

Are you a Real Professional?

A little less than four decades ago I took my first recreation classes at ASU. I learned a lot about parks & recreation management – program planning, leadership, administration and more. I learned how to organize activities and events, how to motivate staff and volunteers, and how to manage a budget. It was all good practical knowledge that prepared me for a successful career in parks & recreation. None of it, however, was as important to me as a more esoteric concept that every professor included in their classes – that of professionalism.

Parks and recreation was still an emerging field back then, NRPA hadn't even exist until the 1960's, APRA was barely 20 years old, and many people were working hard to ensure that our field was being taken seriously. As students we were all encouraged to join APRA and I remember making my first trip to an APRA conference in Tucson with about two dozen fellow students. We might have been only students, we might have only paid \$10 for annual membership, we might have been much more interested in an arts & crafts class than sitting through a general session on land and water conservation funds, but we were a part of this growing field – we were professionals! Oh, and by the way, minimum wage was about \$2 per hour and that \$10 membership and \$20 one-day student rate for the conference came out of our pockets – it was not paid for by the university or any organization.

I'm telling this story because I am concerned about what I am hearing from some people as we all work our way through the current recession. I'm hearing that because my agency is not paying my membership or paying for the annual conference then I will not be an APRA member or attending the conference this year. I want you to reconsider – I want you to step up and support APRA – I want you to act like a professional.

Sure, APRA is struggling right now, but that doesn't make it any less viable or valuable. There are still continuing education and networking opportunities being offered at amazingly affordable prices. For less than \$300 you can renew your membership and sign up for a full conference registration. That's less than a dollar a day, less than two Starbucks a month. Times are tough, but this is possible folks.

If your agency or organization has cut their professional development budgets and will not be paying your way this year I am asking you to pay your own way this year. I am asking you to act like a professional.

Vern Biaett, Jr. CFEE