From the President

By Steven Collins, PhD, PE
WSPE Board of Trustees 2018–19 President

Welcome to WSPE News, the new monthly newsletter from the Board of Trustees of the Washington Society of Professional Engineers! Featuring news, commentary, and announcements of interest to PEs in the state, the newsletter serves as a channel of communication between the WSPE leadership and its membership. If you have ideas for items we should include, upcoming events to publicize, or a desire to contribute an article, please let me know—you’ll find my contact information below.

This past year has been a busy one for WSPE. The new integrated membership model came into effect July 1, requiring that NSPE and WSPE revise the working documents that define our relationship. Past president Nate Palmatier ably represented us in the crafting of a new NSPE-Washington Society Agreement. Based on that agreement, and the new NSPE Bylaws, WSPE leadership is reworking the WSPE Bylaws and Policies with the goal of bringing them to a vote at the winter meeting of the Board of Trustees in February.

Our local chapters continue to be an important focus of member activities. If you haven’t yet gotten to know your local chapter, please check it out. It’s a great way to learn about the issues affecting our profession, build your network, and meet some truly wonderful people!

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In Memory of Neil A. Norman, P.E.

By Ken McGowan, PE, F.NSPE
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We recently lost a true friend and colleague, Neil A. Norman, on September 12, 2018, after a long battle with lymphoma cancer. A Celebration of Life was held at the Shalom United Church of Christ in Richland, where Neil was a member and past moderator of the congregation. He is survived by his wife of 48 years, Janet Norman and children. Neil treasured time spent with his children, grandchildren and others whenever the opportunity presented itself. Neil’s sense of humor was appreciated by all who interacted with him, and he was in good spirits until very near the end of his life.
Neil was the penultimate engineer who excelled in everything that he tackled. He was a strong voice for engineering ethics, and mentored many of us as well as dozens of young engineers throughout their career.

Neil’s career consisted of working for the following six engineering companies in high-level positions: Pratt & Whitney, Aerojet, B&W, Bechtel National Corp, Roy F. Weston, and Parsons.

Neil’s professional activities included serving as President of CSPE in 1980, President of NSPE in 1990, and served 10 years on the Washington State Board of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors.

Neil has received too many awards to completely mention, but he has been recognized with WSPE’s Columbia Award for public service in 2008, WSPE’s 2009 PE of the Year, and WSPE’s Tri-Cities Engineer of the Year in 2017.

Neil managed to find time to enjoy the outdoors, owning a number of boats, skiing, camping, backpacking, playing tennis and traveling to many places around the world.

Neil had a passion for learning by reading the classics, books about history, or the latest scientific developments. Late in life he discovered a passion for genealogy. Neil was a kind and loving man and had concern for those in need, be they family, immigrants, or minorities.

Neil will be sorely missed at our future WSPE board meetings. Those of you who would like to make a contribution in Neil’s memory may do so by sending a check to Jan Norman at 70 Edgewood Drive, Richland, WA 99352. She will purchase something in his honor for display at the Richland Shalom United Church.
Making WSPE “Relevant:” One Member’s Viewpoint

By V. Alan Werner, PE, F.NSPE
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“Relevant,” according to the Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, means “having significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand.”

To be “relevant” by this definition, a professional society must deliver benefits that bear on the matters its audience—members and potential members—care about the most. Membership in a society entails benefits and costs: if a member perceives a high ratio of benefits to cost, the society has relevance for that member. Relevancy is subjective, differing according to each individual’s valuation of benefits and costs. It is also fluid, since members’ needs, expectations, and desires change over time. For a society to thrive, it should be tuned to members’ changing perceptions about the benefits it offers and the ratio of the benefits to the cost of membership.

Since its founding in 1934, NSPE’s core values have centered on licensure, ethics, and professionalism. For Professional Engineers in years past, NSPE’s value proposition provided sufficient reason to join and remain as members. Opportunities to network and pursue continuing education added to the attractions of membership. WSPE translated these values to the local context and actualized them at the point of practice in our state.

As the steady decline in membership over the past 30 years makes clear, reliance on core values no longer provides a sustainable basis for recruiting and retaining members. As WSPE enters a new phase as an integrated state society, it should seize the opportunity
to reassess its relevancy to its members. It needs to identify the value triggers of its members and realign its core values with those of its target audience.

The prospective member today asks, “Will membership deliver benefits in excess of the cost?” An affirmative answer makes membership a possibility; a negative answer excludes it. The same consideration influences membership retention. Given the severe competition among organizations to recruit and retain members, and the limited time Professional Engineers can give to their professional societies, it is crucial that WSPE take action to enhance its relevance based on an accurate understanding of the values of its target audience—the Professional Engineers and Engineers-in-Training in our state.

The path to relevancy can occur in many ways. The outline below is but one approach.

1. Determine the goal—this is the first step. What is relevant to WSPE’s membership? Although NSPE has done many studies along these lines, I contend that such a study does not exist or has not been published for WSPE.

2. Design the changes with the goal in mind. Utilize the talents of members to determine the changes required. Perhaps the emphasis will shift to products and services, with licensure and lobbying as secondary bases. Perhaps a restructuring of the WSPE organization will be required.

3. Commit to making the changes. The survival of the organization depends on adapting it to the needs and desires of the members. At all levels, WSPE must be committed to enacting the program of changes that emerges from this process.

**Links**


4. Offer products, services, and benefits that justify the price of membership in both money (dues) and effort. Tempting though it may be to jump immediately to deliverables, this step should not be taken before the design is complete.

5. Promote the changes and the re-structured organization. Members and nonmembers in the target audience must be informed about the changes that have been made. Special effort should be made to reach out to former members.

6. Re-examine the premise. Once the changes have been made, a process of continuous monitoring and tweaking must occur to maintain alignment between the values of the organization and those of its membership.

In conclusion, WSPE is a proud, refined, respected organization promoting and defending the Professional Engineer. However, its values may no longer be in proper alignment with those of its target audience. As a result, its relevance with that audience has come into doubt. WSPE must regain its relevance or it risks perishing as an organization. The possibilities for viability and prosperity are there, but they must be seized and embraced while the ability to do so still exists.

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**Events**

1. **Seattle/Lake Washington Chapter Dinner Meeting, January 15, 2018, 6:30 pm, Best Western Executive Inn, 200 Taylor Ave North, Seattle, WA.**

2. **Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors, Special Board Meeting, February 6, 2019, 8 am, Radisson Hotel, Seattle Tacoma Airport.**

3. **WSPE Board of Trustees Winter Meeting, February 20, 2019, 11 am, Central Washington University, Ellensburg, WA.**