



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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# 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary project draws media attention

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When Al Easton developed a survey about the years 2010 and 2050 for members of the Futurism Section, he didn't realize he would turn the Section into a media star reaching 17 million readers of the financial, business, and general press.

Easton, 1997-99 Section council chair, wanted to conduct that the Section had done in 1989. The study asked Section members to forecast future events in members' practice areas. The Delphi technique, developed by the Rand Corporation in the 1950s, assembles a group of experts and polls them on the same questions in up to four rounds of surveying. Each time, the previous round's answers are revealed so the experts can consider their next responses in light of their peers' views. (See "Futurism Section: What's ahead for 2010, 2050?" in *The Actuary*, October 1999.)

This seemed like the perfect idea for actuaries interested in futurism, Easton thought — especially with the Society celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary on the eve of the year 2000 (to some, arguably the new millennium). What better way for futurists to celebrate both than by looking 50 years ahead?

### Start the presses

The study was underway when the SOA's communications staff learned of it and saw the natural news value for a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary media campaign. Working with Easton and the Section council, staff developed a media kit with four stories targeted to actuarial practice areas, a set of tables, and color graphics. The kit was mailed to appropriate news outlets and posted on the SOA Web site, and a news release was issued over Business Wire and through a print news service. The resulting attention from reporters seeking ideas for Year 2000 stories was immediate and widespread.

Probably the most impressive coverage was two very different stories that claimed page-one spots. First came an item in "Business Bulletin," a widely read weekly column of newsbriefs on *The Wall Street Journal's* front page. The column was picked up by the Associated Press and Dow Jones News Service, which reach nearly every U.S. newsroom. Then in November, a major insurance trade magazine, *Best's Review*, featured the Section's Delphi study and its results as the cover story for *Best's* life/health edition. The article, "Project Tomorrow," offered an in-depth look at the survey's results and their implications for the insurance industry. In addition to quoting the study's three primary spokespersons — Easton; Bill Bluhm, former SOA health vice president; and 1997-98 SOA President Anna Rappaport, a pension expert — the story included comments from 1996-97 SOA President David Holland and life insurance executive Alastair Longley-Cook.

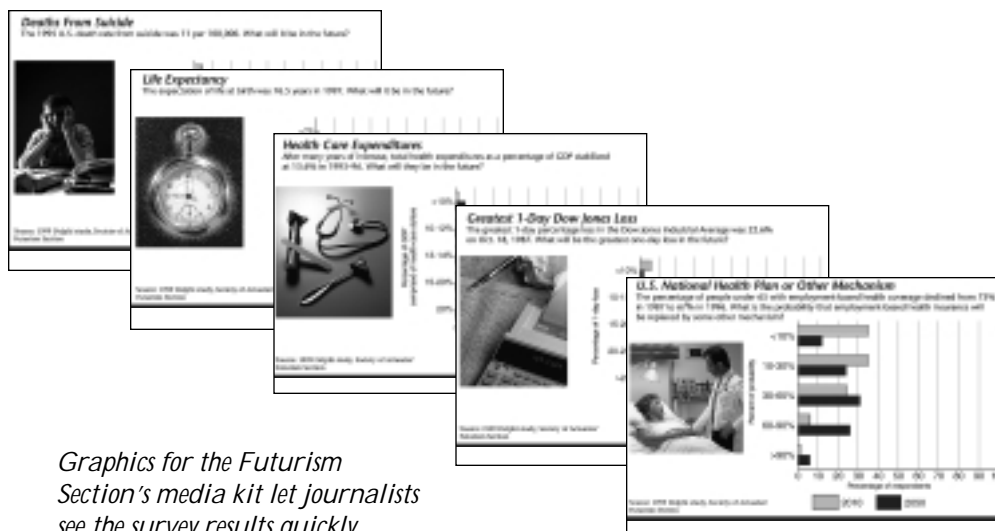
Substantial articles quoting actuarial experts also were published by *Life*

*Association News*, *Resource*, *Insurance Times*, *New Physician*, and *Pension Plan Guide*. Shorter stories ran in *Risk Management*, *Healthcare Business*, and *Investor's Business Daily*, and several dozen mid-size and small newspapers.

### What's in it for you?

At press time, the SOA staff had received clips from publications with a total circulation of 17 million. More important is the fact that some of the audiences reached — financial and business executives and managers — are exactly those whose attention and managers could benefit the actuarial profession.

"In our day-to-day work, actuaries deal with details. The media coverage showed actuaries taking a 'big picture' approach to issues we deal with all the time, like the future of health insurance and life expectancy, in a way that cut through the details," noted Easton. "Many of us have trouble answering the question, 'What does an actuary do?' I hope the kind of publicity that the Delphi study brought for the Society will help get fewer and fewer people asking that question."



Graphics for the Futurism Section's media kit let journalists see the survey results quickly.