluation by others in the association industry would provide good ideas and direction for the organization as it met the challenges of growing and changing to meet members' needs.

"One of the members of the review team was **Sharon Hunt, CAE**," he says. Hunt's own involvement in GSAE—as both a former association management account executive for the association and an active association leader—prompted her to recommend that he become involved in GSAE. "It was great to find out that I was not alone in Georgia and that I had a chance to get involved and meet other local association executives," he says.

Vickers joined GSAE in 1997 and immediately volunteered to work with the education committee. "I chose that committee because so much of my own business is to provide continuing medical education for my members," he explains. "I wanted to learn more to improve my ability to offer services to my members."

Although Vickers appreciated his membership with ASAE, he admits, "I didn't know what I was missing by not belonging to GSAE." He became very active and attended all of the meetings and annual conferences. "I was like a sponge," he adds.

He first joined the board of directors in 1999 and

served as president in 2003-04. His first challenge as president was to ensure a successful annual meeting.

"The previous year's meeting was held in Biloxi, MS, and the meeting during my year as president was scheduled for Chattanooga, TN," he explains. "Many of our members did not want to travel out of state two years in a row." Vendors expressed concern about the potential low attendance, but Vickers and his board members assured them that there would be at least 100 association executives in attendance.

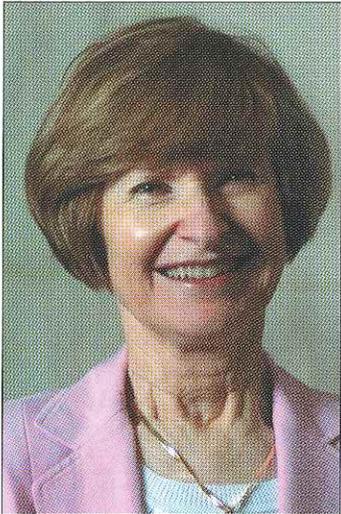
When registrations starting coming in slowly, Vickers and his board members got to work. "We called members and encouraged them to attend," he explains. "It turned out to be a very successful meeting with more than 100 association executives attending and all of the vendors were happy," he adds.

Another achievement during his year as president of which he is proud was the Learning Culture Task Force, headed up by **Beverly Black, CAE**, says Vickers. "We became the source of professional development education and we also facilitate communications between special interest groups and other organizations to improve networking opportunities for all members," he explains.

"I'm a strong believer in GSAE," Vickers says. "The association has been a great resource for me in many ways. Whether rewriting bylaws or developing print materials for my organization, or learning about the use of social media, I always walked out of a meeting or annual conference with ideas I could implement in my organization." <

Living Legends:

Sharon Hunt



Flexibility and dedication ensured success throughout the years

BY SHERYL S. JACKSON

HER ROAD TO the top volunteer leadership position in Georgia Society of Association Executives (GSAE) may not have been traditional, but **Sharon Hunt, CAE**, believes that she has learned more from her affiliation with GSAE than any other organization.

"I was an account executive working part-time on the GSAE account prior to my being named executive director from 1985 to 1995," Hunt explains. "I was a part-time executive director, juggling other associations, but I was involved in all of the GSAE committee meetings."

When GSAE moved to a full-time, dedicated staff in 1996, Hunt knew she wanted to continue her involvement in the association but she deliberately took one year off. "I had just accepted the executive director position at the Southern Association of Orthodontists so I needed time to learn my new job and I also needed to give the GSAE executive director a chance to establish herself," Hunt points out.

After her one-year hiatus, Hunt began serving on committees. "I just responded to GSAE leaders' requests and served where they asked me to serve." Eventually, she was on track to serve as president in 2004 and 2005. "I was deeply honored to be asked to serve as president of this organization," she says. "I used my year

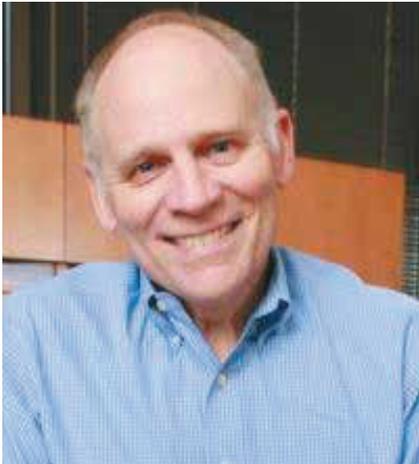
president-elect to put together committees and plans for my year as president."

If there is anything Hunt learned working with associations, it is that things don't always go as planned. Flexibility is key to successful leadership. "As I took office, Jim Moody, the executive director, told me that he needed to let his support staff person go and I needed to be there to witness the firing," she says. "Thirty days later, Jim tells me that he has been offered a wonderful job opportunity and was giving notice that he was leaving!"

Whatever plans Hunt had made for her year as president changed. "My plan became 'find a way to keep GSAE going with no staff,'" she laughs. Hunt set up a search committee and hired an interim director. "I hired the interim director to make sure we had time to look for the right person for the job," she explains. "Too many times, associations will rush to fill a position and not end up with the best candidate."

Even after so many years of serving GSAE, Hunt is still volunteering as an instructor in the Leadership Academy. "My original career path was in education so it was a natural move for me to work with the Academy," says Hunt. "I enjoy sharing real-life stories and experiences that will help participants learn." ●

Robin B. Gray Jr., JD: Continually Honing His Craft



Under Gray, GSAE began using a long-term strategic plan, with quantifiable, definable measures of success. “Rather than abstractions, we have numbers, we have insight, we have something that can be measured and tracked.”

ROBIN B. GRAY JR., JD, has never been a bystander in association management. Whether he was working in Chicago, Washington, D.C., or Georgia, Gray has always been involved in SAEs, continually honing his craft as an association executive and, in the process, becoming a respected volunteer leader, serving as GSAE president from 2005–2006.

“Whether I was in D.C. or Chicago, I’ve always been involved in association management as a profession, not just as a job,” Gray said. Before moving to Georgia, Gray was active in the Association Forum of Chicagoland, where he was on the leadership track for the board of directors.

Upon moving to Georgia, he joined GSAE and volunteered for the conference planning committee. Soon, Gray found himself in positions of greater and greater responsibility within GSAE’s volunteer leadership. Having experienced both national and local SAEs, he is firmly convinced that local SAEs are more relevant.

“As a volunteer, I was really able to jump right in and get things done,” he said. “I was able to get more done in one year as a GSAE volunteer than I would have in four years elsewhere. It is incredibly rewarding, and it made it even more rewarding when I served as president and was able to see, from that point of view, the work that I and others had done—and to see that work continue.”

Gray noted that most of the items on his “wish list”—things he wanted to do or change with

GSAE—had been accomplished while he was a board member or volunteer with the organization. He did, however, have a clear vision for his tenure, an even bigger change—or rather, a change in mindset.

“We had been doing the same sort of strategic planning exercise for years,” Gray said. “It had become an ad hoc process, repeated every year: a consultant would come in, and we would repeat the same variation of a ‘strategic planning’ exercise that never resulted in definable objectives.”

Under Gray, GSAE began using a long-term strategic plan, with quantifiable, definable measures of success. “Rather than abstractions, we have numbers, we have insight, we have something that can be measured and tracked,” Gray said. “If your members have a need that you as an association can meet, you won’t discover that through abstractions. You’ll only discover that through data. We wanted to change the entire process we used for strategic planning to focus on concrete actions and goals, and we did well.”

Gray said that “finding insight and relationship building” are the two most important things in association management. “I still get those two things from my GSAE community,” he added. “There is a group of us who regularly have breakfast and exchange insights and just discuss what’s going on in our organizations. That’s why we exist, to foster those relationships.” 

LIVING LEGENDS: BEVERLY BLACK, CAE

Helping Associations Be the Best They Can Be

BY MARY LOU JAY



ONLY ONE OTHER recent GSAE president has served as long in office as **Beverly Black, CAE**. In 2006, when Black was president-elect, the association's board moved the start of the association's fiscal year from July 1 to January 1. "That necessitated redoing everything from the constitution and bylaws to the tenure of board members, although we hadn't thought about that when we set it all in motion," says Black. With an extra six months to fill in, Black, who was president in 2006-2007, and her successor, Bill Anderson, CAE, split the difference, with each serving a 15-month term.

"On the surface it looks like we extended our terms on purpose," she adds with a laugh.

Black didn't mind the additional months, since she's been "hooked on GSAE" since first moving to Georgia in 1993. "It's an incredible group of people; an outstanding state organization," she says.

Black, now senior manager for the affiliate relations division of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists got her start in association management in the D.C. area. As part of her coursework towards a master's in health administration from George Washington University, she interviewed the ASHP education director. Based on that interview, the association invited her to apply for a year-long internship.

"It was a great organization, but I was ready to go back to work. I told my husband I'd love it if they offered me a job instead of an internship," she says. Black got her wish, and served for four years as director of ASHP's division of management and reimbursement and another four years as head of federal regulatory affairs.

When her husband accepted a position in Georgia, Black became director of the Georgia Pharmacy Association Foundation. After seven years, she had a "serendipitous discussion" with someone from ASHP, and in 2000 they offered her a job as program manager. She became senior manager of ASHP's affiliate relations division six years later.

"My job is to help our affiliated chapters become the best associations they can be. We work with their boards, we help them share information among themselves, we set up micro-sites for them, we help them set up online education opportunities—anything that you can think of to assist them in becoming more effective," she says.

Her work with GSAE and especially her time spent in a GSAE study group for the CAE test have been wonderful preparations for her current job.

"I am so much better an association executive because of my experiences with GSAE," Black says. "To this day I still reach out to people, peers and friends for advice and recommendations...When you have the opportunity to be involved in your own professional association, it helps you understand what the issues are for your work association."

Although Black plans to continue her activities with GSAE, she's also becoming more involved on a national level with ASAE.

Black hopes to impart what she's learned and still learning from both associations to the ASHP affiliate chapters. "To me the beauty of being involved in an association is that somebody has always got your back — there's always somebody who's done something that you can learn from and draw from and share with others." <

A Big Change but a Smooth Transition for Bill Anderson, CAE, LEED AP



"I enjoyed and really admired the professionalism, strong ethics, and integrity that the GSAE board and members exhibited. It was truly amazing to see this firsthand as GSAE president."

BILL ANDERSON, CAE, LEED AP, president of GSAE from 2007 to 2008, brought significant experience in association management to the growing society.

Anderson, president of Associated Builders and Contractors of Georgia, had also held positions as an associate director of a health care association and a communication associate at an association management company, before becoming GSAE's elected leader. Over the course of his career, he had already seen, and successfully met, challenging situations and navigated significant changes in associations.

This experience served him well during his tenure as GSAE president, as he would be instrumental in overseeing a significant change for that organization as well.

"During my term, we decided to change GSAE's fiscal year to a calendar year," Anderson said. Since one of the organization's greatest income producers—the annual meeting—was at the very end of the fiscal year, Anderson explains that the change from a fiscal year to a calendar year would help with GSAE's annual budgeting and financial process, creating a more predictable flow of revenue and expense.

"We planned well but never realized how much behind-the-scenes-work was involved," Anderson said. He added that communication and close, coordinated work between the GSAE staff and board of directors ensured that the shift went seamlessly, thanks in part to both Anderson and another

volunteer leader, **Beverly Black, CAE,** going the extra mile.

"The change in fiscal year required Beverly, who was GSAE president immediately prior to me, and I to work very closely on GSAE's strategic goals and planning," said Anderson. "Beverly and I also agreed to serve another six months longer in our terms to help the transition period to the new fiscal year."

Anderson said that his main goal while serving as GSAE president was to ensure that it remained one of the strongest SAEs in the nation, a quality that he says always attracted him to the organization. "My most important goal was continuing the strong momentum that GSAE had established the years prior to my term as president. GSAE was a high-performing association when I became president, so I wanted to ensure it was still at this level or even higher at the end of my term."

Said Anderson: "I enjoyed and really admired the professionalism, strong ethics, and integrity that the GSAE board and members exhibited. It was truly amazing to see this firsthand as GSAE president. I also enjoyed hearing all the members talk about the great things GSAE had done and was doing for them, their associations and their companies for so many years."

The proof of GSAE's greatness and durability can be seen in how much GSAE members believe in the organization and make it what it is. "The amount of time the members volunteer to help out GSAE is proof how much they believe in it," Anderson said. "It made me really proud and honored to be GSAE president." <

Beyond Branding: Forging an Identity for GSAE



"It's finding what the organization is really about, and sometimes what it *should* be about, to make sure that it's in line with what members need."

LORI K. SPEAR, CAE, has the unique position of being the first president of GSAE (2009) who also was a former staff member of the organization.

"I've only ever worked in two associations," says Spear, "and that's GSAE, where I was director of marketing and events, and SAIS, which serves and accredits independent schools, which is where I am now and where I was when I was GSAE's president."

For the membership, staff and elected leadership of GSAE, Spear was an easy choice for president. The organization was entering into a period where it was gaining more and more traction and influence, and as a result, had to be able to adjust its internal capacities to adjust to the realities of growth. Someone such as Spear, who was intimately familiar with not only the inner workings of GSAE, but also with its membership, has a unique advantage of "double vision"—in the best possible sense. "I was able to look at both the macro and the micro details," Spear says, "so that was certainly an advantage."

Spear does say that it was a little awkward at first to be the chief elected leader of an organization where she was once a full-time staff member, but she says "the other elected leaders, as well as the staff, made me comfortable and they also made it clear that I was president, which made me comfortable inhabiting that role."

Spear's main strategic objective was in line with her professional

experience: branding. With her deep knowledge of GSAE's audience, she proved an invaluable force of nature during the effort to rebrand the organization.

"I had been involved with GSAE for 20 years, so being able to put all of that history, knowledge and passion for GSAE to use in helping to build GSAE's identity and tell its story is one of the highlights of my career," she says.

During Spear's tenure, GSAE really dug deep into what makes GSAE *GSAE*. The organization held numerous focus groups, did market research, looked at various logo and identity schemes to refresh its visual image, and continually "listened, listened, and then listened some more" to find out what really makes GSAE valuable to members.

"This to me is the most important aspect of a branding venture or a rebranding venture," says Spear. "Not finding the perfect color scheme or the right logo or the best website—although of course that is all very important. It's finding what the organization is really about, and sometimes what it *should* be about, to make sure that it's in line with what members need."

Beyond the reward of serving as elected leader of an organization she has loved for years, Spear says that the relationships she's built that extend beyond the workplace are the most valuable rewards of her involvement with GSAE. "This place is part of my life; its people are part of my life. GSAE has added a lot to my life." <

Steady Hands for a New Direction



"I love strategic planning—thinking critically about the challenges of today and the opportunities of the future, casting a compelling vision, developing a plan to move forward that bridges aspiration with an informed understanding of the organization's capacity."

REBRANDING IS BOTH daunting and exciting. Stakeholder communication—and lots of it—is critical, not just during the creation and launch of the brand, but especially during its earliest days. **Ragan Cohn, CAE**, chair of GSAE in 2010, was at the helm for its rebranding.

Says Cohn: "2010 was a pivotal year for GSAE—one in which a three-year effort would culminate in the launch of an updated and redefined GSAE brand. We were also scheduled to develop a new three-year strategic plan that year. As chair, I wanted to ensure the fantastic work that had been done on the GSAE brand was embodied and carried forward effectively in the organization's next strategic plan."

Her background in communication and her broad experience in association management made her well equipped to handle the intricacies of rolling out a new identity.

"In 2010, I was vice president of the NCCPA Foundation, an organization I served as managing director when it was founded in 2006 by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA). I have served NCCPA in a variety of roles since 1999, including my stint with its foundation," says Cohn. "Throughout my tenure here I've led NCCPA's communications program in combination with a variety of other departments—all but finance and IT. Today I am the vice president of governance and communications, a role in which I get to work closely with our board of directors, while also overseeing significant outreach efforts to a multitude of stakeholder groups," she adds.

Cohn also says she was happy to serve GSAE during a

time when strategic planning was on the agenda.

"I love strategic planning—thinking critically about the challenges of today and the opportunities of the future, casting a compelling vision, developing a plan to move forward that bridges aspiration with an informed understanding of the organization's capacity," she says.

She notes that when a session with a professional facilitator did not deliver the results that she and the rest of the board hoped for, it was through working with those who knew GSAE best—its staff and members—that true progress came. "At the retreat—as is GSAE's custom—the board was joined by a host of other GSAE volunteers and a professional facilitator who we had prepared to lead us through a series of discussions from which that compelling, aspirational yet actionable plan would emerge. However, the facilitation fell flat, and we left that retreat having brainstormed a host of new ideas but without anything that resembled a plan," she says.

"To get us where we needed to be, I worked closely with Wendy [Kavanagh, GSAE's president] to use the considerable information already available from the just-completed work on the GSAE brand as well as the member survey to draft a vision statement, goals and measurable objectives and then incorporate the best of the strategies brainstormed at the retreat. The smart, dedicated, fun GSAE staff is the heart and soul of this organization. Long before and long after any individual elected leader comes and goes, it's the staff that brings GSAE to life for members day to day and year to year." 

Answering the Call to Serve



"The life and work experiences people were willing to share was amazing. The candor of personal and professional stories is something I miss and will never forget."

"**I DID NOT** seek to become chair of GSAE; I was asked to serve," says **Karl Kirsch, CAE**, who was chair of GSAE in 2011. "I have never reveled in the spotlight nor particularly enjoyed podium time. It is something I did as a requirement of being in association leadership."

While Kirsch was chair of GSAE, he served as vice president of the Association Management Business Practice for Meeting Expectations, an association management company located in Atlanta. "Prior to my position with Meeting Expectations, I had held manager, director and executive director positions in many of the core areas of association management," says Kirsch. "I have previously been responsible for membership, component relations, technical divisions and special interest groups, governance, and even started up a new conference from scratch. I credit much of my success to learning these core competencies early in my career."

Although Kirsch has an enviable resume, he admits that he initially lamented how much public speaking he would need to do. "As chair, you are required to address the GSAE membership regularly. So that became my challenge," he says. "Don't be a bore in front of a large, influential collection of your peers."

He quelled his uneasiness with some help from another GSAE member, **Jeff Justice**. "Jeff runs Jeff Justice's Comedy Workshope. This program helps aspiring comedians perfect their craft. It also helps regular guys like me learn to use humor in business presentations to more effectively make your point and think on your feet. Well, about six weeks of coursework and one on-stage performance at the

Punchline Comedy Club, and I was ready to be chair of GSAE!"

During his time as chair, not only did Kirsch sharpen his public speaking chops, making him infinitely more comfortable speaking in public, but he also found a good venue in which to test advice he had been giving others for years.

"I have always advised new presidents of associations to pick two or three things they want to accomplish during their term of office," he says. "This is based on seeing so many excited presidents try to do too many things and end up with none of them really done well. I took my own advice to heart as chair of GSAE and picked one thing: take GSAE's good reputation for quality programs to the next level with even higher profile speakers. With great support from our board, staff, volunteers and a significant increase in speaker budgets, we managed to improve the programming to a level that GSAE has sustained ever since. While I would like to take all the credit, **Wendy Kavanagh, CAE**, as president and **Mary Beth Cornell, CAE**, as the professional development chair were instrumental on executing the vision."

Kirsch says he will never forget his time as GSAE chair, noting that above all other factors, open honesty defined the quality of his interactions and the lessons and memories he carries with him. "The life and work experiences people were willing to share was amazing," he concludes. "The candor of personal and professional stories is something I miss and will never forget. While we all experience this through active participation in GSAE, as chair, you have a lot more opportunities to engage in these critical conversations a lot more often." <

Jim Moody, CAE: From One Chair to Another



“The key thing left in the strategic plan was to look at a new dues structure. Could we draw more people if we instituted a tiered structure for associations that had multiple staff members?”

JIM MOODY, CAE brought a unique perspective to the GSAE board during his time as chair in 2012—“unique” in the literal sense of the word, one-of-a-kind, unlike any other. Moody, once GSAE’s chief staff officer, was now its chief elected officer. Indeed, it is the word that Moody himself uses to describe his tenure.

“I think my biggest challenge was somewhat unique,” he says. “Because I had been the chief staff officer in the past, I had to make sure I was filling the elected role and not stepping on Wendy’s toes [Wendy Kavanagh, CAE, president of GSAE].”

Moody’s time as chair began at the end of one strategic planning cycle and at the beginning of another. The challenge wouldn’t be one of catching up, as sometimes can be the case. Instead, the challenge, Moody says, is that “we were ahead of schedule in completing the tasks from the prior cycle, so we were a bit challenged with strategic initiatives to start the year. That’s a testament to the chairs before me but also to our great staff who work so hard to make GSAE better. We went through a strategic planning process in August to set the stage for the next three years.”

During the his tenure, Moody was president of the Construction Suppliers Association, a position that he still holds. Prior to that, he had been president of the Building Owners and Managers Association of Atlanta and for a decade prior to

that held various positions at the American College of Rheumatology. With a three-year plan in place and with the acumen only someone with his experience can possess, Moody and the board took a look at revising a key revenue stream for the organization: dues.

“The key thing left in the strategic plan was to look at a new dues structure,” he says. “Could we draw more people if we instituted a tiered structure for associations that had multiple staff members? We looked long and hard at it, and though there was financial risk, we adopted a new structure.”

As far as how he left the organization that he had the unique duty of leading twice—each time from different perspectives, Moody says, “When I left GSAE as the chief staff executive, I thought it was in pretty good shape. We had learned to live within our means financially, we had grown the annual meeting after a period of being down a bit, and we refined the mission and scope of the GSAE Foundation to support GSAE better.”

For him, his time with GSAE wasn’t just vocational; it was a labor of love. “The last thing I wanted to see was the association I loved so much hitting a road block after my departure,” he says, adding that he has always had and still has full confidence in the GSAE staff. “When you have total confidence in the staff, it makes being chair a pretty easy job,” he says. <

Aubie Knight, CIC, AAI, CRM: Time to Serve



There may not be “enough hours in the day,” as the old lament goes, but good leaders certainly know how to make the most of every hour.

AUBIE KNIGHT, CIC, AAI, CRM answers clearly and directly when asked what his biggest challenge was during his tenure as GSAE chair in 2013, and it’s an answer than anyone with a career in association management can relate to.

“My biggest challenge personally was simply making sure that I was going to have the appropriate time to give the commitment the appropriate level of attention that it deserves. That was only possible by having a very competent staff at IIAG [Independent Insurance Agents of Georgia],” says Knight, who is currently with Independent Insurance Agents of North Carolina.

As far as the biggest challenge for the organization that year, Knight says that it was strategic planning. “The main thing on our to-do list as a board was to develop a strategic plan for GSAE.”

To assist in this effort, Knight and the board enlisted the aid of Whorton Research & Marketing, which Knight says “did a *big* survey for us” that contained a lot of useful data and yielded much insight into the future direction of the organization. “Then, we had an amazing retreat in Athens that was facilitated by **Shelly Alcorn, CAE**.” Through synthesizing all of the insight collected, the board was able to develop a solid, forward-looking strategic plan that would carry the organization for the next three years.

Along the way, Knight also managed to have a great time representing GSAE and Georgia’s association community. “Atlanta hosted ASAE’s Annual Meeting & Expo in 2013, so it was really

cool to be chair of the host state and get to take part in a lot of fun activities,” he recalls. “The GSAE Annual Meeting was held in Augusta, and they did a great job. The Rock Star party was probably the most fun I’ve ever had at a professional event. In an attempt to insert a little bit of my personality in the annual meeting, we incorporated a fun run for the first time. Overall, it was a great idea and seems to have had some staying power. However, doing the run in an Elvis costume was not the best idea I had as chair.”

As far as advice he would give to volunteer leaders, Knight says that, first and foremost, respect for others’ time is crucial. “Something that I would tell all volunteer leaders would be to know your role and to support the staff leadership,” he says. “My primary role as chair was to make sure the board performed its basic duties and to have meetings that were an effective use of everyone’s time.”

Knight also says that board members must be flexible and above all accessible, noting that, sometimes, hammering out the details of governance happens far from the boardroom. “A lot of issues were discussed over cheese dip and salsa at our favorite hole in the wall Mexican place on Buford Highway.”

In the end, not only did Knight make use of his time—the resource he feared he would not have enough of—effectively, but he also ensured that he treated everyone else’s time with the same respect. There may not be “enough hours in the day,” as the old lament goes, but good leaders certainly know how to make the most of *every* hour. <

Susan Cheshire, CAE: Lifelong Student, Lifelong Teacher



Like most of GSAE's former chairs, when Cheshire is asked what her greatest challenge was during her term, she speaks more to efforts of continual improvement rather than heroic rescues or dramatic overhauls.

TO HEAR SUSAN CHESHIRE, CAE speak about GSAE—which she led as chair in 2014—is to be in the presence of someone who is truly inspired and who truly believes in what not only GSAE does to further education but in education itself. She is committed to fostering lifelong learning wherever she goes.

This is fitting for Cheshire, who began her career as an English teacher, then as a guidance counselor. From there, she moved onto other local jobs, and then into association management.

During her tenure, and for the entire time of her GSAE membership, Cheshire has served as executive director and CEO of Georgia School Nutrition Association, a 5,000-member 501(c)(4) organization of professionals employed in the school nutrition field in Georgia. Prior to this, she also held numerous executive-level positions in Florida, all of which informed her work as GSAE chair and continue to inform it today. “I have also held the position of executive vice president of the Palm Bay Florida Chamber of Commerce in Palm Bay, Florida, and executive director of the Brevard County Legislative Council, also in Florida,” Cheshire says. Her extensive background in governance made her a strong chair for GSAE.

Like most of GSAE's former chairs, when Cheshire is asked what her greatest challenge was during her term, she speaks more to efforts of continual improvement rather than heroic rescues or dramatic overhauls.

She says, “GSAE has been for many years professionally staffed with an excellent executive

director” and staff, says Cheshire, adding that she “did not anticipate any real challenges during my term, and that is what happened.”

Under Cheshire's term, GSAE leaders especially looked at how it could bolster membership and cultivate a more meaningful relationship with association suppliers.

“The board worked together that year to bring GSAE to even higher levels of development in the areas of membership and the relationship of association executives and corporate suppliers. One challenge we studied and worked on together was the annual meeting and trade show. We worked to make it a fulfilling educational experience for both vendors and association members and provide adequate financial resources to GSAE,” she says, noting that it is just as imperative for an organization's offerings to deliver a solid return on investment in terms of education for its members as it is for the offering to be financially sound for the organization.

Cheshire says that especially important to her was ensuring that all association professionals had adequate resources to learn and to get ahead in their careers. Fostering the next generation of leaders is an important part of all associations' missions.

This is a tall order but one that she says was made easier by the GSAE staff, of whom she comments make “the role of the chair much easier and enjoyable. We are fortunate to have this type of stable and effective staff as the foundation of GSAE as it grows and changes.”



Clearer Metrics for a Clearer Vision

COMING FROM A background that includes significant experience as a vice president with Kellen and as vice president of association management at Cornerstone Communications Group, **Jim Fowler, CAE**, who was the chair of GSAE in 2015, brought with him a wealth of lessons learned from years of observing—as well as actively participating in—association governance.

Fowler, who serves currently as president of the Atlanta/Georgia Apartment Association, noted how important it is for board members to have clear, easily digestible and salient metrics at their fingertips. Although a board of directors is by definition a deliberative and contemplative body, time is still a precious currency not to be wasted. The clearer the metrics, the more informed the decision.

Fowler says that he was “fortunate to serve in a time where our organization wasn’t faced with any major issues.” Like many of the chairs before him, Fowler entered his time as GSAE chair during a period of equilibrium. The organization was in a steady

state, matching member needs with timely, leading-edge offerings while balancing the revenue and workflow challenges that come with growth.

Recognizing that not all board members are equally fluent in interpreting financials, Fowler saw an opportunity to simplify the financial reporting process without diluting or simplifying the information the board received.

“I spearheaded an initiative to streamline our financial reporting, which provided clarity and resulted in easier-to-interpret financials for our board members,” he says.

The new process enabled the board members to better understand the full financial health of GSAE, giving them greater confidence in decision making and enabling the organization to focus on what Fowler says were his main strategic goals as GSAE chair: “To spread the word about all the great things associations accomplish and to continually pump up GSAE members, regardless of rank or position, in that everyone makes

a difference in what they do; to get folks feeling good about themselves and their contributions to the greater cause.” This inclusive spirit continues to define GSAE as a place for *all* association professionals, not just C-suiters.

When he’s asked what he most enjoyed about his time as chair, Fowler answers, “Serving with a great board of directors, working alongside a great staff, and representing an incredibly smart and talented group of association leaders in Georgia.”

And like every good volunteer leader, Fowler recognizes just how vital the relationship between elected leader and chief staff officer is. “I enjoyed a very transparent and fluid relationship with **Wendy W. Kavanagh, CAE**,” he says, “where we each had a clear understanding and respect for our respective roles. As one of my last roles as past chair, I introduced a more focused, goal-oriented annual review process, which was adopted going forward for ease of use for Wendy and the executive committee.”

Fowler’s goal as GSAE chair: “To spread the word about all the great things associations accomplish and to continually pump up GSAE members, regardless of rank or position, in that everyone makes a difference in what they do; to get folks feeling good about themselves and their contributions to the greater cause.”



Fine-Tuning the Future

AS ANYONE WHO has spent time in the GSAE community knows, an organization's might has little to do with its resources or size and absolutely everything to do with the people who comprise it: not just the staff and elected leadership but every single person who touches the organization.

During his tenure as GSAE chair in 2016, **David Ellis, CAE**, helped GSAE make even better uses of its resources as the organization constantly and rapidly evolved to address emerging member needs.

When asked how he approached his position as elected leader of the organization, Ellis says, "I was elected to make sure that something that was already going really well—GSAE—continued to go really well. I saw what I was tasked to do as keeping the trains on track.

"We weren't selling cookies to make budget," he adds with a laugh, "so I saw my tenure as a great time to fine tune delivery, to see how we could provide services and programs even better, more efficiently, and with improvements in technology and delivery."

Ellis didn't seek to make a "big splash" as chair. Instead, "I focused my time on nuance," he says. "What we had was working. My job—our job, really, because everyone was involved—was to make things even better."

Ellis credits GSAE's success to the hard work of everyone. "The thing that we really work hard at, particularly in leadership, is we work as a team toward the long-term plan, toward what happens when our turn at the wheel, so to speak, has long passed," he says. "What will this organization look like next year? In 10 years? Twenty years? What might be down the road? What is right around the corner. We have to all look at that together, and it takes many, many sources of input to do that with any real success."

Ellis says the obvious and most important source of this input is members, and he especially credits GSAE President **Wendy W. Kavanagh, CAE**, as a major strength in this area. "Wendy does a fabulous job working with the members of GSAE," he says. "She is dynamic and innovative and keeps her finger on the pulse of everything. She would

call to tell me she has solved a problem, rather than presenting me with a problem. She's incredibly smart and incredibly resourceful, and we're so fortunate to have her."

Ellis, who for the past 12 years was the executive vice president of the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association and before that served as EVP of the Collier Building Industry Association, says that what he valued the most as GSAE chair, and continues to value, is the time that he spent with other association executives.

"I got to know a wide variety, a diverse group of professionals who work in my industry," he says. "The only people I meet all day long in my position are home builders, who of course I love talking to. Those are the people who I serve. But when working with GSAE, you get to meet people from all kinds of associations—healthcare, food service, technology. It really broadens you and gives you a platform to hone your craft and learn more about what's out there, and it enables you to better serve your members." 

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Heart and Soul

"I DIDN'T REALLY have any aspirations to be chair," says the 2017 chair of GSAE, **Tara Morrison, CAE, CMP**, who currently serves as president of Association Management Executives, Inc. in Norcross, Georgia. "I didn't have my eye on the chair, but I've always wanted to be involved. It's an organization that is near and dear to my heart."

"Heart" is a fitting metaphor for Morrison's motivation, what drives her. "When I first delved into association management, I was the director of corporate wellness and CPR programs at the American Heart Association in Georgia. Following that, I was executive director for special societies at the Medical Association of Georgia."

Few sectors are as demanding, changing and challenging as healthcare. Many of your members have actual life and death on the line in their jobs, every day. It's imperative for association executives serving that sector to have foresight, to serve as trusted counselors and advisors to people with often-grueling career challenges. Her experience in that

sector, as well as her extensive experience managing all types of associations through her firm, equip Morrison with valuable vision and experience, which she is putting to work for GSAE's members and for the organization's future.

Morrison says that just as important as a leader's knowledge—and perhaps more so—is the leader's deliberate practice of listening carefully to others and always displaying empathy. "Getting to know people that I hadn't had a chance to meet before has been enlightening and really informative," Morrison says. "I get to be involved in a lot of committee work that I otherwise wouldn't have been involved in, and through that, I get a clearer picture of how the entire organization comes together."

She emphasizes the importance of understanding that even when everyone is working toward the same goal—as they are on a board—people are still people. They are relentlessly individual and relentlessly unique, and no two groups will ever have the

same dynamic. While everyone may be focused on a common end, the paths they find desirable will always be filled with differences. The job of the board collectively—and especially the board chair—is to pull from these competing viewpoints a singular vision and strategy.

The key, Morrison says, is to "think about the golden rule. In our industry, we are basically like a conveyor belt; you have constant movement, and different people come through, some of whom don't have agendas that are in line with your organization, or at least aren't in line with where the majority of the organization's stakeholders believe it should go."

She encourages all to keep empathy and fairness in mind, especially with the challenges that come when volunteer leaders turn over. "Think about the golden rule when new volunteer leadership comes through. It can be hard to deal with different personalities and people with different agendas. Lean on your staff to make sure that they can manage things and be the constant." 

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