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By Ruth E. Thaler-Carter

Optimism and Strategic Renewal:

Today's challenging economy affects everyone, including APPA and its member institutions. In such trying times, institutions and organizations need strong leadership, optimism, and a willingness to revisit basic principles—and that is exactly what Polly Pinney plans to bring to APPA as its new President. Her theme for her presidential year, "Honing the Brilliance—A Time of Strategic Renewal," makes her focus clear.

AN UNTRADITIONAL START

Pinney, executive director of facilities management at Arizona State University in Tempe, came to facilities management from an untraditional route, and the same can be said about her path to her current professional position and her role in APPA. "I'm really delighted that the opportunity to become an educational facilities manager came my way—it's one of the most interesting jobs one could have—but, like many colleagues, I didn't set out to go into this field," she said. "In college, my first thought was that I would get involved in management, although I was also interested in the theatrical world; I always wanted a position where I would have a strong impact on an organization. I began this journey on the administrative side of the house, in labor relations and organizational development. From there, it was a short trip into facilities management."

One reason Pinney thrived in the field is because, she said, "I'm constantly challenged. For someone who has a rapid boredom level, that's a real plus."

AN INSPIRING CAREER

Pinney's "untraditional route" to her career in facilities management started with a bachelor's degree in theatre and communications and a master's degree in management, both from the University of South Dakota. She started out as a director of human resources and director of training and development for the South Dakota Department of Labor. She joined ASU in a labor relations position for Facilities Management. Once launched in facilities management, she made steady and impressive progress toward her current position: previous positions include manager, assistant director, associate director, and director in the facilities management department.

She has taken her professional education seriously. Pinney is a graduate of APPA's Institute for Facilities Management, Leadership Academy, and HERS-Mid America Institute for Women in Higher Education Administration at Bryn Mawr College. Areas of responsibility under Pinney's management have garnered six Governors Awards for Excellence, and she has been listed twice as one of the Outstanding Young Women of America.

Beyond her formal position, Pinney has demonstrated a deep-seated commitment to furthering professionalism both at her campus and throughout the field. In 1986, she developed and implemented the Physical Plant Supervisors Institute at ASU Facilities Management, the first supervisory academy specifically for physical plant supervision. She also developed and implemented an in-house Apprenticeship Program for ASU Facilities Manage-



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Left, Pinney accepts the presidential gravel from Bill Elvey. Above, the ASU facilities team.

THE PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Pinney takes her facilities management skills to communities outside ASU and APPA. For five years, she taught on issues related to the management of facilities organizations and strategic planning to facilities professionals in the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian community.

In addition to her deep involvement with RMA and APPA, Pinney also is an active local, state, and national member of the Association of Business and Professional Women. She also gives backs to the community by teaching résumé writing and interviewing skills at the Chrysalis Battered Women's Shelter.

There is, of course, more to Pinney than her dedication to

A Profile of President Polly Pinney

ment. Over her 23-year career, she has contributed to the facilities profession through speaking, writing, and teaching.

Pinney's APPA involvement is well-known to readers of *Facilities Manager*. Before becoming APPA President at the Vancouver annual conference, she served as APPA's Vice President for Professional Development; also served on the Rocky Mountain Association Board as RMA representative to the Professional Development Committee; was co-chair of the Welcome Committee for the APPA Educational Forum 2002 in Phoenix, Arizona; conference director for RMA's 2003 conference in Sedona, Arizona; speaker at regional and national forums on multiple occasions; was a facilitator for the Supervisor's Toolkit for RMA; is on the faculty of the Institute for Facilities Management; and was chair of the APPA subcommittee charged with redevelopment of the annual meeting, which presented its new format at APPA 2007.

her job and her professional organization. Her daughter Hillary (named after explorer Sir Edmund Hillary of Mt. Everest fame) and her sister Connie are "my heart and my soul; my support system," and have both been integrally involved in Pinney's life in APPA. "APPA has become a part of me, so it's appropriate that they become part of APPA," she said.

In her rare off time, Pinney enjoys cooking: "I find it relaxing. I enjoy the creativity, from the preparation to the presentation to watching people enjoy what I've done." She maintains her early interest in the theater and loves to travel.

SUPPORTING WOMEN IN THE FIELD

As a woman in what remains a male-oriented field, Pinney can remember when an Institute class consisted of "a couple hundred men and a handful of women." Lander Medlin and Maggie

Kinnaman were essentially the only women in visible positions in the profession and in APPA—"the numbers were few and far between. I have witnessed real growth in the diversity of our profession and field," she said. "That has been a real joy. Women have become not only more visible, but real leaders. It's very rewarding." And APPA has played an important role in that progress: "APPA has been a genuinely welcoming organization for women in many ways," Pinney said. "Diversity really enhances our dialog as professionals."

To ensure that other women have similar opportunities, Pinney is one of the founders of ASU's University Career Women. She is committed to continuing APPA's progress in diversity, in particular for women in the field. In 2008, she was one of a delegation of APPA members participating in CHEMA Women's Leadership Institute, a new program designed in collaboration with seven collegial associations that is targeted to women seeking to become senior leaders in higher education administration. She has recommended that APPA continue its collaboration on this endeavor and looks forward to "adding this opportunity to the rich fabric of programs we offer our members."



Pinney, right, with sister Connie and daughter Hillary.

Pinney is committed to inclusion and diversity in the profession and the association in all ways. She sees inclusion as vital to the future of APPA and the success of its members and their institutions. "APPA's leadership must create a climate of inclusiveness and collaboration where voices will be heard, ideas will be shared, and the business of change and growth can occur," she said in her platform. "This will require each of us, as members, investing in the future of our organization." By focusing on such collaboration, she says, "together, we can create greatness."

ENCOURAGING THE NEXT GENERATIONS

For Pinney, facilities management remains an exciting, fulfilling profession, and is one she wholeheartedly recommends to current students. "I think educational facilities places people in the most interesting position anyone can have, and in an ever-changing, vibrant environment," she said. "A college campus has so much to offer in technology and the cutting edge of contemporary society, and facilities management offers ways to make things happen. When a faculty member has an important invention or creation, we have a piece of it—



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“ APPA’s leadership must create a climate of inclusiveness and collaboration where voices will be heard, ideas will be shared, and the business of change and growth can occur ”

we created that lab, that building, that environment that could make it happen.”

Citing the rapidly changing workforce demographics that “challenge APPA’s programming models to stretch to meet the wants and needs of a new generation of facilities professionals,” Pinney used her presidential platform to call on APPA to “recruit, welcome, and retain these individuals with programs suited to their needs and style of learning, as well as strong mentoring programs to support them. We must embrace and explore new ideas and methods, while still retaining our passion and respect for the past,” she said.

COMING UP THROUGH APPA

Pinney first got involved with APPA in the 1980s through the encouragement of her boss at the time, Val Peterson. She started out as a member of the Rocky Mountain region, and her first contact with APPA was as a speaker at an international conference on gender communications. “My growth through RMA began as co-director of a conference, and the same happened with APPA,” she recalled. After she became a trainer for APPA’s Supervisor’s Toolkit program—“I love to teach that!”—she was elected to the Education Committee and had the opportunity to be a candidate for Vice President for Educational Programs. “That gave me the opportunity to see all aspects of APPA and its services to members,” she said. “I am a product of APPA development.” Topics that appealed to her then and remain vital to her today include educational and leadership opportunities offered by both

the RMA and APPA. “These are what built the foundation for my career growth.”

APPA Executive Vice President Lander Medlin and Past President Maggie Kinnaman take lead roles among those whom Pinney appreciates as role models in her professional career and her APPA involvement, in addition to Val Peterson, past APPA President and her boss at ASU, who encouraged his staff to be involved in APPA. “So many individuals have been instrumental for me, as

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friends, colleagues, and mentors,” she said. “Each APPA President I’ve had the privilege of working with has been instrumental in teaching me, developing me, and I must thank Chris Ahoy in particular for his ongoing encouragement and support.”

Pinney remains deeply loyal to and appreciative of her RMA roots. “You never forget the person who brought you to the dance and, for me, that would be the RMA,” she said.

That involvement has given Pinney education and leadership opportunities in her profession that cannot be matched anywhere else, as well as resources that come only from active participation in one’s professional association. “A degree and formal training gives you the background and knowledge, but on-the-job gives you the bedrock of your leadership skills,” she said. “The sheer fellowship of colleagues you meet through APPA gives you a rich network—there’s always someone to turn to. You can’t have a successful career without such a resource.”

CAMPUS CONCERNS, APPA RESPONSE

At ASU these days, Pinney faces the same challenges as many, if not all, APPA members and institutions. “The essence of this economy for our campus is extreme change with few resources. “We are a rapidly changing, ever-evolving campus. It’s the greatest ride you can take if you can stay on the pony. The challenge is to continue to serve with excellence.”

Like many of her colleagues, Pinney has had to lay off staff and reduce her workforce this past year, and has lost “considerable” budget dollars. At the same time, “the campus is growing incredibly fast, and demands for service are not changing. We must continue to provide services when technology is changing incredibly rapidly as well. We must provide skills and training to respond to new technology needs. Keeping our organization positioned to meet the changes is that largest challenge of all.

Pinney sees the current economy issues from several perspectives, all practical and pragmatic. “We need to remember that, after the rain, the sun always comes out,” she said. “One of the key roles for APPA will be to maintain a balance and keep serving the membership regardless of the economy. Our members are financially and resource challenged, yet they are growing—universities always increase enrollment when the economy is down.”

As she said in her APPA 2009 conference remarks, “In these turbulent and somewhat daunting times of ‘heat and pressure,’ it may be tempting for us to retreat to our campuses and try to hold steady and stem the tide by concentrating solely on our financial struggles or our immediate organizational needs. While I must admit this is certainly a needed response, I would assert that, at just such moments, we need to do much, much more.”

In response to the current challenges, “APPA has to find ways to help members cope. We have to stay on top of what’s hap-

pening and find ways to enhance our resources and those of our members. As an organization, we have to build new programs and resources, and use technology effectively.” She laid out her planned approach in her 2009 conference presentation: “We will search for opportunities to work smarter and more efficiently; to partner and leverage our services; and to expand our services and make them more accessible at all levels.”

What Pinney said in her election platform remains the case more than a year later, and will remain a focus in the coming year: “A diminished financial picture for many of our colleagues will mean we must be ever-vigilant to offer services in accessible formats and will challenge the organization to seek ways to ensure financial strength as we change and grow.”

Most importantly, Pinney said, neither APPA nor its members can give up or give in. “If we wring our hands and look only at the dark side, we will lose,” she said. “We must be ready for the time when the sun comes out.”

To make that preparation, Pinney is looking at her presidency as a year of strategic renewal. “It is my belief that this organization can survive and thrive,” she said. She agrees with the philosophy of Simon Bailey, who has said that organizations and individuals are “uncut diamonds, formed by heat and pressure, waiting to be polished to brilliance.”

Said Pinney, “It is time for us to look at APPA’s key principles in terms of where we are and where we’re going—to revisit and renew our understanding of and commitment to those principles. This fits into our key roles within APPA and how we assist our members. The heat and pressure we are experiencing creates an opportunity for us. An opportunity to revisit our services and our strategies, to assure we are on track to help our members hone the brilliance of their team members and their organizations.”

A POSITIVE PLATFORM

Pinney may be an optimist, but she is also a realist. “APPA has provided me with superior educational programs, cutting-edge tools, opportunities for growth and enrichment, and a rich network of valued colleagues and mentors. The times we now face will require all of these things and more for success.”

Pinney believes that not just strategic planning but strategic renewal will be key to APPA’s success in these difficult times. “The APPA organization thrives on a strong strategic direction with the 7 Key Strategies,” she said. “However, we are not done yet. APPA faces organizational challenges as well. I will continue to strongly support and promote the development and completion of the initiatives posed by the 7 Key Strategies. These are integral to position APPA as an organization for the future.”

Based on her belief that “a strong organization must be nimble enough to react and change to meet the needs of both

current and future members,” she is committed to supporting APPA’s certification initiative and the development of programs for the recruitment, education, and mentoring of our future professionals,” because “strong offerings in these areas will enhance our membership expansion efforts and bring new ideas and perspectives to us all.”

Because “the strength of APPA is in the collaborative relationships throughout all segments of the APPA community,” Pinney also has pledged to work to strengthen relationships, communications and collaboration between APPA international, the regions, and state and local chapters. “Our strength in this area lies in our ability to meet many needs in many places,” she said. “To do this, we need to work diligently at communication. One of our greatest challenges is to create strong, vibrant channels of communication both internally and with our peer groups, such as NACUBO and SCUP.”

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Recalling that, on being asked to serve the APPA membership as Vice President for Professional Development, she said, “I’m listening,” Pinney used her platform to ask members to “allow me to serve you. Please know: I am still listening.” Now that she is APPA’s President, she is speaking out as well as listening.

Pinney called on APPA members to remember that “APPA and the network of information, assistance, and strategies it offers are even more important as we all work to keep things on track and polish our diamonds. Thanks to a visionary foundation begun by Jack Colby and carried forward by Chris Ahoy, Alan Bigger, and Bill Elvey, we have a strong core of programs built on strategic assessment. Inside every challenge is an opportunity waiting to emerge. We will need to explore reinventing ourselves to meet the times and needs.”

Despite the challenging times, Pinney believes that “APPA’s future is extremely bright. If we are careful stewards—all of us, every member—and join together to share our ideas and needs, we can use those ideas to meet those needs,” she said. “One of my roles as President is to see that APPA not only survives, but thrives. “We are uniquely positioned to be the partner that helps our members and their institutions cope.” ☞

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