

Early Experiences of a New AAW Board Member

By: Larry Genender, March 2007

I was recently elected to the Board of the AAW. My first official activity was a 5-day trip with the AAW Board. We first went to St. Paul MN, where the AAW headquarters is located. We saw the offices, saw the AAW Gallery, toured the convention center (probable site of the 2011 Symposium), and had an all-day Board training session. We then went on to Portland OR, the site of the 2007 Symposium. We met with the local club liaison people, toured the convention center, toured the several museum locales where AAW exhibitions will be held as part of the 2007 Symposium, and had our first Board meeting. I came away from all this very invigorated with a greatly enhanced view of what the AAW represents, and it is this that I want to share. The thoughts and opinions that follow are strictly my own, and do not represent the AAW, its Board or its staff.

The most significant event of the trip was the all-day Board training session. The AAW is just beginning a major overhaul of the way it operates administratively. We have a new Executive Director, Larry Sommer, who has joined with Mary Lacer, assistant Executive Director, to effectively double the administrative leadership of the AAW. Our session was led by Emil Angelica, a consultant with expertise in non-profit organizations, and his sessions were outstanding, both for new Board members like me and for others who had already served one or two years. The committee structure of the AAW will be divided between 1) policy and financial matters, which remain the responsibility of the elected Board and 2) administrative matters, which will now be run by the Executive Director and his staff. In addition, a professional conference coordinating company has been hired which will do many of the Symposium tasks previously done by Board members. These changes are important, because up to now the Board members did everything themselves. As the AAW has grown in recent years the Board's workload has become enormous. This represents a major culture shift for the Board, which will now be able to focus on the "big picture", i.e., policy issues and serving the membership that it represents. Look for significant changes in the way things get done, although not overnight – all for the benefit of the membership of the AAW and for woodturning in general

I was impressed by how "pure" the AAW is. There are no politics – everyone is dedicated to the AAW mission of fostering the art and craft of lathe turning. Decisions are reached by consensus, with virtually no dissent.

The financial health of the AAW is sound. Preliminary thinking has already begun about the AAW purchasing its own building to house its offices, merchandise, permanent collection, and gallery. I would like the AAW to have its own woodturning school in that building. There are a lot of big things on the horizon – all in the idea stage!!

I was appointed to the Educational Opportunity Grants (EOG) committee, chaired by Malcolm Tibbetts. We are reading 118 applications for EOG's, and we will award money to the most worthy applicants. I encourage more of you to apply next year – I

know there are many worthy projects that would receive an EOG in response to a well-written application.

We have a new webmaster, Ed Davidson. Look for a bigger and better website. We are “retraining” the membership to renew memberships and to vote for Board members online. However, we will provide paper Ballots and registration for those luddites (Google that word!) who have resisted the digital age.

Membership growth is important. After my first Board weekend where I really saw the benefits of AAW membership (the American Woodturner magazine together with the insurance coverage is more than worth the annual dues!) I have changed from a so-so member to a very enthusiastic AAW member. Many of the attendees at club meetings are what I call wannabe turners – they sit and watch, but don’t really get into it. We want those members to take a class, meet up with an experienced turner, and then get “hooked” onto woodturning like all the more involved members have become. Then you’ll want to join the AAW and enjoy all it can do for you. Without the AAW you would all be in your individual shops reinventing the wheel with nothing to unite and advance the progress of woodturning. Look at how woodturning as an art form has progressed in the last decade!

One last thing – I bought one of the new design AAW woodturning smocks while I was in the office. This is the best one I have ever tried – it is light as a feather, zips completely up the front, has vented armpits, and a comfortably snug fit at the collar. Buy a biggish size, as they are longer. I got an XXL, and have turned in it – really comfortable. All for 35 bucks!

I hope this article will stimulate more interest in the AAW and will encourage more of you to become AAW members

Larry Genender
AAW Board Member