

President's Message

Dick Pantages,
R.E.H.S.



Geometry 101: The Equilateral Triangle

The Windup

As I write this column, my term of office is half over, but as you read it, it will be three-fourths over. In early December, I was at the NEHA office in Denver. Three things were going on. President-elect Roberts and I did an evaluation of the executive director and NEHA; two new board members had orientation; and the board held a teleconference.

As we were talking about the state of NEHA, the comment was made that in these difficult times, NEHA is more important than ever. It offers job listings, for those who need or want to look for a new position. It offers free online continuing education to keep credentials up-to-date, or just to improve your knowledge. Both of these are helpful in obtaining or keeping a job. NEHA also offers credentials. Again, these are helpful for keeping or obtaining a job.

NEHA is doing very well now. Those of you who have heard me speak at an affiliate conference or who have read my past columns know what I'm talking about. We are aware, however, that the current difficult times will undoubtedly affect NEHA to some extent, and we are prepared for that eventuality.

In spite of the doom and gloom, NEHA is a bright spot on our horizon.

The Pitch

Now we're getting to the equilateral triangle. This concept has always been rather intuitive to me, but it really came home during the visit to the NEHA office in Denver.

An equilateral triangle has three equal sides. (See, I *did* remember something from 10th grade plane geometry!) Three points

...the current difficult times will undoubtedly affect NEHA to some extent, and we are prepared for that eventuality.

determine a plane; three legs make a stable chair or stool; there are three separate, but equal, parts of the federal government, and for that matter, most local governments.

Well, NEHA has three equal parts: the members, the staff, and the board of directors. Each of these three parts contributes to the increasing greatness and influence of NEHA. Let me illustrate with my week in Denver.

The Members

While I was in Denver, I had to make an appointment for a person to be a liaison with a federal agency. We put our heads together and quickly came up with a list of very qualified members. We narrowed this list down and asked one of our members to serve in this position. Without hesitation and with pleasure at being able to represent an organization with the reputation of NEHA, he agreed to serve. In selecting section chairs and vice-chairs, the process was difficult because we have so many qualified

people who want to serve but we have a limited number of positions to fill. All the members that I've had the pleasure of appointing to one position or another have been excellent professionals and eager to represent NEHA. I can assure you that it is not my persuasive charm that convinces them to serve. It is the opportunity to represent an association with the reputation and influence that NEHA has. It never ceases to amaze me how many members donate significant amounts of time to NEHA. They may be working as peer reviewers for the *Journal of Environmental Health*, serving as subject matter experts developing exam questions, serving on a committee, serving as a liaison, serving as a section chair or vice-chair, presenting at a conference, or helping in numerous other ways to serve NEHA. My thanks to all of you!

The November 2008 *Journal of Environmental Health* has a listing of the members who have belonged to NEHA for 25 years or more. There are 503 of them! More than 10% of our members have belonged to NEHA for 25 years or more. To me, that is just another example of the professional dedication of the members of NEHA.

The Staff

As a part of NEHA's evaluation, we discuss the staff. Also, as a part of the new board member orientation, many of the staff give presentations on their programs to the new board members, as well as to the president-elect and the president. The professionalism, enthusiasm, creativity, and energy of the staff are truly awesome. One of the problems is

that the presentations are so good, and we're so interested in them, that we're always running late because we want to interact with the staff on their programs.

The staff is where the rubber meets the road. No matter what the members do, or what the board of directors wants done, it only gets done, and done well, because of the dedication of the staff.

As I speak to affiliates and do the other things that a NEHA president does, the staff is always ready to help out and make me look good, which is not the easiest thing to do! I personally appreciate that, but more importantly, it makes NEHA look good, or, more correctly, better.

For most of the members, very little interaction with the staff occurs, so members don't realize what an important side of the triangle the staff is. Believe me, they are the best!

The Board of Directors

I've talked about the board of directors in previous columns, but I would be remiss not to mention them again here. Again, my week in Denver brought home the importance and the quality of the board. First,

we had two new board members getting oriented for two full days. You don't realize what a complicated association NEHA is until you have one of these orientations. Things are changing rapidly at NEHA, so there is much to learn. The new board members both were very attentive and had a lot of dialogue with the staff during these presentations. As the whole board met in a teleconference, I again appreciated the strength of this third side of the equilateral triangle. We discussed and made decisions on many complicated items. The board had read and understood the information that had been sent to them ahead of time. Some of it had been sent out only a day or two before the meeting, too. The agenda items were in a binder about one inch thick—and this was one of the "minor" board meetings! The board discussed each item clearly and concisely, with respect for each other's positions, and came to decisions that are in the best interests of NEHA.

Being a board member entails a lot of e-mails and a lot of reading. The board members are all busy people, and they dedicate themselves to this work for the good of the

environmental health profession. I've been on the board for 17 years, and the discussions have always been polite and collegial. I've never seen personal attacks or finger pointing or "I told you so" sorts of comments. It would be nice if many of our elected officials could do their jobs as well as the NEHA board members do!

The board members work on a lot of committees and projects. They are always willing to help with anything that needs to be done for NEHA. They are *not* a figurehead board; they are a *working* board. Each board member makes at least a three-year commitment.

Well, that concludes my lecture on equilateral triangles. There will be no quiz. You all work too hard for that.

A Final Note

After you read this, you should be making plans, if you haven't already made them, to attend NEHA's 73rd Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition in Atlanta, Georgia, June 21–24. It's only three months away! 🐼

Blisk Pantazis