

# The NAGC Communicator



National Association of Government Communicators

Winter 2008

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### 50% Membership Discount for Military

To honor the service of our military, NAGC is offering a 50% discount on annual membership to active duty military and reservists. Visit [www.nacgonline.org](http://www.nacgonline.org) for more details. ★



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## Karen Hughes to keynote at Communications School

**K**aren Hughes, former U.S. Department of State Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs with the rank of Ambassador and former Director of Communications for President George W. Bush, will be the closing keynote speaker at the 2008 NAGC Communications School in Albuquerque on May 1.



Karen Hughes

NAGC's Communications School is the only event of its kind providing invaluable networking opportunities and practical educational sessions to help government communicators increase their skills.

*See Communications School, page 8*

## Blue Pencil/Gold Screen entries reach record

*By Jennifer Callahan, NAGC Competitions Director*



Mary Ackleson, Michelle Savoie and Lusi Sumarna sort more than 600 entries.

**N**AGC received a record number of entries for the Blue Pencil and Gold Screen Awards this year. More than 600 entries were received by the competition closing date of December 29 as a result of intense efforts by the NAGC staff and the Blue Pencil and Gold Screen Awards Committee.

This year the committee held two "How to Submit a Winning Entry" teleconference sessions to brief potential entrants on how the awards process works and to share the valuable experience of previous winners and judges. The committee greatly appreciated the level of interest and participation in discussions and the quality of feedback

*See Awards, page 7*

## 14 Powerful Presentation Tips

*By Joan Detz*

**H**ow many speeches do you give each year? Are you using each presentation as an opportunity to connect with your constituency, build your base, and communicate your message?

Here are some practical guidelines to help public servants leverage the power of public speaking:

1) **Request a good time slot.** It takes work to prepare an effective speech. Why spend weeks preparing only to get stuck with a poor slot on the agenda? Ask the host to schedule you for a particular time frame. Try to avoid common problem spots: late in the evening (when audiences are tired), or last on a panel (when time may have run out), or right before lunch (when people want to go eat).



*See Presentation tips, page 3*



Gene Rose  
NAGC President

## President's Perspective

### NAGC's reconstruction action plan

**Y**ou've seen signs of NAGC's construction process in recent months, such as more emails, more Web content and faster response times to requests. Elsewhere in this newsletter you can read more that a record number of you entered the awards competition this year. Our membership is growing and the finances are stronger.

The Board is pleased by your response, but we also hear loudly and clearly your desire to transition NAGC to a more robust, visible and active organization. The Board is undergoing great internal changes that will help us meet this goal. We held a retreat this fall and adopted an action plan for 2008 that will result in substantially more visible growth for the organization. The board focused on three key areas:

- Member Services
- Marketing & Outreach
- Resource Management

In our member services action plan, you've already received one of our top priorities — a membership directory. In the coming months, you'll be getting more information on the enhancements we've made to our annual Communications School, more targeted volunteer opportunities, an advocacy program to respond to issues of concern to government communicators and more professional development opportunities.

We're creating a marketing and outreach plan, which will feature new social media networking opportunities, partnerships with other organizations and improved communications with our members.

NAGC members have recently voted on new bylaws, which is a step in our resource management plan to make Board members more accountable and streamline the interactions among the Board, membership and our management company.

With only a few weeks left in my term as president, I feel confident that, by working together, we have brought new energy, focus and commitment to NAGC. We're building a sturdy network of government communicators and I hope each and every one of you will contribute some of your time, tools or supervisory skills to make this a project in which we can all take pride. ★



Treasurer John Nash leads a spirited discussion at the NAGC Board of Directors retreat last fall.

Immediate-Past President Dave Matustik, President Gene Rose and President-elect George Selby take copious notes for the 2008 Action Plan.



*The NAGC Communicator is published quarterly to keep members apprised of special activities in the organization. Your comments, story ideas and information are always welcome. Contact Editor John Verrico at [jverrico@comcast.net](mailto:jverrico@comcast.net).*

*Always visit the NAGC Web site at [www.nagconline.org](http://www.nagconline.org) for the most current and up-to-date information.*

## Volunteers Needed

Want to become more active in the growth, activities and programs of NAGC? Please contact Volunteer Director Deidra McGee at [DMcgee@fs.fed.us](mailto:DMcgee@fs.fed.us) or Beth Armstrong, NAGC Executive Director, at [Armstrong@nagconline.org](mailto:Armstrong@nagconline.org). Your efforts can help strengthen our work as government communicators. ★

## Presentation tips

Continued from page 1

2) **Choose the person who will introduce you.** You will be judged by the company you keep, so keep good company. Select someone the audience likes and respects.



Joan Detz  
Speaking Coach

3) **Write your own introduction** so you're "branded" most effectively. Since each audience is unique, each introduction should be unique. Emphasize aspects of your background that each audience can relate to.

4) **Focus your topic.** Resist the temptation to throw in everything you know about a particular subject. If you try to say everything, the audience will remember nothing. Instead, by narrowing your focus, you will command greater authority.

5) **Analyze audience demographics.** How many people will attend? The size of the audience won't change your subject ... but it will certainly change the way you approach it. Smaller audiences tend to pay closer attention because they know you can see them. Larger audiences feel more anonymous. Other things you should know: the male/female ratio, age range, educational background, income level, family status, etc.

6. **Consider audience psychology.** How do they feel about your topic? Do they have any biases? Where have they gotten their information (or mis-information) in the past? What's their most pressing problem? If you tailor your message to meet their needs, you will build a strong rapport – and be more persuasive.

7. **Target your research.** Don't hit your audience with tons of numbers. Pick three key statistics, and elaborate on them. Cite personal anecdotes, powerful examples, clever quotations, interesting definitions, real-life comparisons, endorsements from respected groups, headlines, letters from community leaders, constituents' phone calls, etc.

8. **Organize your material.** Make it easy to follow. Give your presentation a beginning, a middle, and an ending ... and if possible, keep them close together! Whatever you do, be sure to stay within the allotted time.

9. **Simplify your language.** Make it easy to understand. The audience has to get your message the first time through, so get rid of jargon, long-winded phrases and bureaucratic gobbledegook. Avoid acronyms as much as possible. When you must use an acronym, be sure to identify the term.

10. **Use humor; don't abuse humor.** A light touch of humor will bring you closer to an audience. Heavy-handed humor will make your audience uncomfortable — and tasteless jokes can flat-out cost you an election.

11. **Improve your delivery skills.** Make a conscious effort to polish a new skill each time you present. The better your delivery skills, the better you can promote your platform. Good speakers aren't born great; they're made great through practice and training. A skilled speech coach can help you master advanced communication techniques

– so you can speak with greater confidence and greater clout.

12. **Consider your "vocal personality."** The average person speaks about 140-150 words per minute. But pace varies by age (younger people talk faster than older people) and geography (people in the northeast talk faster than southerners). Your rate of speed should be similar to the rate your audience uses.

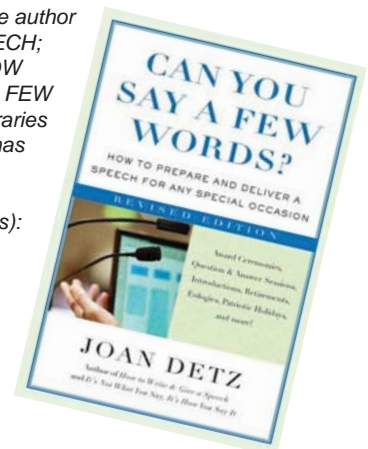
13. **Use body language that reinforces your words.** Consider these factors:

- Will you be standing or sitting?
- Do you typically hide behind the lectern ... or move out to the open stage?
- Will you walk around and interact with the audience as you present?
- Do you have good posture? (Your high school teacher was right: Posture does make a difference.)
- Are your feet well-planted? Or do you make the mistake of rocking from foot to foot ... or heel to toe?
- What do you do with your hands? Don't lock your hands behind your back military-style, don't fold your hands in front a-la-fig-leaf, and don't stuff your hands in your pockets.
- Do you look audiences in the eye? Audiences don't trust speakers with shifty eyes.
- Do you have an easy, natural smile? A good smile works miracles.

14. **Get a second bounce.** If you think your presentation is done when you walk away from the lectern, think again. Savvy speakers seek positive media attention on a regular basis. Simple, inexpensive efforts can yield significant dividends: blog or put highlights of speeches on your website; submit excerpts to trade publications; follow up your appearances with op-ed pieces for area newspapers; send the manuscript to your alma mater's magazine; send summaries of your speeches to faculty and student leaders at area colleges.

After all, it takes a lot of work to prepare a good speech. Make sure your speech works just as hard for you. ★

© 2007, Joan Detz. Joan Detz is the author of *HOW TO WRITE & GIVE A SPEECH; IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SAY, IT'S HOW YOU SAY IT;* and *CAN YOU SAY A FEW WORDS?* (all widely available in libraries and bookstores). Since 1992, she has taught the distinguished Joan Detz Speechwriting Seminar Series (with Basic, Advanced and Master classes): [www.joandetz.com](http://www.joandetz.com)



# Stumbling your way through crisis management

by Glen Thomas, Corporate Communications, Memphis Light, Gas & Water

*We all have our bad days. Now there are bad days, and there are BAD days. Lucy-pulling-the-football-away-from-Charlie-Brown bad days. The kind that leave you flat on your back, staring at the sky, and wondering what happened.*

*At Memphis Light, Gas & Water, we had one of those days when we discovered that we had been subpoenaed by the FBI. It is never good news when the words “subpoena” and “FBI” are used in the same sentence. The basic premise of the investigation was that a City Council member had been able to run up a very large utility bill without making payments or getting cut off. The focus was the relationship of our President to this City Council member. What followed was a whirlwind of media coverage, political involvement, legal wrangling, and — for MLGW’s public relations staff — a daily struggle to keep our image afloat. We have a lot of talented, skilled people on our communications team and we did a lot of things right. However, hindsight allows us to look back at some of our missteps, and because I’m much smarter now than I was then, I’ll share my hindsight genius with you.*



## **Have a Plan**

As utility communicators, we often have elaborate, detailed communications and response plans for electric outages, gas leaks, water contamination, and employee injuries. But we really don’t have anything concrete for ethics or legal situations. Maybe we just don’t think it’s going to happen, or maybe the scenarios are so vague and varied that it’s hard to pin down a specific plan. But some kind of protocol needs to be in place. Lesson: Use our experience as a case study and get to work on that ethics communications plan immediately.

## **Review All the Info That’s Going Out**

When the communications department learned of the subpoena, we only had a couple of days before the information had to be provided to the FBI, which meant we didn’t have much time before the information hit the media. Some already knew because it’s hard to keep such things a secret. We gathered as much information as we could from the legal team, which means we were forced to interrogate them, use truth serum, etc. We established our position on the situation. However, it was near impossible to predict all of the questions, stories and speculation that the release would cause. Lesson: We thought that by knowing the basics, we could properly respond to queries, but that really wasn’t enough. There were 10 boxes of information turned over to the FBI. We should have gone through all 10 boxes to see what the reporters would see when they requested the same info. You need to know everything that’s going out, and step into the reporter’s shoes to look for controversy.

## **Respond, Even If There’s Nothing to Say**

The local daily newspaper had been on the story from the get-go and the first article was pretty scathing. Once it hit the stands, we were absolutely flooded with calls from local media. Despite knowing the general issues, the corporate communications department didn’t have all the facts. That, of course, meant that our response needed to be checked and double checked by a number of executives. It was at this point that I made a key error, and that was waiting until we had approval on the release, and thinking that it would answer most questions and head off many of the stories. I might as well have been wearing Custer’s uniform. By the time we got approval, it was late in the day and most of the media were very put out with us. Lesson: Always respond, even if you are just telling them you’ll have more for them later. If you need to expedite the approval, you might light a fire by giving the media a time that you will update them. It’s one thing to say, “I need that approval on the release soon,” but a totally different dynamic occurs when you say, “I told them we’d have an announcement at 3 p.m. and they’re on their way.”

## **Know Your Public Records Procedures**

In the coming weeks, the public records requests came rolling in like nothing I’d ever seen. If one outlet got a piece of information, the other stations or newspapers wanted it. While we have pretty detailed public records procedures, things got a little frayed. Some information was released by our legal department, and some from other departments, and reporters were calling everywhere trying to get the information. Obviously, if a reporter gets a document before your communications and PR folks do, the system is flawed. It seems simple to follow protocol, but this was a situation that bred confusion and chaos. There was no intent to circumvent the system, but the frantic pace caused

**See Crisis Management, page 5**



## Crisis Management

*Continued from page 4*

disorganization. Lesson: All public records need a gatekeeper. That gatekeeper needs to be the final person to sign off on all records requests before they can go out. Identify the gatekeeper, empower them, and maybe buy them lunch every so often.

### BS Brigade

We got a ton of negative media coverage during this time. Following the usual “kick ‘em when they’re down” mentality, the subject matter branched away from the billing issue to stories that basically showed “other ways MLGW is being evil to customers.” Some of them were ridiculous. We often found ourselves in such reactive mode that it was difficult to respond to some inaccurate reports. One of my staff was told by a reporter, “Well, everyone’s mad at you guys right now.” Lesson: Appoint someone to serve as the “BS Brigade,” looking through all the coverage to see what is grossly inaccurate, and taking steps to correct it.

### Have Contingency Plans

While our policies and procedures received media coverage and criticism, our president’s alleged unethical actions remained the primary interest of the media. This can get pretty sticky for communicators, as you begin to evaluate the difference in defending the organization as opposed to defending an individual. If you are in a similar situation, you need a contingency plan, or two plans. Lesson: In this case, we looked at our communications direction if our President stayed on, and another if he left the company.

Our President resigned later that year and we have since been in the process of rebuilding our image. It will not be an overnight process. ★

*Glen Thomas is the Supervisor of Corporate Communications for Memphis (Tennessee) Light, Gas and Water, the nation’s largest three-service municipal utility, serving more than 420,000 customers. He can be reached at [gthomas@mlgw.org](mailto:gthomas@mlgw.org).*

**Want to learn more about how Glen handled this crisis? He will be speaking at the 2008 NAGC Communications School in Albuquerque, April 28- May 1, as part of a panel of other government communicators who have dealt with ethics crises.**

## Commentary: What we miss by outsourcing

**E**xperienced government communicators — public affairs specialists, writers, editors, graphic designers, Webmasters, and others — possess invaluable institutional memory and an understanding of the peculiarities, requirements, and concerns of performing such jobs in a government setting.

The communications tools used within the government may be similar to those used in the private sector, but the policies, procedures, attitudes, and considerations in what to say, how to say it, where to say it, when to say it, and through what mechanism, are often very different.

Case in point: The Census Bureau went through its re-branding process between 1997 and 2001. Included in that process was the creation of an agency logo by an outside vendor. One logo the vendor produced was a unique map of the United States which looked great. But PIO folks took one look at it and said “no way!” Reason: It was a map of the lower 48 states only. Hawaii, Alaska and all the territories had been left off the map for design reasons.

Here’s another small example: Without thinking about it, some writers use the words “census” and “survey” interchangeably. They are not. A census counts everyone/everything, while a survey is just a sample of the overall group. This may be a small matter word-wise, but is a huge issue when it comes to accomplishing the Census Bureau mission and providing information of the highest quality.

The point is that there are hundreds of considerations and nuances like these when creating and disseminating information for a government agency. Couple that with the decades it has taken for many government agencies to establish a reputation, and one must ask about the wisdom of placing the job of communicating often sensitive government information in the hands of non-public service employees.

When first hired, Census Bureau employees take an oath of confidentiality when it comes to private information entrusted to them by the public. Each year all employees renew this commitment and take classes about the importance of maintaining confidentiality of the data they receive as well as protecting the privacy of census and survey respondents. Census Bureau personnel take this oath and commitment very seriously. After all, it has taken more than 100 years to build the public’s trust in the work they do and how well they do it.

Those of us who have such jobs in government could easily have gotten comparable and perhaps better paying jobs in the private sector. Instead we chose public service, and in all probability derive the most satisfaction from providing clear, accurate, and unbiased information to the general public. ★



*George Selby  
NAGC President-elect*

*George Selby is Chief of Customer Service, ACSO Publications Services Branch, U.S. Census Bureau.*

## Sharing across the seas

By George Selby, NAGC President-elect, 2008-2009

**R**ecognizing the expertise in American government agencies on working with the media, government communicators from Japan asked to meet with NAGC leadership in November to learn about our methods and practices. A delegation representing two Japanese Prefectures (equivalent to our states) came to NAGC headquarters in Falls Church, Va., November 8 to meet with NAGC Executive Director Beth Armstrong, NAGC Awards Program Director Jennifer Callahan, NAGC Communications Director John Verrico, and NAGC President-elect George Selby.

Mr. Norio Yamamoto, Assistant Director of the Atami Taxation Office, Shizuoka Prefectural Government, Atami City, Japan; Mr. Shigehiro Suzuki, Senior Officer of the Civic Cultural Affairs Department, Ishikawa Prefectural Government, Kanazawa City, Japan; and Mr. Mitsuhiro Oba, Assistant Director of the Shizuoka Prefectural Taxation Office, Shizuoka, Japan; were accompanied by the very capable interpreter, Ms. Yumi Kajino and the President of The U.S.-Japan Culture Center in Washington, D.C., Mr. Mikio Kanda.

General introductions went well, thanks in part to some advance research by John Verrico. We followed the Japanese custom of exchanging and reading business cards, and greeted each other with bows and then handshakes. One could not help but notice that their business cards were printed on two sides: one side in English, the other in Japanese. Each card carried an image pertaining to a particular aspect or prominent geographical feature of the Prefecture in question, including Mt. Fuji.



John Verrico, NAGC Communications Director, talks with Japanese visitors about government communications in the United States.

Partially based on a brief list of topics submitted by Mr. Kanda, your NAGC representatives prepared and delivered a three-part presentation that included an overview of NAGC (Selby), the Blue Pencil-Gold Screen Awards (Callahan), and a nuts-and-bolts discussion of how government agencies use media to communicate with their publics (Verrico). Our guests were very receptive to our comments, appreciative of the information and asked deep, thought-provoking questions.

Perhaps the only difficulty encountered was in our being unaccustomed to speaking in short bursts and then allowing a translator to convey our words in Japanese. Fortunately, after a few humorous moments we each got the hang of it and the session went smoothly.

Had time allowed we would have been most interested to learn more about their particular perspectives and experiences, although Mr. Yamamoto assured us that his Prefecture's Taxation Office is just as "popular" as our own Internal Revenue Service.

The members of the delegation were invited to contact any of us if they have any questions in the future. Mr. Kanda expressed the delegation's thanks to NAGC for hosting the event. ★



Standing: Interpreter Yumi Kajino; Mikio Kanda, U.S.-Japan Culture Center; Jennifer Callahan; John Verrico; Shigehiro Suzuki; Beth Armstrong. Seated: Norio Yamamoto; George Selby, and Mitsuhiro Oba.

# Report to be released in March

## *First-ever government communicator survey provides revealing data*

**G**overnment communicators can be found in nearly every city in America. From the center of the nation’s federal government, Washington, D.C., to state capitals, county seats and small municipalities, these public servants deliver key information to their neighbors, families, friends and countless others who depend on the government services their employer offers. They work in universities, police departments, fire stations, sheriff’s offices and on military bases. So what do we all have in common and what makes us different?



In early March, NAGC will release its full report from a survey it sponsored last year. This first-ever survey of government communicators on their salaries, job responsibilities and trends provides some revealing data.

### **The “Average” Government Communicator**

The typical government communications employee is likely to be female, between 42 and 53 years old, has a bachelor’s degree, has 10-20 years of experience in government communications, and has held her current position for the last two to five years. She tends to put in 41-45 hours a week, works with two or three people and is responsible for writing and editing, producing news releases and Web content and managing news events. She gets around 300 emails a week, resulting in about two hours each day spent on email alone. She’s convinced that government communicators don’t receive adequate compensation for the services they provide, is fairly happy with the specialized training she receives and typically is authorized to improve her skills.

The survey report detailed information on salary and compensation, work habits, work environment, and opinions on the media and public perception.

Government communicators were asked to speculate on where their industry is headed. Want to know what they said? Get the full report at [www.nagconline.org](http://www.nagconline.org). ★

## **Awards**

*Continued from page 1*

at these sessions. More than 80 participants had their questions and concerns addressed. At the same time, the committee learned of problems or gaps in the instructions and process to be addressed in the 2009 competition process.

Michelle Savoie and her team at NAGC had the challenging task of sorting, recording and forwarding of entries to the judges by January 24 so the judges could complete their review by February 29.

Judge Orientation sessions were held in December and January to ensure that judges would be consistent and fair in their evaluation of the entries. The committee added orientation sessions this year to ensure that judges understood the process and forms they would be using. At the same time, the forms were reviewed and revised to make them more uniform and user-friendly, to further ensure that the evaluations were consistent and fair.

The committee is now finalizing details for the awards banquet at the 2008 Communications School in Albuquerque, where winners will be recognized in April. They are also organizing a Blue Pencil and Gold Screen session at the School where previous winners, judges and committee members will share the experiences and benefits they have received from their involvement in the awards program. ★



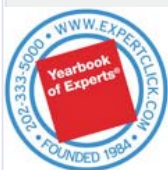
**Jennifer Callahan**  
NAGC  
Competitions  
Director

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## Communications School

Continued from page 1

The conference focuses on messaging (creative, crisis, humorous, tactical) externally and internally through print, the web, photographs, blogs, etc. and mentoring by experienced communicators within the profession. Other 2008 FEATURED SPEAKERS include:

- **Barbara Cochran**, president, Radio-Television News Directors Association and the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation. She is a leading advocate for First Amendment rights.
- **Steve Crescenzo**, Crescenzo Communications, senior editor and columnist for both The Ragan Report and The Journal of Employee Communication Management, and a columnist and contributor to Corporate Writer and Editor.
- **Hal Gordon**, former White House speechwriter who has written for Gen. Colin Powell and some of America's top corporate executives.
- **Freddi Vernell**, Federal Aviation Administration employee and winner of the 2007 DC's Funniest Fed competition.

SOME OTHER SESSION TOPICS include:

- **How to Survive Ambush Interviews** — by Peter Olson, Department of Public Safety, State of New Mexico
- **How to Create a Blog** — by The Federal Citizen Information Center
- **Crisis Communications: Case Studies of Disasters and Emergencies**
- **Appearing Before Congress** — by Frank Sietzen
- **Blue Pencil & Gold Screen Awards Panel**
- And much more... View the entire program at [www.nagconline.org/images/stories/nagcprogramoutline022108.pdf](http://www.nagconline.org/images/stories/nagcprogramoutline022108.pdf)

Register online today at <http://www.nagconline.org> ★



## NAGC Wants YOU

(to serve on the Board)

The following positions are available:

President-elect (Becomes President April 2010)

Treasurer (Term expires April 2009)

Competitions Director (Term expires April 2010)

Professional Development Director (Term expires April 2011)

Communications Director (Term expires April 2009)

Membership and Volunteer Director (Term expires April 2010)

Development Director (Term expires April 2011)

Marketing Director (Term expires April 2009)

Brief job descriptions and board service expectations are posted at <http://www.nagconline.org>. New staggered terms ensure the entire board does not rotate at once, so an initial commitment may be for 1, 2 or 3 years. Thereafter, all terms are two years.

If you are interested in placing your name on the ballot, contact Executive Director Beth Armstrong at [Armstrong@nagconline.org](mailto:Armstrong@nagconline.org) by Friday, March 7.

The Nominating Committee will meet to finalize the ballot on March 10, and it is anticipated that the vote will occur March 12-April 2. ★



## Membership Directory now available

**N**AGC has released the 2007-08 Membership Directory. This is a new benefit for members of NAGC. To assist you with networking in your state, the directory includes a list of members by state and city. An alphabetical listing of members provides complete contact information (address, phone, fax and email) for each member in good standing as of November 15, 2007. The directory also provides Board member and staff contact information. Log in to the "Members Only" section of the NAGC Web site [www.nagconline.org](http://www.nagconline.org) and select "Member Directory" from the menu on the right side of the home page. Email [info@nagconline.org](mailto:info@nagconline.org) if you need help with your user name and password. ★

## Half-price, pro-rated membership offer!

*For first-time members only!*

Join now to receive half-price on the regular NAGC membership rate! The NAGC membership year is Oct. 1-Sept. 30. Join at half-price now (\$60 instead of \$120) and you will be credited through Sept. 30, 2008.

Visit [www.nagconline.org](http://www.nagconline.org) for an application. ★

## Next Issue:

Communicator of the Year • Election Results • Bylaws Changes • Much More