Southwest Region Chapter Reports – November 2015

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VP’s General Overview – Membership and association coffers are up throughout the region. States chapters are complementing NSPRA efforts to provide professional development opportunities through monthly, biannual and annual workshops and conferences. Arizona, which has held its annual conference in Prescott in June the last four years, will try something new in 2016, partnering with Arizona School Administrators in early June at a conference in Tucson. Brian Woodland, APR, will be a keynote speaker.

VP’s Environmental Scan – Get your popcorn and peanuts. The Barnum and Bailey Circus continues its run in the great Southwest. In this ring, you have the Arizona Board of Education voting to denounce Common Core, while the Maricopa County recommends voter reject all 28 school district overrides and bonds in the Phoenix area. In this ring, the Nevada legislature votes for full-scale vouchers for private schools. Parents to receive funding through an Education Savings Account. The bill was written by the Goldwater Institute of Arizona…And in this ring, Utah Senate Bill 235 – School takeover legislation. Allows for the state office to turn consecutive failing schools into charter schools or over to a private contractor.

VP’s Outreach and Travel – The COSPRA fall conference was rescheduled from November 6 to November 13 so I was unable to attend due to conflict (NSPRA Board meeting). Communications to out-of-state individuals via a variety of topics have been via phone calls and emails. Within Arizona, I have been active with a variety of organizations regarding how to present new AzMerits results that will be released November 30 that will include the appearance of a lower achievement due to a more rigorous test.

Arizona School Public Relations Association (ASPRA)

Submitted by: Danielle Airey, chapter president

Chapter well-being – The Arizona School Public Relations Associations (ASPRA) membership is growing with 120 members. We have held two regular meetings and continued executive board meetings and are preparing to support the Arizona School Boards Association (ASBA) for their annual conference. New this year, we have launched an ASPRA mentor program, based on feedback from members at our Summer Conference.

Chapter projects/collaboration efforts – This year, we are shifting our Summer Conference from a standalone two-day event, to collaborate with the Arizona School Administrators (ASA) group in Tucson, Ariz. We look forward to hosting keynote speaker Brian Woodland who will undoubtedly provide incredibly professional development to our members, as well as the 250+ ASA attendees.
Professional development programs/activities – Our first program day this school year focused on the impact of the 2015 legislative session and members were provided with a preview of what to expect in the 2016 session by ASBA’s Director of Governmental Affairs. In addition, ASBA’s Director of Legal and Policy Services and General Counsel provided the group with do’s and don’ts for bond and override elections. Most notably, the membership adopted a 2016 budget for the upcoming year and revised the chapter’s annual ASPRA*tion Awards. There were 41 members in attendance.

For the second program day, a detailed presentation was provided by Peoria Unified School District’s Director of Research and Assessment on Arizona’s Measurement of Educational Readiness to Inform Teaching (AzMERIT) and had a preview on changes for the Summer Conference. Discussion was held regarding current issues impacting education, such as bonds and overrides, the Arizona Republic Virtual Fair and details for the ASBA Conference. There were 25 members in attendance.

Issues or areas that could use NSPRA regional or national support – Our chapter is thriving with an influx of new members that add great perspective and insight to the group. We are fortunate to have Terry Locke as our regional representative who keeps us apprised national areas of focus.

State or local issues that NSPRA should keep an eye on – The recurring issue for Arizona is the struggle to attract and retain teachers to the profession. In addition, Arizona is juggling results from a new state assessment (AzMERIT) and a state superintendent of public instruction who wants to repeal and replace the current standards. The state’s new governor is facing increased scrutiny over the hemorrhaging of dollars from public education and has proposed a ballot initiative for 2016 that would allocate monies from the State Land Trust to schools. The State Legislature and Governor on October 30 agreed on a solution to the Arizona Supreme Court’s ruling that Arizona has underfunded schools. Because it involves a raid of the State Land Trust, it will require a voter of the public in May 2016.

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)
Submitted by: Daniel Thigpen, chapter president

Chapter well-being –
Financials: As of Oct. 2015, year-to-date balances totaled $43,915
- Decrease from June reflects expenses to cover summer strategic planning activity (two sessions) and NSPRA California chapter hospitality activities at the national conference
- Expected increase in revenue with annual membership drive launch and impending registration for 2016 annual seminar
- Sponsorships for 2016 annual seminar to be secured by end of calendar year
Chapter projects/collaboration efforts –
Leadership Retreat and Strategic Planning: Our 2015 Board and Committee Leader Retreat was held June 30-July 2 at The Garland in North Hollywood.

- CalSPRA leadership began reviewing and revising our three-year chapter strategic plan, examining in depth the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the organization in the three years since our first strategic plan
- Our overarching goals continue to be 1) increasing membership 2) demonstrating member value and 3) advancing the school PR profession
- Board members reconvened during NSPRA in July and for one final strategic planning session in September.
- The president and secretary are finalizing a draft policy document based off of those planning sessions and will present to the full CalSPRA Board for review and adoption at its November meeting.
- A final copy will attached to our next NSPRA Chapter Report.

Partnerships: President Daniel Thigpen recently led a workshop for the California Association of School Business Officials, Shasta-Cascade Chapter Annual Conference titled “Making it Make Sense: Communicating the Business of our Schools.”

Professional development programs/activities –
2016 Annual Conference: Board has selected The Garland in Hollywood as the location for our 2016 Annual Seminar and Awards Program

- The seminar will be held March 3-5, 2016
- Location will be in Los Angeles County and strategically located to maximize member recruitment and engagement in region where we have potential for growth
- Awards Committee Chair Kindra Amalong, of the Placer County Office of Education, has negotiated contract with Pitchburner to provide the platform and awards entry processing for our annual awards program, making it easier for encourage entries for our members and for our partners to judge them.
- Amalong has also proposed comprehensive and strategic improvements to provide clarity and expanded purpose for the annual program.

Major chapter issues or concerns – We continue to see growth in the school communication profession throughout the state, and in particular in the capital region. New positions of note include a communications director at the Monterey County Office of Education, Washington Unified School District in West Sacramento, and a Chief of Communication and Community Engagement in Rocklin, CA.

National industry publication Cabinet Report will be publishing an in-depth article on the growth of school communication in an upcoming October edition. The piece draws heavily from a reporter’s experience shadowing CalSPRA President Daniel Thigpen for a day in September.

Issues or areas that could use NSPRA regional or national support –

- Best practices for building partnerships that enhance resources
- Diversity engagement
**Additional items of note** –

- In September we welcomed Heather McGowan, APR, to CalSPRA leadership as our Central Valley Regional Chair. Heather is principal and owner of Sounding Board Marketing & Communications, a veteran, award-winning practitioner, and active CalSPRA member who has contributed to and participated frequently in our professional development activities. Heather will assemble a strong committee of leaders from key locations throughout the region in an effort to advance the profession, grow membership, and build capacity.

- Two CalSPRA leaders – Past President Stephen Nichols, and Central Valley Regional Chair Heather McGowan – recently earned their APRs!

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**Colorado School Public Relations Association (COSPRA)**

*Submitted by: Kevin Denke, chapter president*

**Chapter well-being** – Our recent 2015-16 membership drive has put us at about 130 members for the year. We are happy with this number and believe, thanks to improved bookkeeping work, we will be able to better track annual changes in our membership numbers. We made a special effort this year to reach out to our rural districts, perhaps those without dedicated communications professionals, to consider a COSPRA membership. This effort appears to have been mainly unsuccessful but I believe the key to attracting these types of memberships is a “show, don’t tell” type of mentality – create the value and programs that will be beneficial to them. We will continue to reach out to these districts.

In a fiscally solid position through membership fees and sponsorships – should allow us to provide excellent conferences for our members this year.

**Chapter projects/collaboration efforts** – We underwent an important process to clean up our membership files over the past year. While this was mainly behind-the-scenes paperwork, it allowed us to have a better understanding of our membership moving forward.

Two initiatives we would like to launch this year:

- A mentor program where we can connect veteran COSPRA members with newer communication professionals.
- An online resource bank where we can spotlight the best work of our school district communications teams.

**Professional development programs/activities** – Our fall conference will again emphasize learning opportunities for our members with a focus on topics relevant at a state and national level. Continuing to work on ways our members can connect and learn in between conferences is important. We want to bring value to our members throughout the year.

**Major chapter issues or concerns** – Probably not a unique problem to anyone, anywhere but time is a big obstacle. I think there are a lot of initiatives and things we would like to do but, as a volunteer board, with our own busy jobs, it’s difficult to look beyond just effectively managing the two yearly conferences we host.
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 – Continues to be assessment testing and standards as well as funding

Utah School Public Relations Association (USPRA)
Submitted by: Ben Horsley, chapter president

Chapter well-being – Our chapter met for the first time this fall in October and started a large communications plan strategy session to help all of our members improve or create a plan.

Chapter projects/collaboration efforts – Our chapter is continuing an ongoing effort to work on best practices for bonding including a segment in our last meeting to help with final pushes for respective bond initiatives occurring across the state. Many in the chapter are also preparing for bonds for next fall.

Professional development programs/activities – Our chapter will have 3 meetings dedicated to improvement of marketing strategies and communications plan with professional development provided by outside private practitioners. We hope their perspective will help us hone our focus and efforts for this important component of strategy and planning.

Major chapter issues or concerns – Board member unity is an ongoing issue.

State or local issues that NSPRA should keep an eye on – SB235 – School takeover legislation. Allows for the state office to turn consecutive failing schools into charter schools or over to a private contractor.