



President's Message

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Dear Friends and Fellow Planetarians:

I am happy to report that, as President Tom Mason noted in his December column, even though IPS was technically leaderless for approximately 12 hours as 2011 arrived around our spherical Earth, the passing of the leadership baton went smoothly. Actually, I was sleeping when I became president, since I was visiting my brother in Denver, Colorado and didn't stay up to ring in the New Year!

You will not be reading this until March, yet I would still like to extend New Year's greetings to everyone. I would also be remiss if I did not offer a special thank you to all of the officers, regional affiliate representatives, committee chairs and many others who have served our organization over the past 40 years.

The officers cycle

As Susan Reynolds Button leaves the office of past president, I am sure that she will still be vigorously involved in the activities of IPS, as she has been for so many years. She continues to chair the Portable Planetarium Committee and will certainly be a valuable resource for the current officers.

Tom Mason now becomes our past president. We are all thankful for his guidance over the past two years and especially for his leadership, which culminated in our highly successful conference last year in Alexandria, Egypt.

Shawn Laatsch and Lee Ann Hennig, as treasurer/membership chair and executive secretary, respectively, have both been integral parts of the officer corps for so many years. They are the constants as we presidents flow in and out, and thereby they provide a strong continuity between successive administrations.

Finally, we welcome our new President Elect Thomas Kraupe, although in a way I hesitate to use word "new" as he was also president elect from 1995-1996 prior to serving as president of IPS for the two subsequent years. He brings a tremendous amount of experience to his office. I look forward to working with this wonderful team of officers over the next two years.

Stories are as old as humanity and they are

the lifeblood of our profession. Each of us has our own personal stories. One of my favorite things to do at a conference is to ask fellow planetarians how they first became interested in astronomy or how they got into the profession. The answers are fascinating!

It's my brother's fault...

Therefore, I want to relate how I got interested in the sky. It's all my brother's fault! I was 13 and my brother Wayne had a school assignment to go outside and find some constellations. I checked out a book on constellations from the school library and we used it on our first foray outside.

It was a cold Minnesota night. As recommended, we first searched for the Big Dipper. There it was! Clear as day (or should I say night?). The bowl and the handle were easily visible. OK, now we follow the pointer stars to the North Star. There it is—that bright star over there! That was easy. Pleased with our obvious success, we went inside to warm up.

The next few nights were cloudy, but when it was clear again, I went out to review the constellations that we had found and perhaps find some new ones. I found the Big Dipper and the North Star again, but then happened to turn around and look in the opposite direction—and there was the real Big Dipper standing upright on its handle in the northeastern sky! So what had we found the previous night?

I'm almost ashamed to admit that it was the constellation of Orion! How, you might wonder, could anyone confuse Orion and the Big Dipper? If we are ever together in a planetarium, I can show you.

That was the genesis of my passion for astronomy and 45 years later I still keep looking up, fascinated by the awesome universe that we live in.

An admitted bibliophile

One of my favorite activities is traveling, and I especially enjoy looking for books written by local authors from the places I have visited. As I read I like to look for clever ways that authors use words, passages that are particularly well written or perhaps one that paints an astronomical image.

Last year's IPS conference in Egypt inspired me to start reading books written by Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz. I found a celestial gem in his book *Khan al-Khalili*. The name of that area of Cairo may be familiar to some of our members, who were on the post-conference tour that visited the famous market from which the novel gets its name.

Mahfouz writes, "It was the middle of the month of Shaaban and the moon was gleaming brightly in the clear August sky. All around it stars were twinkling coyly as though to express their regret that the moon had again appeared in its youthful guise, something they had always known would not last."

Can't you just picture the scene in your mind's eye? We can paint similar word pictures in our presentations, using rich word imagery that helps our audiences to create their own vivid mental pictures.

Visiting Brazil

In November, President Tom, Dr. Pedro Russo, the global coordinator for IYA 2009, and I joined over 120 Brazilian planetarians at the annual conference of the Association of Brazilian Planetariums (ABP).

Celso Cunha, president of the Rio De Janeiro Planetarium Foundation, Alexandre Cherman, and the rest of the staff of the planetarium were wonderful hosts. I must give a special thanks to the young ladies who helped guide us around the conference site and provided English translation, since neither Tom nor I speak Portuguese. All of them were employees of the planetarium, working as greeters and guides at the reception center.

This 15th ABP conference coincided with the 40th anniversary of the Rio de Janeiro Planetarium Foundation and oh, what a celebration it was! There was a special presentation detailing the history of the institution, a musical concert under one of the domes, planetarium programs, papers, posters, talks, a behind-the-scenes look at the production of a new show, food and, like at all planetarium conferences that I have attended, wonderful opportunities for conversation with other planetarians.

Personally, I especially enjoyed speaking with some of them in front of their posters. Even though I couldn't read the text, the pictures were a natural lead-in to conversations about their facilities and the programs that they presented.

The Planetarium Foundation aggressively sought government funding to support the conference. These funds paid for the travel and hotel expenses for the three invited speakers and provided partial scholarships to pay the registrations of 25 attendees.

In addition, there were 15 full scholarships granted to young planetarians from all over Brazil that paid for airfare, hotels expenses and

registration. After attending the conference, each of the people who received full scholarships had to write a report detailing what they had learned. What a wonderful way to encourage the future growth of the planetarium profession in their Brazil!

It's also a good way to encourage future professional engagement, one component of which is attending conferences and share and interact with other planetarians.

Important Council meetings

Every year, the IPS officers, regional affiliate representatives, and committee chairs participate in a Council meeting, either personally or by submitting their reports digitally. Minutes of the annual meeting are published in the *Planetarian*. Committee reports are posted on the IPS website committee page.

During conference years, we meet for 2 days prior to the start of the conference. During non-conference years, we meet at a site chosen by the incoming president.

There are several questions that may be considered in choosing the site for the non-conference year Council meeting. Are there areas of the world where we can help establish a new affiliate? Are there areas where we can help regional affiliates rejuvenate themselves? Are there parts of the planetarium community with which our Council members lack familiarity? Are there places of astronomical interest that may aid Council members in their own professional development?

The 2011 Council meeting will be in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, on July 1-2. One important item of business is the selection of the site for our 2014 IPS conference.

Three sites are bidding for the conference, listed alphabetically: the Beijing Planetarium, the Rio de Janeiro Planetarium and the Vancouver Planetarium. Your input is important for the Council to make its decision. Please review the articles that the three sites wrote for the December 2010 *Planetarian* and inform your regional affiliate representative of your choice; their contact information is on page 2 of each issue of the *Planetarian*. You may also want to inform them of any other issues that you would like discussed at the Council meeting.

There are many bright spots in our profession. We really do live in an exciting time with so many astronomical discoveries and tools for communicating them to our audiences. These tools were almost unimaginable a generation ago.

I remember a mere 17 years ago when Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 hit Jupiter. How amazing it was that I could go online, get images that had been taken at sites around the world

that day and show in my theater. But to do so, I had to know a telnet address, usually a series of numbers, which I could use to go to a site and using FTP, bring images back to my computer. I couldn't preview the images in advance. I just had to wait and see what I got. But it was amazing!

Now, in 2011, we have portable digital projectors, some of which cost less than the car which transports them; projectors which fill their domes with moving video and take viewers out to the edge of the known universe. Truly awesome!

Some new permanent facilities are being built and others are either installing new digital projectors or upgrading existing ones. But many of us also face some challenges, especially during the current fiscal difficulties that many nations face. Some planetariums that have closed and others are in danger of closing. There have been some victories, where fa-

You can't wait for inspiration; you have to go after it with a club.

-Jack London

cilities that were to be put on the chopping block were saved, but there have been too many sad endings.

Important: helping planetariums

The IPS officers and the Council have discussed and will continue to discuss these issues in the future. What can we planetarians do in the face of these cutbacks? I am convinced that each of us must be proactive. If we wait until our facility is in danger of closing it may be too late. We have to build up our support prior to the crisis. Many of the issues are local, therefore it is vitally important that we have local support. Certainly, IPS will do what we can to support our members and we need to look for more ways to offer support.

Recently, while reading an article about decreases in funding for the arts in the United Kingdom, I considered if we might not have the same problem in our field for the same reason. The author, Elaine de Botton, wondered if some in academia were at least partially to blame for bringing the problem of decreasing funding on themselves, because they "have failed to explain why what they do should matter so much."

Can we ask the same question of ourselves? Why does what we do matter so much? We may know the answer, but a more important question to ask is do our audiences, our administrators, and our government leaders know the answer. If they do not know the answer, is it perhaps because we have not told them or

shown them why what we do matters?

We need to show that we are relevant at all times, but especially in times of financial distress when administrators must make cuts somewhere. Let us not make that task too easy for them, simply because we have not shown them why what we do matters.

IPS has a Professional Services Committee whose function is "to help planetarium professionals and those interested in developing planetariums gain the knowledge and backgrounds necessary to manage a professional operation." Chair Mike Murray has written an article titled "Planetarium Operations and Management." A link to it is posted at the top of the IPS Home page, the address to which is on page 1 of every issue of this journal. I encourage all of you to read it if you have not done so already; if you have, then a little review never hurts.

I want to highlight one sentence that Mike wrote: "If there's one thing that museums have learned from the business world, it's that you need to be more responsive to a world of rapid technological and sociological change." How true. In the world of Facebook, interactive gaming, large mega-media events, and video mapping of buildings, how do we remain relevant? Let us all look for the answers, individually and as a group.

There is much discussion, at least in the United States, about standards and "teaching to the test." In the midst of planetarium closings, we may struggle to justify our existence by saying that we can teach astronomy and other subjects more effectively in an immersive environment.

I am not suggesting that these points are not important, but perhaps we are missing the most important thing that we can do in our theaters, and that is to inspire. We can inspire students to develop a life-long interest in science and the world around them whether they pursue scientific careers or not.

The American educator and motivational speaker William Arthur Ward wrote, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." How can we inspire if we aren't inspired ourselves?

Attending conferences with colleagues can be inspiring. Going out and looking at the night sky, remembering why you fell in love with it in the first place, can be inspiring. Being around children and seeing their boundless energy can be inspiring. Watching a great video or reading a great book can be inspiring. It doesn't matter how you get inspired, just go out, and do it! Jack London said it best, "You can't wait for inspiration; you have to go after it with a club." ☆