



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Chairperson's Corner

The Rewarding Experience of a Volunteer

by Shumei R. Kuo

As you know, the section's tasks such as developing meeting sessions, publishing newsletters and expanding the Ambassador Program are initiated, coordinated and carried out by volunteers. Over the years, the volunteers, with the assistance from the SOA staff, have worked together to provide abundant continuing education and professional development opportunities, timely market information, and global networks for our section members.

For this newsletter, I invited many section volunteers to share their experience. The volunteers, such as people like you and me, have different reasons and motivations to volunteer. But we all share one thing. That is, while we start out with helping others or wanting to make a difference, we end up being rewarded personally by the experience in unexpected ways. As Emma McWilliam, one of my guest writers, says, "Giving time for what you believe in is really the cornerstone of who you are and can give you experiences that you never realized would shape your life."

The following stories offer some lighter side moments as well as valuable business and personal experiences from my guest writers' volunteer work. These are people who have worked with the section council on one or more projects, as well as served on the section council for years. Getting to know and working with them and other volunteers is my biggest reward being on the International Section Council. There is so much to learn from my fellow volunteers—not only international actuarial work and markets, but also work and life experience. With their encouragement, advice and direct contributions, projects are moving along and task result delivered. Furthermore, it is a simply wonderful experience working with people who enjoy what they do.

Have you ever wondered why you feel comfortable calling for help from another volunteer whom you met only once before? Have you felt an immediate connection with a fellow actuary at the start of a volunteer project? There's something about volunteer work that gives us the opportunity to bond like no other work. The "comradship" developed will go a long way in both our professional and personal lives. International actuaries especially benefit

from volunteer work since relationships and networks are fundamental to our work, and our professional and personal lives are oftentimes inseparable.

In addition to the "soft" benefits, there are plenty of hard and solid management skills that can be developed through volunteer work. For example, what's a better way to learn how to "influence others without authority" but by being a volunteer? Even the highest ranked among us have daily opportunities to practice this, say, with regulators, major clients, and of course, bosses. My first guest writer, Angelica Michail, shares how being a volunteer in a non-profit organization can be an excellent way for us to get prepared for the corporations of tomorrow.

I hope that reading this article will make you want to increase your volunteer participation or perhaps to volunteer for the first time. We are very lucky that many of our employers support us in volunteering in both professional and community organizations. The following stories reveal that the supporting employers actually have everything to gain by giving their employees time and opportunities to do volunteer work. Mike Gabon concludes it well at the end of this article saying, "Volunteerism is suited to the profession. To volunteer...for what, is the question." And if you wonder what to do as a volunteer, Jim Toole inspires, "If you can dream it, do it!"

Enjoy the volunteer experience from a group of your fellow actuaries. Happy volunteering!

Angelica Michail

Angelica is a consulting actuary with National Actuarial Network in California. She has done volunteer work in many professional and community organizations, including the Philippine Actuarial Society, Toastmasters International, East San Gabriel Coalition for the Homeless and the Presbyterian Church of USA. She is also a former chair of the International Section Council of the SOA. Through her work, Angelica learned to appreciate children, as well as fellow volunteers who have different life experiences and perspectives. Here's what Angelica has to say about her volunteer experience.

Have you ever wondered why you feel comfortable calling for help from another volunteer whom you met only once before?

- Shumei Kuo

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Angelica helps a student



Jim Toole

A few weeks ago I attended a lecture by Peter Drucker, the well-known management guru, on “The Future of the Corporation.” We know that the corporations of today are very different from the corporations of yesterday. We, who have been in the insurance industry for the last decade or more, also know this very well on a personal level. It appears that there is no turning back to the old ways. As Drucker puts it, “The corporation of tomorrow is going to be more strategic and less operational. More corporate work is outsourced and corporations are more like confederations (*i.e.*, alliances).” When someone in the audience asked the question, “What should managers do to prepare themselves for the new corporation?”, my ears perked up when Drucker answered, “Be a volunteer in a non-profit organization.”

I am a volunteer in my community, church and professional organizations. My initial motivation is to help others. However, I learned that by helping others, I actually help myself in so many unexpected and rewarding ways. I don’t always know the impact of my volunteer efforts but I believe in volunteerism and I keep trying. These days my volunteer hours are spent teaching young children public speaking and leadership skills, helping churches deal with diversity issues and assisting homeless families gain the resources and skills to gain access to permanent housing. In prior years, I was very active in the SOA and served as a member and chair of the International Section Council.

What do I gain as a volunteer? It is not fortune since I usually contribute financially when I get involved. It is not fame since my work is mostly behind the scenes. What I gain is much more valuable than fortune or fame. Through volunteer work, I made wonderful friends who share my dreams and values. I have good mental health, as there are a lot of positive vibes around volunteers and those who are being served. I developed many people skills as I became very aware of other people’s needs and viewpoints—not only those being served, but also those who are serving with me. The people skills made me feel more comfortable in management and leadership roles and enabled me to say “yes” when asked to be the chair of the International Section Council.

In the management lecture given by Drucker, he gave two reasons for the “being a volunteer” response. First, volunteer organizations provide opportunities to work with

diverse groups—people with different personalities, abilities, ethnic backgrounds, economic levels, educational levels and values. Secondly, volunteers join and leave the organizations at their free will. Those volunteers who can lead, manage and retain other volunteers will most likely be able to lead and manage tomorrow’s corporations. This may yet be the best management tip for an aspired manager in the corporation of the future, What a great reward for volunteering!

Jim Toole

Jim is the managing director of life and health at MBA Actuaries in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Jim started working internationally five years ago and has since lived and worked in Mexico, Brazil, Australia and various other sunny locales. Jim started volunteering in professional activities 10 years ago in the formative Computer Science Section Council. He is currently active in the Latin America Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee, and the Course 8 Finance exam, as well as editing a textbook on acquisitions and the role of the actuary. Jim feels volunteering is the most effective way to implement change—if you can dream it, do it!

I started volunteering when I was a kid. My mother used to make a point of taking me to work with her on her projects. These were not “charities”; these were organizations with which she had a deep commitment. Sometimes, it seemed as though you could almost touch the bonds she forged between people.

We did a lot of different volunteer activities together, from fund raising to outreach to environmentalism, but the work that made the single biggest impact on me was the soup kitchen. It was a real team effort from start to finish to get those meals up and over. Doing the table service for the guests really drove home how important it was to be involved in the community, and how little it really takes to start making a difference.

Once I left my hometown, it became more difficult finding the time and, more importantly, organizations that resonated with me. I was fortunate in New York to come across the East Harlem Tutorial Program, which provided educational assistance and role models to children in East Harlem. I never would have hooked up with them if it had not been for my employer, Met Life, who maintained a list of pre-screened charitable

organizations that it shared with its employees upon request.

After volunteering with them for about a year, I had an idea which became my first exercise in grant writing. They had a space out back with a concrete floor and a tree bursting through it that was completely underutilized. I saw a garden and, with the support of the organization and the skills of its various volunteers, we put together a proposal, which Met Life approved, and put in a garden that is there to this day. It is not big and I am sure it has changed a lot in the last 10 years, but at least it is a safe place for a kid to come and put their hands in the dirt.

That was to be my last satisfying volunteer stint for a long time. As my professional career became more complicated, my hours became less predictable. Shuffling around from continent to continent, I found I had less ability to find organizations I connected with and much less time to volunteer. However, I did start playing chess, and I found it to be both a satisfying outlet and a good way to get know other people while on the road for extended periods.

After a decade and a half, I have come back full circle to my hometown of Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I quickly found the local chess organizations and became involved with the Winston-Salem Scholastic Chess Association. This group has brought chess to the area schools, going from zero to over 350 program participants in just a year and a half. I was fortunate that my father taught me how to play chess when I was a kid but, if you are not exposed to it at a young age, it is likely that you will not pick it up. Studies have shown playing chess has many positive effects on children, and I am very pleased to be involved in an organization bringing this experience to local youth.

One of our longer-term capital projects is installing fixed chessboards in a downtown park. The goal of the project is to use chess and art to fashion bridges linking Winston-Salem's diverse community to its urban center while bringing vitality to a beautiful and well positioned downtown park.

Outdoor chess venues can be found in major metropolitan areas throughout the world. Fixed boards draw life to them and serve as a gathering place for people who might never otherwise have come together. Some come to play; some come to talk, but all come to enjoy.

For travelers, outdoor venues are a great way of getting introduced to the city's inhabitants and tasting a local slice of life. For locals it is a draw of players and observers alike, one that never fails to give pause to passers by for five minutes, a lunch hour or an afternoon.

As part of the effort, we are involving the Downtown Arts District Association (DADA), and we will be presenting competing designs to public vote at a "gallery crawl." Winston-Salem is a diverse community, but we are fragmented; too often we look at each other over fences instead of across bridges. The chess board is by its very nature democratic; neither the game nor its aficionados make distinctions based on age, race or economic status. And although chess is not strictly actuarial, I'll sneak it in there somehow...

Dan Spafford

Dan is vice president and chief actuary with Allmerica Financial Services in Worcester, Massachusetts. He has been involved in a variety of SOA volunteer activities over his 30-year career with Prudential, New York Life, AXA and Allmerica. His involvement with International Section activities is more recent—including a project to survey a number of section members about the joys and pitfalls of the international insurance business.

After "retiring" from AXA at the end of 2001, I considered what next to do in my actuarial career. I began to read the International Section's newsletter more closely and noted the results of a section survey that had been conducted that year. A number of members commented that they would like to know more about what duties, responsibilities and commitments were involved in international actuarial work. I was interested in that too, so I decided to interview a cross-section of international actuaries and write an article about my findings. That started a fascinating process of information gathering that led to an article in the June 2002 International Section newsletter and a panel discussion at the SOA's annual meeting in October. The distinguished panel that I moderated consisted of Rejean Besner, Emma McWilliam, Ronald Poon-Affat and Jim Trimble, who shared their insights with about 30 attendees.



Jim & Jimmy planting



Dan Spafford visits Paris

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Emma McWilliam

In all, I interviewed about 40 actuaries for 45 to 90 minutes apiece and heard many fascinating stories. Some had handled their international duties primarily from their desks in the United States while others had spent years abroad in a variety of locations and jobs, often with several different companies. One theme that emerged was the assumption of large responsibilities early in careers. An example was a recently-minted FSA who was sent down to a large U.S. insurance company's Mexican operation to "help out." Two years later she had been placed in charge of 25 actuaries and other staff as chief actuary. Another theme was the bridging of wide cultural differences. The chief actuary of a U.S. company's Spanish operation mentioned that his staff would not mind being asked to work until 10 or 11 p.m. but would rebel if they had to give up their siestas. That was not because they wanted a mid-day snooze, but because the siesta was their primary family time. I was also a bit surprised to learn that the dangers of travel, including robbery and kidnapping in this post 9/11 world, while certainly acknowledged, were universally "shrugged off" by the respondents.

All in all, the project was a fascinating experience, and I gained a unique insight into the psyche of the international actuary and the opportunities for actuaries abroad.

Emma McWilliam

Emma is a senior manager at Ernst & Young LLP and is currently on secondment to their New York office from London (which she calls home). She has worked in many territories since early on in her career, including Australia, France, Germany, Netherlands and Singapore.*

One of my most memorable experiences was volunteering to join an international business society known as AIESEC (formerly a French acronym for Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales). The SOA seeks to encourage students to gain international exposure in the work place and share cultural experiences globally.

I was elected president of AIESEC at the University of Bristol. My main responsibilities there were raising jobs locally in the United Kingdom for international students to pursue and motivating Bristol students to participate in the international business program. To this

end, my team and I had the challenging task of finding jobs not for ourselves, but for others. Interviewing with a future employer to recruit someone from, say India, for three months can seem even more difficult than interviewing for yourself. It was an amazing feeling when the major multi-national IT consulting firm said "Yes!" The work didn't end there. It also included organizing the annual career fair (for students to gain access to major multi-nationals) and arranging multi-cultural events to provide students with exposure to other cultures.

Giving time for what you believe in is really the cornerstone of who you are and can give you experiences that you never realized would shape your life.

This international flavor continues in Emma's career where she fulfills her passion to combine international concepts and business. She now leads Ernst and Young's global actuarial team for International Accounting Standards (IAS) and is a member of the Global Actuarial Leadership Team, which requires involving actuarial professionals around the world to leverage the experiences of everyone.

Hubert Mueller

Hubert, a principal with Tillinghast-Towers Perrin in Hartford, Connecticut, has been involved in a number of volunteer activities in both Europe and North America over his 17-year career with the company. Born and educated in Germany, Hubert moved to the United States in the mid-80s, then returned to work in Europe for most of the 1990s. Most recently, his volunteer activities have included being on the International Section Council from 2000 to 2002, and being a current member of the SOA's Risk Management Task Force.

I have enjoyed "every minute of it," as this allowed me to meet with many different people in a variety of cultures and in many different markets.

My memorable activities include:

- Stepping directly off a plane in Munich onto a speaking platform for an actuarial society meeting in Munich, and not being able to



Hubert Mueller

*Shumei's note: Secondment means the detachment of a person from his or her regular organization for a temporary assignment elsewhere, per www.rhyme.lycos.com.

speak any full sentence in German without adding in English words.

- Working as a volunteer with the newly established insurance regulatory body in Sofia (Bulgaria) in the mid-90s and teaching them the basics of insurance mathematics and investment management in a one-week course (along with a group of other German volunteers). The afternoon sessions always seemed to go a lot smoother than the morning sessions, which I attribute to the insurance regulators consuming large amounts of vodka for lunch...
- Acting out the Boston Tea Party at the Old South Meeting House in Boston last fall as a member of the International Section Council.

Hans Wagner

Hans is the corporate actuary for AXA in Paris, working on financial reporting matters for the group's consolidated reporting. After getting his FSA in 1992, but before moving abroad in 1998, Hans was active in the Education & Exam process, serving first as an exam grader and then later on the curriculum design. He also spoke at meetings, contributed to articles and was on the organizing committee for the Valuation Actuaries Symposium. Because of the timing of the Education & Exam changes, Hans continued providing examination support for a year from Melbourne Australia, where he joined AXA. Ric Geisler, the SOA Ambassador to New Zealand, first convinced Hans to run for the International Section Council. While working on the Council, Hans's main initiative was to support education about the new E&E process through the Ambassadors.

A few of my favorite volunteer memories include:

- While serving as the regional ambassador coordinator for Asia on the section council, I had lovely meetings with the SOA Ambassadors in Hong Kong and Singapore. I only wished that my schedule could have allowed me to visit more of the region.
- I did a lot of side-trips, from E&E committee meetings. From Reno he went cross-country skiing up above Lake Tahoe—the best skiing I've ever had. From Albuquerque I visited

northern New Mexico during 110°F heat; and from Phoenix I did one drive including Monument Valley and other sites in north-eastern Arizona. On another trip I hiked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and stayed overnight.

- While based in Australia I was asked to speak at the International Association of Insurance Supervisors conference in San Francisco one December. Meeting insurance regulators and other interested parties from around the world was a fascinating experience, as there was a great mix of cultures and also of market “maturities” and practices. Also, being in the Northern Hemisphere gave me the Christmas holiday spirit much more than I could ever get in Melbourne with its long, warm December days!
- My favorite experience was seeing three overseas students, whom I assisted with the professional development component, achieve their FSA qualifications and continue with interesting careers.
- The nicest hotel room I ever stayed in was in Keystone, Colorado, while attending an examination committee meeting. I was given a suite with separate living and bedroom, a sunken tub that could accommodate a relay team and a huge picture window view over the Rockies. Unfortunately, I had visited with a friend near Denver the day before the meeting and, since it was such a great visit, I didn't arrive in Keystone until 3 a.m. Having to be up at 7 a.m. for the meeting and fly out that night, this terrific room was totally wasted. Incidentally, I was able to stay awake and productive for the meeting with the help of a lot of coffee.

Mike Gabon

Over his 17-year actuarial career, Mike has lived in Bermuda, Grand Cayman, the United States, Gloucester, England and Canada, and has worked on projects and assignments of these as well as other countries in Western Europe, Asia and South America. Mike has managed to volunteer his time in each country in which he has lived, either for the local community or the SOA community. This

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Mike Gabon

includes being one of the fund-raisers in organizing and developing an initiative for the betterment of a nation's youths' exposure to math applications.

In earlier days, Mike's enthusiastic attitude and willingness to try anything had earned him the names "Jalapeno Mike" and "Crazy Canuck" by fellowship admission course colleagues. There is also a serious and dedicated side to his volunteerism. Mike's post-fellowship efforts started with spring and fall finance exam committees. Following that in 1997, he started serving on the International Section Council and also as an SOA Ambassador. His work on the council included developing meeting sessions, coordinating opportunities for members to meet at international cultural and historical venues, such as the United Nations, the Cultural Center of Chicago and the Old South Meeting House in Boston. He also participated in the worldwide Table Manager update while on the council.

It is a combination of several factors that makes the volunteer experience rewarding, observed Mike. Within the profession, it's the camaraderie of peers, a sense of giving back to the community, as well as the opportunity to see a project through for the advancement and enhancement of the profession. It's also about the ability to be involved in interesting areas and issues not available in the workplace and developing or keeping fresh on technical and management skill sets. Other factors include sharing of knowledge, being able to work with people you might otherwise never meet—including those located in other parts of the globe as well as exposure to various cultures. Those same factors apply, pretty much, to the local community.

Some of my notable section volunteer moments include:

- Reenactment of the loyalist-patriot Tea Tax debate in Boston as Samuel Adams (while appropriately drinking the beer with the same name).
- Meeting other volunteers in their countries, such as:
 - Iceland, especially the assistance surrounding the 9/11 attacks.

- While traveling in Argentina, seeing several "a la venta" or "for sale" signs on the front lawn of the home of the third President installed in as many weeks.
- Discussing the Danish "wine versus beer" mortality study (a.k.a. the tastes great vs. less filling vs. improves mortality debate).

In 2002, I was elected to the Reinsurance Section Council and am involved in a major literature review and liaison with the ACLI Reinsurance committee on globalization issues. Year 2003 marks my 7th year on the spring and annual program committees, with team members nominating me most valued planning and development contributor on several occasions.

I am currently the vice-chair of the 2003 Annual Meeting, a member of the Reinsurance Section Council, the Board Advisory Group on Continuing Education, Project Oversight Group for Managing Retirement Assets for Longevity and Other Risks, as well as the SOA Ambassador to Bermuda.

Mike's giving of his time has extended beyond the actuarial society to charities and local communities. Raising funds and participation in the local community are ingrained in Mike—from an early age he has raised funds for the Jerry Lewis telethon, local sports teams and schools and for the Terry Rox Foundation's "Run for a Kid Who Can't." His entry, as a kid, for a local police motto "Man Helping Man" sums things up and was chosen over all age groups. Among his more unusual activities, he has played basketball in a company president's office to raise money for the United Way, assisted in England's scouting program (along the way, enduring the conditions of the Cotswold marathon) and augmenting the Johns Hopkins' Center for Talented Youth curriculum with math applications.

"Volunteerism is suited to the profession. To volunteer...for what, is the question! □



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