

NAGC Member Spotlight—Kathy Zona

“I have problems with a homework question on xenon atoms,” began one request Kathy Zona received through the website for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio. But that was an easy one for the multi-talented Web coordinator. Let’s try something more challenging, like, “What is this thing over the air what I’ve seen tonight with my unarmed eyes?” This question was sent by a website visitor from Bulgaria.

Responding to a world-wide audience is ideal for Zona, who has spent much of her government career in public outreach, community affairs and education for NASA. She enjoys sharing her knowledge about how research benefits everyday life with the general public—including those in Bulgaria. In her current position, she is responsible for broadening NASA’s website audience through various marketing techniques and strategies, creating content, and developing multimedia offerings for the website.

Along with her day job at NASA, Zona wears many other hats. Her newest one is as Director of the Blue Pencil/Gold Screen Awards Competition on the NAGC Board of Directors, and we are delighted to welcome her as part of the NAGC leadership team.

Besides professional communicator, community volunteer, wife and mother of two daughters, her other hats include farm girl and animal rescuer. Kathy might be called an “animal whisperer.” (That’s bigger than a horse whisperer.) Kathy and her husband have 9 dogs, 8 horses, many sheep, goats, geese, and a turkey named Tom. “We usually have both a full house and a full barn,” she said. To help pay for the expense of all their animals, they also sell maple syrup products and greenhouse items.

Zona first got involved with NAGC in 2005 when NASA entered the Blue Pencil/Gold Screen Awards Competition—and won an award. That win inspired her to volunteer as a judge in 2007 and serve on the Blue Pencil/Gold Screen Awards Committee. This Committee is comprised of NAGC members from around the country who plan the awards competition—everything from holding podcasts on how to submit a winning entry, securing qualified judges in the many categories, advertising the contest, and planning the banquet, from food to entertainment. And they do all this through conference calls each month.

Zona sees her participation on these committees and her membership in NAGC as an opportunity “to share the common problems we all face as communicators across different levels of government.” And she adds: “This is a group of very dedicated individuals who quickly respond to suggested improvements in the awards ceremony and communication school.”

Through her participation in NAGC’s Communication School and awards competition, she has also been inspired to pursue leadership development courses. Zona recently completed a course in body language offered by Janine Driver, one of our keynote speakers at last year’s School.

Zona also teaches computer classes to adults at her local career center and finds introducing adults to the wealth of information available to them on the Internet as extremely rewarding. But it is her farm-girl alter-ego that she finds equally instructive. “I believe you should always have something to look forward to that you think is fun. Admittedly, my idea of fun sometimes includes cleaning stalls, but it seems, in work and life, you are always shoveling something, so you might as well make it a positive experience!” Now, that’s a philosophy many government communicators can identify with and adopt!