

# Making an Impact

At my company, Cannon Design, we recently experienced a great opportunity. During the summer approximately eight interns worked in the St. Louis office. This year we tried something a little different with our intern program. Rather than put the interns in front of computers and ask them to be productive and learn by redline, we tried to make this summer a learning experience for them. This included having them help us develop new design aids and other research projects that the company's regular employees have not had the time to do.

One of the tools we used to teach the interns was weekly educational programs to give them further insight into what we do. Most of the programs were related specifically to the design aspects of architecture and engineering. I, for one, am glad that I had the opportunity to attend some of the sessions because they were very interesting. The program that I presented was on professional society involvement and the impact it can have on your career.

The key points of the presentation were designed to cause the attendees (yes, more than just the interns were in the audience) to think about why professional

societies exist. After we have struggled through college for the achievement of a lifetime, we often find that our knowledge of our chosen craft is limited at best. You can turn to only a few places after graduat-

ing to gain more knowledge about your industry, and the most common of those places is the professional society.

When putting this program together I visited the Web sites of 20 or so professional societies that serve the building industry. I was not surprised to find some common goals in the mission statements and visions of the various organizations. In these statements I found concern over member education, advancement of the profession, improvement of public awareness, and the industry's impact on the built environment. The most important common goals were how the organizations could protect the public health and how their members could help influence persons for the betterment of society as a whole.

With such a lofty goal as improving society as a whole, how can one person make a difference? Rather than try to change society, I think we should try to improve what

we bring to our profession. As with any effort, you get out of it what you put into it. Many times we do not succeed in what we are doing because we have decided that it is not important for us to have a positive effect on those around us. But everything we do affects something, and it is up to us to decide if the results of our actions will be positive or negative. Many in today's society often ask "What's in it for me?" without considering that they may owe something back to their communities. After we have finished school and started our careers in our chosen professions, we need to remember that a time comes when we must make the change from being a learner to being a teacher.

Professional societies play an important role as the teachers for their industries. Your involvement in a professional society also helps you help yourself. The effect my membership in ASPE has had on me is incredible. I do not think I would have progressed so far in my career had I not joined ASPE.

I only hope that I have had a positive effect on those around me and in some small way helped to improve the public's health and well-being. I can name many persons who have influenced my career by offering their time to teach me how to be a better designer. Being involved in ASPE or other industry organizations is one way to give back to society. However, you do not need to be an association president or a chapter leader to have an impact. I consider myself fortunate for the opportunity to make a difference, and I will be changed forever after my tenure as ASPE president ends.

Have you stopped to think about where you are in your career? Have others taught you something about your profession? Have you given back to society for the opportunity you have been given? Volunteering for your professional organization is one way to give back and help others in the industry. You will not regret the influence that you can have on someone's life, and you never know just how much of an impact it will have on you. **PSD**

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