
A Salute to the AmSECT Volunteer

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I would like to speak today on only one topic—the AmSECT volunteer. Since a fair number of you in attendance here today are volunteers, I am talking to you about yourselves.

Estimates have been made that each year in America the dollar value of the time volunteers devote to their chosen organizations would amount to several billion dollars if the people were actually paid for their services. Volunteers can be found in virtually every area of American life—in our hospitals, churches, schools, civic organizations, and most particularly, in our non-profit associations and societies.

AmSECT is an example of an organization that basically could not survive without its volunteers. You may be interested in knowing that during a typical year upwards of ten percent of AmSECT's active members are involved in some aspect of the Society's operations. I can assure you that as a percentage this figure is phenomenally high when compared to other similar organizations.

In the four years I have served as your executive director, I have dealt with four presidents, two treasurers, two secretaries, and dozens of board members, committee members, and region officers. At the end of each year my reaction is always the same—where do these volunteers get the time, patience, and motivation to carry on?

For make no mistake about it, if performed properly many of these positions are time consuming. Some of them clearly amount to a second job. And most of the positions are the focal point for member complaints and disagreements.

Although the outgoing president of AmSECT usually receives some type of acclaim or acknowledgement for a job well done, practically all other positions are thankless. Year after year people serve loyally in one capacity or another and when their term in office is over they simply leave in total silence. No plaque, no scroll, no round of applause; just deafening silence.

While AmSECT has a paid National Office staff, they cannot begin to perform everything the Society

does. I would like you to consider, for a moment, some of the things that go on within AmSECT that all of us are quite accustomed to:

- We receive a scientific journal six times a year; the journal is comprised of articles written by volunteers and reviewed and critiqued by volunteers
- Virtually every item in the monthly newsletter except the employment ads are provided by volunteers
- The scientific sessions here at this convention were planned totally by volunteers as well as many of the logistical arrangements with the hotel
- And think about this: areas such as awards, nominations, continuing education, by-laws, ethics, relations with the American Board, relations with the Joint Review Committee and the AMA, just to name a few, were all being conducted on your behalf by unpaid volunteers

If we had to pay people to perform all these functions, your annual dues would have to rise to \$200 a year, rather than the \$50 you have been paying since 1978.

The fascinating aspect about the activities the Society performs is that they not only are taken for granted, they are also expected as some type of natural right that comes with the payment of annual dues. And yet practically everything that you may regard as a benefit is in some fashion the result of volunteer effort. In many cases it is literally true that never has so much been done for so many by so few with so little appreciation.

When I became executive director in 1978, one thing that impressed me was that most of the volunteer work had been carried out by the same people for many years. I believe this situation has changed now. No longer is it necessary for a handful of people to carry the whole burden because no one else is willing to serve.

One of the best possible signs of the Society's vitality is that more active members are coming forward to serve on committees and to do some of the unglamorous de-

tail work that someone has to do. From my vantage point the future is looking young and it's looking good.

I mentioned one statistic to begin my remarks and I would like to cite another. At any one time there are approximately 15,000 associations and societies in the United States, but each year several thousand disappear without a trace. AmSECT could easily have been one of the missing. But it isn't, and for that you can thank a lot of people who held this Society together with bailing wire until it began to mature and stabilize.

You know who they are and what they did. They were not perfect and they did make mistakes but the bottom line was that they held you together and kept things going. Some day AmSECT may have a hall of

honor and if so I know their pictures will be in it.

To build on their legacy, I would ask you to consider if sometime during your career you might now make a 2-3 year commitment to serve your Society. Everyone, of course, has job and family responsibilities that allow no time for volunteer work. But perhaps you might consider picking some time span when you will be able to participate more fully.

And please remember this: As a professional group your numbers are pitifully small. It is unlikely that your membership will ever be much larger than it is now. About the only thing you can do is get better.

Volunteers have made AmSECT what it is today and what it will be tomorrow. To all of you who have served so hard and so faithfully over the years I salute you. Indeed, we all salute you.