



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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The Actuary

Mark of a professional It's public service that fulfills actuarial obligations

by Linda Heacox

SOA Manager of Marketing Communications

If the sign of a true professional is to contribute to the public good, actuaries take a back seat to no one.

Volunteerism has been traditional for SOA members, as witnessed by the great number of members who volunteer for SOA committees and sections. It has been an undeniable strength of the organization for 50 years.

What is less well known is how many actuaries have also answered the call of the public at large and offered themselves and their skills in the service of community, church, and even other countries.



The Actuary talked recently with seven actuaries who have distinguished themselves by their efforts on behalf of others. We asked a series of questions about these efforts and what the benefits have been. Interviewed were Dwight K. Bartlett, III, consultant, Bartlett Consulting Services, Inc.; Robert L. Brown, president-elect, Society of Actuaries, and professor, Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science, University of Waterloo; James C. Hickman, emeritus professor and dean, School of Business, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Valerie Lopez, consulting actuary, Towers-Perrin; Rebecca B. Lyons, assistant vice president, David L. Babson & Co.; Robert J. Myers, retired chief actuary, U.S. Social Security Administration; and Teresa R. Winer, consultant, Chastain Financial Services.

Their widely divergent activities range from local politics and schools to advising national governments. We asked for feedback on both purely volunteer activities and serving others in a professional capacity. Here's what they told us.

In-depth service

Myers has devoted 65 years to the public aspects of U.S. retirement systems, working on Social Security, Medicare, and Railroad Retirement

issues. "I think my public service connection with these groups has been the most wonderful experience I've had," he said.

Myers was there at the Social Security system's very beginning, signing on in 1934 and retiring in 1970. He returned in a 1981-82 political appointment as deputy commissioner of Social Security, and he served in 1982-83 as managing director of the "Greenspan Commission" on Social Security reform. But untold by his public titles is his nearly nonstop effort to help others understand the system and its beneficiaries' needs through public presentations and private

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discussions with journalists, which the 87-year-old Myers continues even today. In addition, he holds a record in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the most number of times testifying before the U.S. Congress, always on an aspect of public retirement systems.

He says his step into the public sector was a stroke of fate. Graduating from the University of Iowa in 1934, Myers faced the Great Depression's severe unemployment, even for actuaries. But the government came calling on one of Myers' professors, seeking referrals for temporary government positions. "I didn't know much about social insurance, but a job was a job," Myers said. "I never got conceited about being chosen. It wasn't that I was the smartest actuary around. I was just the nearest to Washington. I was living in Baltimore."

Myers' subsequent career has in effect helped reduce poverty for the aged in the United States. He started by working on the Committee on Economic Security in President Franklin Roosevelt's administration. Myers was the junior actuary on this small committee of about 30 people that included some cabinet-level representatives. "I didn't have any knowledge of social insurance. I was there to grind out the numbers under a fully qualified actuary, Otto Richter, who was on loan from the AT&T pension plan," he said.

But Myers rose to become chief actuary, a position he held for 23 years until his retirement in 1970. His influence is undeniable. It continued with his work with Alan Greenspan, now chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve Board, on Greenspan's reform commission, established to defray a projected

depletion of the Social Security trust funds by mid-1983 and address a significant long-range actuarial imbalance in the funds. "We both influenced each other, I would say," observed Myers. In fact, he considers his

commission work the most important of his career. "We came up with a political compromise that everybody agreed with," he said. Myers acknowledges that the commission's work didn't provide a permanent fix for Social Security's challenges. "No one solution lasts forever. Things change. But it certainly kept the system

going for 20 years, maybe 30 or 40 years."

Myers expects to continue serving as an unofficial Social Security "professor" to those who need to understand the system. "I've always seen my value to the public, the media, and my employers as being someone who is just presenting the facts, and I try to separate that from my opinion on where the system is going," he said. "I always try to follow the motto that it's all right to disagree with people but not to be disagreeable in doing so."

Far and wide

Dwight Bartlett has taken a different approach to public service. Rather than devote his attention to a single area for his entire career, he has spread his contributions across a wide range of causes.

He is known among actuaries as chief actuary of the Social Security Administration, 1979-81, and as insurance commissioner for the state of Maryland. Less well known is that he has volunteered for nonprofit activities throughout his career, ranging from advising developing nations on business issues to helping preserve a type of fishing boat.

Bartlett's volunteer efforts began in the 1950s, when he helped with an

early employer's United Way drive. In recent years, he has brought his actuarial skills to the pension fund for clerics and lay employees of the Presbyterian Church. He has joined with actuaries Arthur Crago and Tony Spano in "helping the Egyptians develop a regulatory regimen for their nascent private insurance industry" through the International Executive Service Corps. This past December, he completed a two-week assignment in Russia involving insurance regulation through the Citizen's Democracy Corps. And he helps develop programs for the Save the Skipjack project in Maryland to preserve this particular type of sailing boat used by Chesapeake Bay watermen.

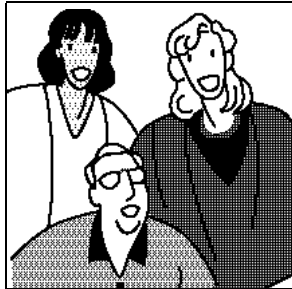
"I think that my advisory work in other countries can only be judged in the long term," says Bartlett. "That's when we'll see whether the people I was advising got usable information out of it." Meanwhile, he says of volunteering, "I think we all need balance in our lives. We all want to both do well and do good."

Acting locally

Like Myers, SOA President-Elect Robert L. Brown chose a career path that paid less than other actuarial job routes. Brown's role is to serve the profession by developing knowledge. And like Bartlett, Brown has contributed to a variety of public service efforts outside his paid employment, often in his local community.

Brown, a tenured professor, is a career academic. He doesn't see the years of preparation as a sacrifice because of the flexibility it allowed later. "I am effectively my own boss, but with a minimum guaranteed wage," he points out. "This includes being surrounded daily by hundreds of bright and eager students," a payoff no other job offers in the same way.

Brown contributes outside academia as well. From 1979-81, he served on the Waterloo Region Social Resources



Council, which advised local government on how to optimize its limited social welfare budget. In 1986-88, he was president of the local Kidney Foundation and a member of the Ontario Kidney Foundation Board of Directors. In addition, he was elected to the Waterloo City Council in 1988 and served until 1994.

"In my work on the Kidney Foundation Board and the city council, I found my actuarial training most valuable," Brown said. "I was able to read and truly understand budgets. I knew how to do short-term projections by hand, often in the middle of a heated debate. I was also able to convince individuals and groups that the resource allocation system being applied to them was fair and equitable. This was particularly helpful during my six years on the city council, when we reduced the tax rate but increased user fees."

Another way of "acting locally" is to serve one's profession. Actuaries give thousands of hours to the profession each year, proctoring actuarial exams, serving on actuarial organizations' committees and task forces, presenting at continuing education sessions, and helping in numerous other ways.

A hand up

Valerie Lopez decided to contribute to the growth of actuaries who weren't yet in the profession.

When Lopez graduated from the University of Texas at Austin, she was interested in forming an alumni organization for minority graduates of the actuarial science program. She switched gears when a faculty member pointed out how small the organization would be. "I decided instead to work on creating an open actuarial science alumni group," she said.

Lopez recruited 20 alumni to an organization that now has over 70 graduates. "One of the really useful things we do is have alumni conduct mock interviews on campus to help students prepare for professional interviews," she said. "The alumni also show the range of the actuarial profession by

sharing their professional experiences with the students."

Although studying for Fellowship exams as well as working in a busy consulting firm, Lopez finds time to volunteer for the Joint CAS/SOA Minority Recruiting Committee. She stresses that a little volunteer time can go a long way. "I don't think you should underestimate how important an hour a month could be if it is used for something like mentoring a student," she said.

Influencing the future

Many actuaries participate in their children's schools. Some, like John Hadley, do so extensively. (See "An Actuary Goes to School — to Help," *The Actuary*, October 1998).

Still others work with children not their own.

Career academic James C. Hickman, best known as emeritus professor and dean of the University of Wisconsin School of Business, tells of a chapter in his life as mentor to a boy from a very different culture.

"My wife and I got involved through our church helping a Vietnamese boy adjust to life in the United States," Hickman said.

From grades six through 12, Phong Mak was included in the Hickman's family activities. "He was assigned to us because teachers had recognized his math ability and knew of my actuarial skills," said Hickman.

With their adult children gone, the Hickmans were able to make Phong part of the family routine. They spent long periods two or three times weekly for several years, especially for reading and some science projects. Equally important, they introduced him to American life. "He had never been on a picnic before, never been to a movie. We took walks in the woods and looked at wildflowers; he was fascinated," Hickman recalls. Less time was needed in high school, but the young man still consulted Hickman on class papers.

"Working with Phong was the best experience that we ever had other than

raising our own children," Hickman said.

Another route actuaries take to help children is by serving as math mentors through the Advancing Student Achievement program sponsored by The Actuarial Foundation. The program provides math tutoring for elementary school students by actuaries. Two volunteers are Rebecca Lyons and Teresa Winer.

Lyons donates skills she gained as a former high school math teacher. She has written detailed lesson plans for actuaries mentoring fourth graders in a Springfield, Mass., public school. When some Mass Mutual co-workers obtained a grant to start an Advancing Student Achievement program, "we had a lot of actuaries willing to sign on, but they were a little nervous," Lyons recalls. "They knew they weren't teachers, nor were they all parents, so they didn't know what to do in the classroom."

"This year, I organized the lessons during summer and, in the fall, the mentors got big books of lesson plans for the year."

Teresa Winer is in her fourth year of directing the Math Enrichment Program at W.T. Jackson Elementary School, Atlanta. Winer launched the program in 1996-97. "Setting up this program was so overwhelming that I recruited my husband, mother-in-law, other family members, and friends when I ran short on volunteers," she recalls. "My husband helped design a stock market math club session, gave a tour of the brokerage offices where he works, and did quite a bit for the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade club."

Winer views the math program's importance as its emphasis on helping all types of students. "There are so many school programs targeting only the underprivileged, inner city, and/or minority schools. We have all types of kids in our program. The less fortunate as well as the average kid, and even gifted children, are eligible."

Winer found that skills gained as an

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actuary-turned-manager in individual life and health product development helped in her volunteer work: getting support from people who don't report to you, setting schedules, obtaining buy-in, and working with government systems. "Getting approval for products in state insurance departments was similar to dealing with the bureaucracy in the city school system."

Despite the work, Winer says she benefits "because I'm doing something I feel strongly about, and I can tell I've made a difference. When I walk into the school, I'm greeted by smiles and kind words from kids, teachers, and administrators. They show so much appreciation and warmth that I love to keep going back."

Voices of experience

Actuaries warn that the help they try to give doesn't always have an impact, at least in the near term. However, that doesn't make the work less valuable, they said.

"Regarding my recent work for Russia's insurance business, I'm not optimistic at all. They've got some real problems," Bartlett observed.

"My assignment was to advise them on their long-range planning, but I felt that was unrealistic. The economy has shrunk by 50% in the last decade, so the standard of living is quite low. There's no middle class, which is essential for a private insurance industry. Probably only 2 or 3% of all Russian households own insurance at all, and business is not much better. So I tried to encourage the company I was working with to take a shorter-range focus. How does a company survive to get to the long range? I suggested some products they could sell in the short range."

For Hickman, the relationship and successes with Phong Mak were important, yet there was a small, subsequent disappointment. The young man's family, supportive of the Hickmans' mentoring, moved away a few years ago and haven't been in contact. And Hickman has observed

volunteer situations where mentors aren't able to have an impact because of the recipients' family problems, economic difficulties, or other factors.

"Perhaps the improvement isn't as great as you'd like to see. Perhaps there's none at all. But at least you know you've tried to give some good experiences to others. This is especially rewarding where children are involved," he noted.

Lyons would agree. "I think the math mentors find it rewarding because they keep coming back. But there are difficulties, I won't lie: discipline problems, that kind of thing. But it's really important to the kids to have adults who come to be with them who don't have to be there and whom they can rely on.

"Many of these kids come from unstable homes. Some of them have no role models from the working world. One little boy told a mentor that he had never seen a man, other than a teacher, reading a book before. You really have no idea how you will affect them."

A payoff for everyone

Volunteers from all walks of life have sung the praises of what you get when you give: the satisfaction of helping others, accomplishing results, learning new things, having new experiences, meeting new people. The actuaries interviewed for this story found those benefits and more.

Math mentoring volunteers Winer and Lyons both cited an improved image for the profession. Helping kids through the schools "adds visibility and recognition," Winer said. "So many kids and parents have met actuaries through this program. They know actuaries can be warm, caring, and generous with their time." Said Lyons, "People who would never have heard of an actuary in their entire lives now have

direct experience of us because of this tutoring/mentoring program."

Renewal of spirit is an important benefit for many volunteers. Noted Winer, "Over time, many of us lose our enthusiasm and energy for our careers, work, community service, and other endeavors. One way to renew your enthusiasm and increase your appreciation for actuarial work is to get involved in the many issues facing our profession and contribute to its betterment." Winer's service on an SOA exam committee helped her by reminding her "how much I struggled, and then how joyful I became when I successfully passed an actuarial exam."

Her work in the schools had positive effects for Winer's two older daughters, as well, "including goodwill from my children's teachers and friends at the school." Her parenting benefited also. "The most important way a parent can lead is by example. Being a good role model is more important than telling your children what to do."

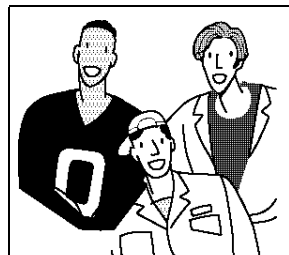
Of course, there are those more direct, personal satisfactions.

"Money isn't everything. You need to have passion," Winer said. Observed Bartlett, "We want to make money, but we also want to feel that our lives count for something. I think that both paid and volunteer public service provide that opportunity."

Volunteering "is one of the great rewards of life," said Hickman, whose father served on both the U.S. draft and ration boards during World War II. ("You wouldn't make friends in your hometown being on either one, much less both.")

"That's what we're here for, to serve. Sometimes you get paychecks for your service, but for some of the most interesting experiences, you don't."

"To lead a balanced life, you've got to participate in these other experiences. If you're going to live a complete life,



you can't let that part that you share with everyone atrophy."

"To grow, you have to push forward on both fronts: on the professional/technical skills and in the other services you can perform. You'll understand the world much more. You won't have squeezed the juice of total human experience if you don't."

And Hickman voiced the sentiments of many when he said, "Service is more than a question of debt. It's concomitant to citizenship. It's part of belonging to this amazing society."

Ideas for actuarial volunteers

What can actuaries do to get involved? And just what do actuaries bring that's special?

Said Lopez, "I think actuaries bring certain characteristics to whatever projects they work on." The CAS/SOA Minority Recruiting Committee, on which Lopez serves, "has a wide range of personalities," she says. "But you can tell we're all actuaries. We have a rational approach to problems and are creative in finding solutions that you might not find with just a random group of professionals."

Bartlett observed, "One way that actuarial skills can definitely be put to good use for the public is to volunteer with your local or county office on aging and advise seniors about their insurance and pension issues. Those offices are delighted to have that kind of talent

available."

Lopez observed that The Actuarial Foundation offers programs actuaries can get involved in. She also recommends approaching employers for support in these activities. "Many times, it's just a matter of asking, because a lot of what an actuary gets involved in for the public can benefit employers, too."

Noted Joe Abel, the Foundation's development director, "In the four short years that the Advancing Student Achievement program has been in existence, more than 100 actuaries in the United States and Canada have volunteered their time and energy to mentor grade school children in mathematics. The compassion and commitment evidenced by these actuaries is infectious. A groundswell of interest has arisen from actuaries looking to develop local mentoring programs."

Most of those interviewed reminded actuaries to be realistic when committing their time. Lyons noted, "It really depends on where you are in your life. I began giving time to the math mentoring program only when my children were a little older and needed a bit less attention. I think everyone has to think through what a commitment like this means. It is very important to follow through."

Actuaries who volunteer their time and talents to the public good are bringing more than actuarial skills, Hickman pointed out. "We can give of our techni-

cal skills, which are not widely held and therefore can be quite valuable. But we also share a broad range of experiences as human beings."

If you're ready to volunteer, Lyons wants to sign you up now for her math mentoring program. If not, or if you don't live near Springfield, Mass., her words may be encouraging nonetheless. "If you can do it, it's very personally rewarding to be an important part of other people's lives. Don't be too nervous. Actuaries really have something to give."

The volunteers quoted in this article can be contacted by e-mail. Reach them at: Dwight Bartlett, dkb3fsa@webtv.net; Rob Brown, rlbrown@uwaterloo.ca; James Hickman, bjansen@bus.wisc.edu; Valerie Lopez, lopezv@towers.com; Rebecca Lyons, rlyons@massmutual.com; and Teresa Winer, twiner@worldnet.att.net. Bob Myers can be contacted at his Directory address.

Mail alert

The First Ballots for the 2000 SOA elections will be mailed to all Fellows on March 7. To be valid, ballots must be received by the Society office no later than April 7. Fellows who do not receive a First Ballot by March 17 should call Lois Chinnock at the SOA office (847/706-3524).

Correction

Two names were misspelled in the December 1999 issue of *The Actuary*: Peter Morse in the caption on page 5 and Rod Rohda in the story on page 23. We apologize for this error.

Presentations invited for 2000 ARC

The organizers of the 35th Actuarial Research Conference (ARC) invite anyone interested in actuarial science to submit a presentation proposal for this year's ARC, Aug. 10-11, Laval University, Quebec City.

ARC provides an opportunity for academics and practitioners to meet and discuss actuarial problems and their solutions. Presentations on all topics of interest to actuaries are welcome.

To be assured a place on the program, those wishing to make presentations must submit an electronic

copy of their title and abstract to the ARC 2000 organizing committee (arc2000@act.ulaval.ca) by June 15. Presentations will be published in the conference proceedings, *Actuarial Research Clearing House 2001.1*.

More information is available from the ARC organizing committee (mail: Actuarial Science Dept., Laval University, Local 1620, Pavillon Vachon, Quebec, Que G1K 7P4; e-mail: arc2000@act.ulaval.ca; Web site: www.arc.ulaval.ca/arc2000/home_main_en.htm).

IN MEMORIAM

John N. Laing
FSA 1935, FCIA 1965

John O. Montgomery
FSA 1967

Rejean Ruel
FSA 1987, FCIA 1988