

President's Message

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As I sit here writing this column, I've been the president of NEHA for about five months. By the time you read this, I'll have been the president of NEHA for seven or eight months. Averaging this all out, I'm about halfway through my term. So, let me tell you what it's like to be the president of NEHA.

I've been on the NEHA board since 1991, so I've served under 16 different presidents. I've followed what they do, talked to them, and listened to them. I thought I knew what it would be like to be the president of NEHA—wrong!

Journal Columns

First of all, you have to write 10 of these columns! For those of you who know me, I'm rarely at a loss for words. When you're putting the words in writing for the *Journal of Environmental Health*, however, knowing that they will be seen on the NEHA Web site (www.neha.org/JEH) makes it an even more daunting task. Whatever I say will be there for a long time. Of course, this is based on the somewhat egotistical notion that people read and pay attention to what I write in these columns. I actually have gotten two or three e-mails about them, so I know that *someone* reads them. And, no, the e-mails weren't from my mother!

One of the things that also makes writing this column difficult is that things are changing so fast at NEHA, that it's hard to keep up with the changes and report on them in a timely fashion. We changed NEHA-CERT to NEHA e-Learning and provided all the courses for free, instead of charging for them. I had to rewrite a column to accommodate this change. We received a five-year contract from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center

The Halftime Show

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for Environmental Health for a maximum of \$1,000,000 per year, which necessitated quick rewrites. Although I knew that it was likely that the contract would be approved, and that the NEHA e-Learning courses would be offered for free, I didn't want to talk about them until they were done deals.

I've written about this in the past, but Strategic Thinking at NEHA and the opportunistic business model allow for rapid changes to keep NEHA in the forefront of the environmental health field. As a result of one of those e-mails about my column, you can now learn more about NEHA's Strategic Thinking on the NEHA Web site, in two locations: www.neha.org/about/neha.html and www.neha.org/JEH/president_column.html. Strategic Thinking and the opportunistic business model keep things changing almost daily, it seems.

The upside of writing this column is that I can talk about whatever I feel like talking

to you about. If you have anything that you would like me to address, send me an e-mail. I'm always glad to receive column suggestions.

Staff Support

I have a lengthy conference call with our Executive Director Nelson Fabian every couple of weeks. We get a chance to catch up on what we're each doing; to discuss changes in the office; to discuss appointments that need to be made; to commiserate on our dental woes; to discuss the future of NEHA vis-à-vis the economic situation out there in the "real" world; and, generally, to keep up on the status and future course of NEHA. NEHA is structured like a council-manager city government. The board hires the executive director, who receives general guidance from the board, and the executive director then is responsible for carrying out the policies set forth by the board. That includes hiring, promoting, transferring, and dismissing staff; setting a budget for board approval; and, generally, being responsible for the day-to-day operation of NEHA, as well as being tuned into the Strategic Thinking established by the board. The board does not meddle in the day-to-day operations of NEHA. The president and the executive director work as a team to guide NEHA. As president, I inform the other 14 board members of what we discuss at our conference calls, so that the entire board is kept up-to-date on the many changes that occur at NEHA. The relationship between the president and the executive director is a special relationship, and our conversations are very open and thorough. I view this as one of the special privileges of being the president.

The entire staff at NEHA supports the president exceptionally well. They keep me supplied with NEHA information as I travel to affiliate conferences; they send out correspondence for me; they gently remind me that another column is due; and they generally keep me out of trouble and make me look good—well, as good as possible! You are lucky to have such a professional, dedicated staff to represent NEHA. Again, one of the privileges as president is being able to work so closely with so many of them.

Affiliate Conferences

As of this writing, I have had the chance to visit four affiliate conferences. I have been to Alaska, the Yankee Conference (the north-eastern states), Montana, and Texas. The public that we serve, I'm sure, doesn't truly appreciate the hard-working, dedicated professionals that safeguard their environment on a daily basis. Although each of the conferences represents unique demographical, political, budgetary, geographical, and professional challenges, the environmental health professionals step right up and deal with them and provide excellent services to the public. I am truly impressed with the quality of the professionals whom I've met

at these conferences. I also really appreciate those who are honored with awards by their peers. As "the invisible profession," we don't often get the recognition that we deserve. So it's good to see these awards going to deserving professionals. It's too bad that there aren't more awards, because there are a lot of people out there who deserve them.

Another thing that strikes me about environmental health professionals is what a friendly, receptive group they are. The genuine warmth and friendliness of the professionals that I've met at these conferences is inspiring. I am pleased to be able to represent such a wonderful bunch of people.

Serendipity

While I was at the Montana Environmental Health Association, I received an e-mail from Don Mangold, who is the son of Walter Mangold. We were finally able to get together recently. He and his mother, Walter Mangold's widow, would like to donate Walter Mangold's papers to NEHA, so environmental health professionals can learn from one of the founders of our profession. Early in his career as a sanitarian, Walter Mangold realized that education and training were necessary for sanitarians to do their jobs properly. He embarked on a

career of professionalizing the sanitarian. He trained environmental health professionals at the University of California, Berkeley. He was friends with another legend in environmental health, Walter Snyder, the founder of NSF. They both worked to make the sanitarian, and later the environmental health professional, truly professional. It is no accident that the top two awards given by NEHA are the Mangold and the Snyder Awards.

It was truly an honor to be able to meet Don Mangold and have a chance to talk about his father. It will be a privilege for NEHA to be the repository of Walter Mangold's papers, so that the history of the profession will be honored.

What else can I say but it's a once in a lifetime experience to be the president of NEHA. I get to represent a truly noble profession, composed of hard-working, dedicated, and friendly professionals. I've gotten the chance to meet some of the current legends in our field, and I've been lucky enough to be able to meet Don Mangold and talk with him about his father.

I've been in environmental health for over 40 years, and let me tell you, it doesn't get much better than this! 🐻

Rich Pantano