Southwest Region Chapter Reports – July 2015
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VP’s General Overview – The state chapters in the Southwest Region are generally healthy with regard to budget and membership. The Colorado chapter experienced a tumultuous year, with turnover of many leadership positions and real division among what veteran members vs. new members want for development opportunities. Three states continue to host annual or semiannual conferences, the most recent, the Arizona School Public Relations Association’s 1 ½ day event in Prescott, June 17-18. The event and all meals are free to ASPRA members thanks to sponsorships and profitable events throughout the year.

VP’s Environmental Scan – The biggest news from the Southwest, comes not from one of our chapters, but from Nevada. Beginning this fall, any parent in Nevada can pull a child from the state’s public schools and take tax dollars with them, giving families the option to use public money to pay for private or parochial school or even for home schooling. The new law passed the state’s Republican-controlled legislature with help from the education foundation created by former Florida governor Jeb Bush. And they are working to spread it nationwide: Lawmakers in Georgia, Iowa and Rhode Island considered similar legislation this year.

The Arizona Legislature and Governor’s office are now under control of the Koch brothers who spent significant money to ensure election of candidates who reflected their Libertarian view. Governor Doug Ducey has floated the idea of a referendum for the ballot in November 2016 to use state land trusts sales as a way of providing funding without raising taxes.

Many members throughout the region report that financial elections are as difficult to pass as ever, with small opposition groups popping up frequently and gaining ground through social media.

Disturbingly, the Sacramento Bee, the state capital newspaper, produced a news story that examined and criticized school districts’ participation in employee recognition programs, including CalSPRA’s annual awards program. It’s not enough that morale is low is many districts, apparently it’s not OK to try to do something about it.

VP’s Outreach and Travel – I’ve had considerable communication via phone and email with members throughout the region. But in-person activity has been limited to Arizona. Colorado is at crossroads and I’m hoping to attend the chapter’s November conference if it does not conflict with the NSPRA Executive Board meeting or Chandler Unified’s bond election.
Arizona School Public Relations Association (ASPRA)

Chapter well-being – The Arizona School Public Relations Associations (ASPRA) membership is growing with 99 paid members and nine lifetime members. We have continued having regular general and executive board meetings (monthly) and are preparing for our annual 1.5 day summer conference in Prescott, AZ. Because our chapter is fiscally sound our members’ registration fees and meals to the ASPRA conference are waived. In addition to the conference, ASPRA is happy to provide three $1,000 scholarships to the 2015 NSPRA Seminar for new members.

Chapter projects/collaboration efforts – Our chapter recently completed our annual Superintendents’/ASPRAtions Awards Luncheon, organized by our president-elect. This event welcomes hundreds of public education supporters from across the state to honor the work of public relation advocates as well as our superintendents. This is an opportunity for ASPRA to thank them and others for supporting public relation efforts in our local schools. This is an amazing way to expose our organization to superintendents and community members across the state.

Professional development programs/activities – ASPRA is gearing up for our annual summer conference, which will take place next week in Prescott, Arizona. This two-day professional development conference will consist of our own experts presenting on topics such as Marketing to Millennials; Emergency Response Plans; Managing Through Strengths; Writing a Communications Plan; Effectively Communicating Through Social Media; Small Bite Video; Student Recruitment, and more. Our organization has such a diverse range of members; those brand new to public relations to those who have been in school public relations for decades. This event is such a remarkable time for everyone to learn from each other. In addition, we have several lifetime members who are always willing to play an important role in the continued success of our organization.

Major chapter issues or concerns – There are no major issues or concerns to report at this time. Membership continues to increase slightly, despite school budgets shrinking. New members, especially those out of the journalism and/or traditional news reporting field, continually are in awe of our organization and express their gratitude of the work that’s being done.

Issues or areas that could use NSPRA regional or national support – ASPRA continues to be thankful to have two NSPRA Executive Board members among us. Both Jim Cummings, NSPRA President, and Terry Locke, Southwest Region Vice President, keep our chapter informed and updated with current regional and national educational issues.

State or local issues that NSPRA should keep an eye on – The current issue facing the Arizona chapter is the polarizing dynamic surrounding the political platform of public schools. A shortage of teachers, a lack of funding, and more importantly, what the media portrays as a lack of confidence in public education. There are so many great stories to tell – from exceptional students to teachers and the political environment and characters that blur the lens of public is disheartening. However, the ASPRA champions continue to plow through the muddy waters and share the stories.
Additional items of note – ASPRA continues to promote the benefits of becoming a NSPRA member and promoted the discount offered. In addition, ASPRA promoted the National conference to its members.

California School Public Relations Association (CalSPRA)

Chapter well-being – Financials: As of May 2015, year-to-date balances totaled $54,311
- Despite 2014-15 drop in membership, financial position is comparable to nearly a year ago: June 2014 ($57,754) due to significant gains in other sources of revenue
- 70% increase in annual conference registration revenue ($30,655 in 2015; $18,021 in 2014)
- 39% increase in sponsorship dollars year over year ($18,000 in 2015; $12,874 in 2014)
- 2015 Annual Conference, our second since shifting from our traditional, two-conference model, was a financial wash, posting an estimated net profit of $587

Chapter projects/collaboration efforts – Leadership Retreat and Strategic Planning:
- Our 2015 Board and Committee Leader Retreat will be held June 30-July 2 at The Garland in North Hollywood. This will be our first opportunity to update and create a new three-year strategic plan.
- Based on feedback from chapter leaders, areas of focus will include: re-evaluating our membership outreach and engagement efforts, furthering our demonstration of membership value through improved communications, and enhanced customer service.
- More clearly defined roles and responsibilities for our growing committee chair positions
- Better shared understanding and continuity in policies and procedures
- Expanding corporate partnership agreements that provide ongoing member resources and creative professional development opportunities throughout the year

Partnerships –
- Our ongoing partnership with the Californians Dedicated to Education Foundation’s (CDEF) Common Core communication campaign continues to provide CalSPRA a seat at the table with a statewide group of stakeholders sharing responsibility for building understanding and support for the implementation of Common Core.
- Stakeholders include California Teachers Association, California Department of Education, California State PTA, California School Boards Association, and more.
- Partnership has collaborated on producing statewide messaging guidance for partners and school districts throughout implementation and in anticipation of 2015 test score reports
- CalSPRA has provided ongoing resources and messaging through its e-mail listserv and presentation at 2015 annual conference.

Professional development programs/activities –
2016 Annual Conference:
- Board is currently considering three finalists for 2016 Annual Seminar venue
- Location will be in Los Angeles County and strategically located to maximize member recruitment and engagement in region where we have potential for growth
- Contract negotiations underway and on track to be finalized by June 30
• Date targeted for later in the year - mid February - based on member feedback
• Dates and location will be announced to members before and during NSPRA
• President-elect Music Watson developing communication plan examining growth of program over previous two years and member feedback, which has included:
  • More diversity in programming and backgrounds of speakers
  • More opportunities to engage new professionals/veterans
  • More programming connected to timely issues and policy trends

2015 Regional Events:
• Our annual regional events, intended to engage members and increase presence throughout state outside of annual conference setting, will be scheduled for mid-fall 2015
• Dates to more directly coincide with our annual membership drive and also build momentum for our 2016 annual conference
• Regional chairs will bring proposals to Board Retreat for event focus and PD opportunities based on analysis of unique needs/issues in their respective regions and strategic interests (strengthening network, recruiting new members, etc.)

Major chapter issues or concerns – In the Spring, the state capital’s newspaper, The Sacramento Bee, produced a news story that examined and criticized school districts’ participation in employee recognition programs, including CalSPRA’s annual awards program. We are monitoring for impact on participation in our 2015 awards program and will discuss any necessary outreach or changes.

Issues or areas that could use NSPRA regional or national support –
• Common Core test score reports communication
• Diversity engagement

State or local issues that NSPRA should keep an eye on – Communicating public health policy: Immunization bill in CA legislature

Additional items of note – On May 1 we welcomed new our new Board secretary Nathan Quevedo, Media and Communications Manager at Merced County Office of Education. Nathan is a longtime, active CalSPRA member and most recently served as our Central Valley Regional Chair. Nathan and President Dan Thigpen will be working together to recruit a new committee chair after the Board retreat, when leadership will discuss our existing regional boundaries and strategic interests.

Colorado School Public Relations Association (CoSPRA)

Chapter well-being – I believe the best way to describe our membership at this point is dormant. We are able to maintain our current membership and sporadically add new members. Fiscally, we continue to be strong but we need to place a bigger emphasis on sponsorship support in the coming year. Our two annual conferences (fall and spring) continue to be our strong points but we need to find ways to add member value throughout the year.
Chapter projects/collaboration efforts – No ongoing projects. We are working on cleaning up our membership files so we have a better record of current members. This should help with recruitment efforts.

Professional development programs/activities – Both of our conferences were heavily focused this year on providing learning opportunities for our members and we tried to focus on topics relevant to our Colorado team (i.e., legalized marijuana regulation). We added breakout sessions at our spring awards luncheon that allowed a couple of our winners to share how their products were successful. Members continue to use our ListServ to reach out to each other for help/advice and information on challenges they are facing.

Major chapter issues or concerns – Chapter is really at a crossroads. While any organization faces a natural gap between its more veteran members and newer to the profession members, it definitely felt pronounced, especially among our leadership team, in terms of where they wanted to see COSPRA go and their expectations especially in terms of conference agendas. We need to find some place in the middle that this is satisfying and useful for both sides. We really need to establish our goals as a chapter, what we’re about, why we exist and our purpose for members. If we can establish clear mission/goals, I think it will aid our recruitment efforts. Lots of turnover on the board for the 2015-16 year (new president, new president-elect, new conference chair and one new regional VP). As I’ve recruited for these positions, I’ve really put a focus on bringing together a team focused on charting a new, ambitious course for our chapter.

Issues or areas that could use NSPRA regional or national support – I think in public education communication, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and I would really like to know what other state chapters are doing – where they are seeing success, new initiatives they are launching.

State or local issues that NSPRA should keep an eye on –
- New assessment testing – I think that’s a nationwide challenge so I won’t spend time elaborating on it.
- Funding – our school districts continue to feel the impacts of a state budget stabilization effort or negative factor instituted in 2009. Though there have been successful efforts in the past couple years, led by a strong coalition of superintendents, to pay down the negative factor, school funding is still not at the pre-negative factor level. These funding challenges will continue to impact education in our state.

Additional items of note – This past year felt frustrating in many respects but looking forward to getting new board in place and working on strengthening our organization.

Utah School Public Relations Association (USPRA)

Chapter well-being – The Utah School Public Relations Association is taking a break for summer with many of us attending the NSPRA seminar and a few of us presenting. We had a great year and hope to continue supporting, encouraging and commiserating with one another again in August.
Chapter projects/collaboration efforts – Our chapter plans to continue work on Best Practices for bonding. Many of our districts will be going out for a bond in the next year or two. We gathered to brainstorm some ideas and will be gathering again over the summer or in early fall to put it all on paper. We hope to use the information with our Boards of Education and Administration as they move forward with bonding.

Professional development programs/activities – None to mention at this time.

Major chapter issues or concerns –
- Board members working against public education, including some who have children in charter schools or home school.
- Facebook attacks on teachers, schools, principals. And yet schools are accused of tolerating bullies.
- Utah continues to be the lowest in per pupil spending. Additionally, many of the larger districts are the lowest funded in the state.
- Difficult bond elections with the vocal minority opposing any increase for public schools.

Issues or areas that could use NSPRA regional or national support – None at this time.

State or local issues that NSPRA should keep an eye on – None at this time.

Additional items of note – None at this time.