

## Managing Editor's Desk

Nelson Fabian, M.S.



# 25 Years!

**T**here were many touching moments at this year's annual conference. My list includes (but is not limited to) the opening (and energizing) hoop dance that was performed by an ensemble of Native Americans; the keynote session where attendees routinely applauded when consequential points were made by our special panel of speakers during a captivating discussion of our profession's future; the steady performance by several new, enthusiastic, and tired NEHA staff who were working their first-ever AEC; and most certainly, the moving acceptance speech that was delivered by Dr. John Barry upon being honored with this year's Mangold award. For me personally, however, the "granddaddy" of all the touching moments involved the event when many of NEHA's past presidents came together to honor (and roast!) me for my 25 years of service to NEHA. That particular touching moment was, indeed, "priceless."

From my heart, special thanks go to former NEHA President Harry Grenawitzke, who organized this first ever past presidents' dinner (and roast). Special thanks also to Kevin Lawlor and Stan Hazen from NSF International; their organization so very kindly sponsored this event. I have no doubt that the warmth, friendship, and fellowship that existed in that room touched not just me but surely everyone present.

In late May of this year, when I flew past my 25th year of service to the profession and your association, I hardly noticed. We were all involved in the final stretch of preparations for our annual conference that was by then only a few short weeks away. It is also not my inclination to look back. Except for learning lessons from the past, it has always

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been much more fun for me to think about the future and its limitless possibilities.

This special moment, however, forced me to think about the significance of reaching this milestone. More profoundly, it prompted me to think about the factors that explain why I have invested both my career and much of my life in this enterprise we all call NEHA.

Though many thoughts have come to mind (with some being interesting enough, I think, to warrant discussion in future columns), two thoughts clearly stood out to me. I will spend the remaining time of this column talking about those two thoughts—not so much to finish a little story about Nelson but rather to tell you something about the organization of which you are a member. I think you will enjoy this inside peek at what makes NEHA so special.

### **Thought #1: Freedom**

I cannot say enough about how appreciative I have been for the great boards I have worked for year after year after year. Beyond the stimulation that results from working for stimulating people, however, these boards—to a one—have all done something else through their governing style. It is that something else that I have absolutely cherished.

Within adopted board policies (of course), each of these boards has allowed a freedom to exist within NEHA that has enabled all of us working on its behalf to explore promising and sometimes even zany ideas, chase after possibilities, and imagine what could be—even if a potential solution involved taking NEHA to places and routines it was unfamiliar with. To be sure, this degree of freedom has been clearly coupled with heightened expectations of accountability. Nevertheless, as long as we produce solutions, help our members (and profession), and build the association's prosperity, that freedom to maneuver and change direction on the head of a dime has been steady and trusting.

I believe down to my core that this freedom (and more importantly, the multitude of programs, projects, and initiatives that it has spawned) stands as the single greatest reason for why—over my term as NEHA's executive director—NEHA has grown from a tiny, four-person operation on a \$280,000 shoestring budget to an organization that today employs over 30 people with a budget that is now closing in on the \$4 million mark. And it is this growth that has made possible the explosion of programs that NEHA is today able to provide to virtually anyone working in the environmental health field. Our growth has also

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conflict resolution—often a critical need to help diverse partners find common goals.

In designing CARE, we worked to model collaboration across traditional U.S. EPA stovepipes by rotating leadership across the four major program offices. This allows us to tap expertise from all relevant U.S. EPA programs to create ownership and accountability across program lines. This fall, the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response will take over leadership of CARE and has already been providing key financial support to CARE communities. In support of communities' efforts to tackle land use issues, the Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization provided

\$1.1 million in contract assistance to CARE projects for targeted brownfields assessment.

Externally, we've also focused on improving coordination at the federal level. To enhance U.S. EPA and CDC's long history of working together, we began a new collaboration last year with CDC and ATSDR to better support communities working to improve environmental health. Together we produced the "EPA-CDC-ATSDR Federal Grants Guide for Community Environmental and Public Health Activities," which can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/care/>, along with other CARE publications such as the "CARE Resource Guide" (a Web-based index of the

U.S. EPA Web site for communities); the "Community Guide to Voluntary Programs," which lists all U.S. EPA voluntary programs designed to help communities; and the "CARE Roadmap: 10-Step Plan to Improve Community Environment and Health."

As CARE becomes better known throughout the environmental health discipline, we hope to broaden our access to experts in a number of new fields to benefit individual CARE partnerships and the national program. In future columns, we'll address programs from across U.S. EPA, in addition to CARE, of interest to public health professionals. 🐼

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enabled us to become much more of an advocate for this profession and all that it represents.

Thank you, NEHA board, for allowing us the freedom to succeed.

### Thought #2: Your Inspiration

The second factor that explains why I have been so high on NEHA is even easier to explain. It has been simply the inspiration of working for and representing you.

Hardly a day goes by that I do not have some interaction with a NEHA member. Even in those cases where a member and I aren't exactly seeing things from the same point of view, I continue to be impressed with the intelligence, commitment, kind hearts, and practicality that seems to be in the DNA of every person who works in this profession. I've said it before and I will say it again, it is

hard to imagine being in service to any group of people whom I personally admire more.

Whether I'm listening to one of you explain how you worked around a financial, political, or even a technical problem, or whether I'm watching one of you in action as a volunteer on some NEHA project, I sometimes marvel at how much you give—driven not by profit, but by the rightness and goodness of what you are doing.

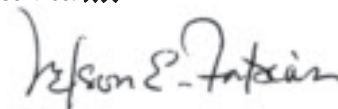
Quite frankly, that says it all. I've witnessed and watched some of you work in difficult situations unheralded and unseen by others. Many of you go the extra mile knowing that no one will ever know what you put into the job or what results your fine work will accomplish. In view of what you give to your work, the absence of any significant outside recognition for what you do has to be disappointing. Yet you have taught me that your rewards come more from the knowledge and

peace that you enjoy by virtue of doing work that is good and meaningful.

Martin Luther King, Jr., once said that "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

With tight budgets, tight timelines, and tight windows of opportunity to get your work done, you are often in these moments of challenge and even controversy. In fact, I think many of you live there! Yet you do your work with an unflinching confidence that your work makes a difference and that ultimately, the world becomes a better and safer place as a result.

Thanks for the inspiration! It has been a great 25 years; I look forward to many more ... at your service. 🐼



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