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Ambassador Program Update - Year 2000 in Review

by Hans Wagner

The year 2000 may not have been the “real” start of a new millennium (perhaps the answer lies with whether you are using an ALB or ANB table), but it was a year of continued change for the SOA Ambassadors Program. Globalization is a continuing force for many of our employers, for economies throughout the world, and for our profession. Our Ambassadors are vital for our Section and the SOA as a whole to be in touch with developments around the world.

The new Education and Examination (E&E) system was a major focus of Ambassador Program energy this year. Recognizing the likely trauma of transition to the new system, and the potential for

confusion for international candidates especially, the Section Council and SOA Staff assembled a “canned” presentation to explain the new system.

The presentation also explores some reasons candidates should pursue SOA accreditation. The presentation has been updated several times as details of the new system have evolved, and been distributed to all Ambassadors, several of whom have used it as the basis for talks (including our new Ambassador to Singapore, Patricia Chang). If anyone would like a copy, please contact Martha Sikaras at the SOA office. She can be reached by phone at 847/706-3596; by fax at 847/273-8596 and by e-mail at msikaras@soa.org.

Martha, incidentally, is one of the new people involved with the Ambassador Program and international issues in general. On June 5, she assumed the role of Manager of International Affairs. The position will now be staffed full-time and headquartered in Schaumburg, IL.

Martha is a ten-year SOA veteran whose previous responsibilities included coordinating the Fellowship Admissions Course (FAC) as well as serving as the staff liaison to the over 500 volunteers within the SOA's examination system. She is fluent in Spanish and has a conversational grasp of French. Martha will assume the staff liaison responsibilities for the Ambassador program as well as the various committees under the International Issues area.

There were other initiatives regarding E&E undertaken by our Ambassadors this year.

- Nauman Cheema surveyed the needs of students in Pakistan,



and effectively lobbied the SOA for attention, ultimately leading to a program providing exam fee relief for candidates in lower-income countries.

- Hassan Kamil has been working on developing a Professional Development seminar to focus on the training needs of candidates in the ASEAN region.
- Several ambassadors responded to a request from Past President Norm Crowder for information on the needs of SOA members and students abroad.

Ambassadors have been active in areas besides E&E.

- Ronald Poon-Affat oversaw the first foreign-language edition of the International Section News, with a Portuguese edition making quite a splash in Brazil.
- Several articles have appeared in these pages.
- The roster of country Web pages continues to grow, with recent editions for Argentina and Germany. Other pages have been updated as well; visit www.soa.org/links/cwp.html to review the current status.

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Newly appointed Ambassadors this year included

- Patricia Chang (Singapore)
- Paul Hegg (Chile)
- Tauno Jaekel (Germany)
- Jorge Noronha (Argentina)

Hideyuki Yoshida (Japan) will be joining as co-ambassador with Stephen Conwill, once formally approved by the Section Council.

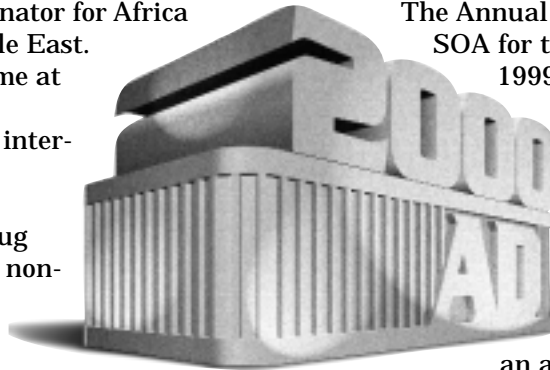
Jorge scored a double by also taking on the Regional Ambassador Coordinator role for the Americas, succeeding Jim Toole. I will continue to coordinate Asia-Pacific, with Hubert Mueller covering Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. With Jim taking on the responsibilities of International Section Council Chairperson, I will be the lead coordinator for the next year. For some time, we've been considering lightening Hubert's load

with a Coordinator for Africa and the Middle East.

Please write me at *Hwagner@axa.com.au* if interested in volunteering.

The Y2K bug was largely a non-event, but we do still have some bugs to work out of the Ambassador Program. As an all-volunteer effort, naturally the time and energy that participants can devote varies as other demands intervene. The Program is also mature enough now that we are looking more at transition issues, and how to ensure that a continual flow of fresh ideas and energy come through the community.

Coordinators will be contacting one-third of their region's ambassadors each year, and a normal "term" for ambassador of three years (renewable) will be established.



The Annual Meeting of the SOA for the anniversary in 1999 was a huge draw, and international attendance fell off in 2000. It might be a useful reminder that one of the "perks" of being an ambassador is fee waiver at the Annual Meeting. The International Section breakfast has been a great time to exchange news and get updates from Ambassadors.

If you are interested in serving as an Ambassador, or have any questions, please contact me or Martha.

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Coming in April 2001! International Start-Up Workshop

The International Section is joining forces with the Nontraditional Marketing Section to present the "International Start-Up Workshop" seminar, slated for April 2001.

Nontraditional marketing channels can be a powerful means to penetrate global insurance markets, either as the sole means of gaining market entry or as a complement to traditional distribution channels. Success stories include bancassurance in Europe and workplace marketing in Latin America. Nontraditional marketing provides an opportunity for companies to leverage their expertise globally with ideas that travel. The challenge is to work within the local culture and regulatory environment.

This seminar will take place over one and one-half days and will combine teaching sessions with interactive case study work. A team of industry experts will provide a "soup to nuts" overview of global insurance start-ups. Topics will include everything from negotiating the deal to understanding the regulatory approval process to facing the challenge of international business. The panel will discuss product development and pricing in global markets, as well as examples of how nontraditional marketing has worked internationally.

Next, participants will break into teams and be assigned a case study to analyze as a team. The panel will be available for advice and direction. That evening, participants will have the opportunity to attend a networking reception. The seminar will culminate on Day 2, where each team will present a case study to a "Board of Directors," and group discussion will follow.

This seminar will provide valuable information and experience for those who are currently active in international markets and/or nontraditional marketing, or who wish to learn more about these areas. Given the interactive nature of this seminar, both novices and experienced hands will be able to share new ideas and gain a fresh perspective on international start-ups.

Location, exact date and PD credit availability will soon be announced.