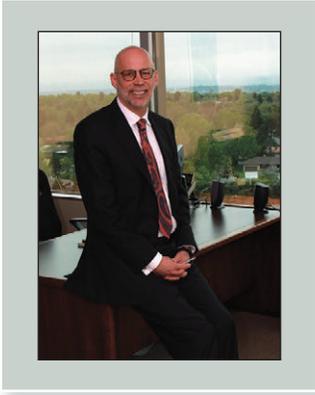


► **DirectTalk** MUSINGS FROM THE 10TH FLOOR



David Dyjack, DrPH, CIH

## Tied to the Mast

**A**thenian nature is social, communicative, and restless, while not necessarily troubled by punctuality. So, I was more than pleased when the Kalypso Divers' van arrived promptly at 8 a.m. to whisk me and a handful of Russians and Danes out for a day of scuba diving in the Libyan Sea. The route we travelled originated in the timeless old city of Rethymno as we embarked on a tortured, 60-minute drive over narrow and winding roads to the south of Crete.

The initial adrenaline rush of the scuba diving experience was punctuated by the presence of yellow-headed moray eels some 80–100 feet beneath the surface. Stones comprised the foundation of the sea bottom, providing safe haven for vulnerable marine life and a stabilizing presence against erosion. After achieving neutral buoyancy, I reflected on Greek mythology, particularly on the goddess Hygeia—the personification of health and cleanliness. The Greeks were among the first to recognize the value of the healing and disease prevention arts, as much of the modern public health profession is grounded by the efforts of environmental health professionals. We benefit by learning from what history can teach us as we embark on our journey into the future.

What did we learn in 2016? We started each NEHA staff meeting with a member who had 30 minutes to tell us about their experience with NEHA, no holds barred. I deliberately invited members who had expressed displeasure with us. We received an earful of criticism from these members about our Web site being light on content. The second most common

observation was that we can do a better job at explaining the value of membership. Perhaps most surprising, our partners in Washington, DC, expressed a pent up demand for NEHA to exert leadership on the national stage.

As we transition from 2016 into 2017, let's consider influencing the new presidential administration, prioritizing and energizing our policy activities, and renewing our commitment to one another. NEHA will do its part by focusing on three key initiatives.

### **Initiative 1: Policy Development**

Yes, our Washington, DC, office has achieved considerable traction since we opened operations 1 year ago, and there is so much more to accomplish. This upcoming year we will support Congresswoman Brenda Lawrence's (D-Michigan) Environmental Health Workforce Act of 2016 (H.R. 5543), conduct our first "Hill Day" sometime this spring, and deliver leadership on issues important to you. We hosted a very successful Capitol Hill briefing last July, and will likely convene another this spring. You asked for a voice in the nation's capital, and now you have one.

*None of us  
is as smart  
as all of us.*

We will also review, update, and sunset as appropriate the plethora of position and policy statements that can be currently found on our Web site. The board will work with staff to identify emerging issues that will benefit from a new set of eyes and attendant policies. These policies and position statements will be crafted to provide you guidance in your own work in the event you need it.

### **Initiative 2: Systems of Engagement**

None of us is as smart as all of us. NEHA recommits itself to stitching together a national system of engagement and to listen and learn from you. We have requested our regional vice-presidents to become intimately familiar with the needs of local affiliates and their members, and to ask, "How can NEHA assist?" We will complement that effort with our Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-funded environmental health workforce needs assessment. This work will begin in earnest through the conduct of focus groups at our 2017 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition. We understand our core mission is capacity building and desire to provide you with what you need to know and when you need to know it, in a format conducive for you.

### **Initiative 3: Professional Environment**

Social science research has established that a cohesive workforce is a more productive workforce. At the same time, there is a transformative power of proximity. As much as I

*continued on page 48*

**DirectTalk**

*continued from page 50*

would love to have each of you feel personally tethered to NEHA, realistically, our country is far too large for all of us to genuinely feel that way. This realization is why strong, well-managed state affiliates are vital to the profession. Too many states either don't have an affiliate or the current one is in disarray. We have to figure this situation out, and I will personally invest in the creation, construction, and strengthening processes in support of local affiliates. If you have ideas on how best to accomplish this initiative, I want to hear from you.

I feel that self-reinforcing professional cohesion is a legacy issue for my time as executive director. States, localities, and chapters should be mutually supportive and strategically cooperative. To jump-start the process, we plan to provide targeted training for affiliate presidents at our AEC. Next year I intend to visit with some of the largest private foundations in the U.S. in an attempt to secure resources to blow life into this critical initiative.

We are indeed only as strong as our weakest link. I ponder what has become of the once proud Greek intellectual and cultural revolution as a clarion call to action for our profession. Now is not the time for status quo.

The return trip to my hotel from the scuba diving site developed into a classic Greek drama. First, no one could locate the driver for the return ride home. In the process of waiting for the driver to materialize, we took on two additional passengers. They were to be dropped



*Remnants of the Hygeia Temple. Photo courtesy of David Dyjack.*

off first, some 30 kilometers from where most of us were staying. The drive home was a vintage knuckle biter for sure, courtesy of hairpin turns executed at high speeds on narrow Greek roads; however, we enjoyed the camaraderie and embraced the pure joy of the experience.

2017 will likely be a knuckle biter for us as well. There will be sharp bends in the road associated with the incoming presidential administration, and the implications of the new Congress remain uncertain. We have new systems, policies, and efforts for profes-

sional cohesion to forge. Any great endeavor inevitably incurs some measure of fear and anxiety along the route. I say the ride is worth it. Let's enjoy our camaraderie and drink deeply from the spirit of the Christmas season along the way.

Happy holidays and best wishes for the new year. 🐻

*Dave*

ddyjack@neha.org  
Twitter: @DTDyjack

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

# ADVANCE YOUR CAREER WITH A CREDENTIAL

Learn more at [neha.org/professional-development/credentials](http://neha.org/professional-development/credentials)



Environmental Health Specialist: REHS/RS



Food Safety: CP-FS and CCFS



Healthy Homes: HHS



Onsite Wastewater: CIOWTS



