

# Letter from the President

**Stephen G. Wells, GSA President**

*1 July 2006 – 30 June 2007*

This year's President's report serves to illuminate some of the achievements that we have accomplished at GSA this year—a year when GSA's leaders moved to better position the Society for future growth and membership needs, and for GSA and its members to take on a more prominent role on geoscience policy and leadership on the national and international stages. Because the Society has streamlined its operations, and with GSA's finances in better order, the time has come to move to implement GSA's core mission goals.

In last year's President's report, William Thomas listed a number of questions identified by GSA Council, GSA Allied and Associated Societies, and in GSA Section meetings as critical for the future of geosciences. One of these questions asked how geoscientists can best contribute to policy decisions that involve natural causes, ranging from natural hazards to resource supplies. It is clear that GSA and its members identified a need to become more involved in public policy issues where earth-science issues are involved. As part of GSA's National Leadership Initiative, a core goal of the Society's mission, GSA is stepping up to the plate to guide geoscience policy decisions at the national level in the USA. To this end, we have undertaken a bold move to make GSA a more prominent player in the public policy arena.

Filling a critical need for both GSA and its members, one of the highlights of this year was the approval to open GSA's Washington, DC, office. Dr. Craig M. Schiffries, hired in September 2007 is the Society's new Director for Geoscience Policy, and he will be staffing the GSA office in Washington. Schiffries comes to GSA from the National Council for Science and the Environment, where he served as Director of Science Policy for the last five years. He has held positions at the National Academy of Sciences as well as the American Geological Institute, and has been a professional staff member for the



United States Senate. In addition, Schiffries was a GSA Congressional Fellow, a very successful program that GSA sponsors. The GSA Congressional Fellows program continues to give geoscientists a chance to work with legislators in Washington, DC, to keep them abreast of, and informed about, earth science issues.

The purpose of the new GSA Washington office is to provide GSA and our members with an informed, active voice in Washington, where Dr. Schiffries will be monitoring public policy issues, and talking with federal legislators to educate them on geoscience issues in particular. He also will be involved in trying to get legislators to support science funding at the federal level, and to use sound science when making their legislative decisions. Finally, Schiffries will be initiating new programs to invite the GSA community at large to get involved in public policy-related activities.

A milestone GSA has reached is that membership stood at over 20,700 active members at the end of December 2006. This is a great achievement, and speaks to the health of the Society and to the vitality of the earth sciences in our society. One of the goals of GSA is to attract and retain new members, and this year, I began to address part of this issue by focusing on increasing GSA's international membership and enhancing GSA's global image. Areas of concern that were identified this year were how to get international members more involved with the Society, and how GSA can better serve the needs of these members. Because GSA is an international Society, a task force was established to look into how GSA's global image can be improved. Elena Centeno-Garcia is the Chair of this task force, which will address international marketing perceptions. This will lead to improvements in the GSA web site and other GSA materials, and should make them more accessible to international members. The overall goal will be to create and implement a global strategic plan for GSA to expand internationally, building on the reputation it has as one of the premiere geological societies in the world.

Another example of how GSA is focusing on needs of the geoscience community is an ad-hoc Committee I established to look into improving and optimizing the interactions between our society's Allied and Associated Societies and GSA overall. This committee compliments the two other committees on Sections and Divisions established by Past-Presidents Rob Van der Voo and William Thomas, respectively. The

goal of this ad-hoc committee goal is to look for ways to improve the organization and effectiveness of the Society as it works and communicates with the GSA Allied and Associated Societies.

With the Society moving forward in many strategic areas, we look forward to new ways to recognize service to the geoscience community. A new award was established in 2007—the GSA President’s Medal. Criteria for the President’s Medal include profoundly enhancing the geoscience profession through supporting and contributing to the Society; by advancing geosciences, enhancing professional growth, and/or promoting geosciences in service of humankind; and/or significantly enlarging the range of scientific achievement for the growth of our profession. The Medal will be conferred annually during the Annual Meeting of the Geological Society of America. The first President's Medal of the Geological Society of America was conferred on Phil Mickelson, a PGA champion, and his wife, Amy, during the 2007 GSA Annual Meeting in Denver. Phil and Amy have been active supporters of science education—one of GSA’s key goals. As a professional golfer, Phil Mickelson has used his celebrity status to publicize the need for improvement of teaching of physical science and math in elementary schools to attract more students into those fields. To address this need, Phil and Amy have teamed up with ExxonMobil to establish the Mickelson Teachers Academy, a weeklong workshop for third- through fifth-grade teachers to gain new skills and strategies for exciting students about science and math. Emphasizing the importance of science education to so many people is another example of how the Mickelsons are providing outstanding support of science, including the geosciences.

As for GSA’s meetings, the 2006 Philadelphia Annual meeting was well attended, with 6171 attendees enjoying 236 sessions, where 3282 presentations were given. Of these presentations, 199 were recorded, and are now on the GSA Web site for people to view. The field trips attracted 554 people, and 78 people attended GSA short courses. To support the Annual Meeting, over \$50,000 was raised in outside sponsorship, and 204 exhibit booths were sold. The Section Meetings for 2007 had a total attendance of 2835 people, which is very successful. During the GSA annual meeting, the GSA Executive Committee and Councilors also visit exhibitors for feedback to help understand what exhibitors expect at the meetings. For the 2007 GSA Annual Meeting, it was decided

that GSA will begin to go “green,” with the goal of having completely “green” meetings in the future.

By improving day-to-day operations and management, by having a new geoscience policy director in Washington, DC, and by working on ways to improve and enhance GSA’s global image, the Society is prepared to take on more of a strong leadership position. GSA will provide a unified voice for member concerns about science policy issues both on a national and global stage. GSA is a well-run organization with an established history and reputation, and soon will be an even stronger, global voice for earth sciences in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Lee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'S' and a long, sweeping underline.