

Chapter Network

President's Perspective

Meet Connie Connor, Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter President

This month's President's Perspective features Connie Connor, CPP, President of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter. She has been an active member of APA National since 1987 and has served as a volunteer leader in both local and national capacities. She echoes the sentiment of APA's current President, Maureen Reed, CPP, CGBA who said, in referring to the APA, "We are all one big family." At the 17th Annual Congress, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter was awarded third place in the Chapter of the Year Competition and Best of Show in the Chapter Pictorial Contest.

Q. How long have you been associated with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter?

A. I have been a member of the SEPA Chapter since 1988.

Q. How many other positions have you held in the chapter?

A. In addition to President, I have served as Chapter Secretary for six consecutive years. During that time I also served on the Planning Committee for two of the chapter's three Pennsylvania Statewide Conferences.

Q. What has been the most rewarding aspect of being Chapter President?

A. The most rewarding aspect of being Chapter President is having the opportunity to work with enthusiastic and creative fellow officers and meeting with the chapter members. Speaking with prospective and new members about the benefits of being a member of APA—both National and Local—is also always enjoyable.

Q. What unique service do you think your chapter provides to its membership?

A. The SEPA Chapter offers numerous services that are unique:

- * A corporate membership enables individuals from the same company to join the chapter at a discounted rate;
- * National APA members receive a discount on SEPA Chapter membership dues;
- * An educational scholarship of \$1,000 is awarded annually to a member's child or grandchild who is selected as the winner of our essay contest;
- * Registration to APA's Preparing for Year-End course is provided free for one member and registration to attend the Annual Pennsylvania Statewide Conference is provided for two members. These winners are selected by a drawing;
- * A job opportunity page is available on our web site;
- * A resume file is maintained on any chapter member seeking an employment change.

In addition, there are several social activities held throughout the year for which the chapter covers all or most of the cost. These activities provide great opportunities for our members to network and forge business relationships that are a mainstay of the chapter.

Q. How do you communicate with your membership?

A. In several ways. At each meeting old and new issues are addressed. Every attendee receives a copy of “Chapter Chatter,” our quarterly newsletter which is also made available on the chapter’s web site. There are still a few members without fax or e-mail and they receive the chapter newsletter via mail. I also have an open-door policy and welcome any communication from the members of the chapter.

Q. What goes on at a typical SEPA Chapter meeting?

A. SEPA Chapter meetings are held as dinner meetings. Attendees are able to enjoy a delicious meal prior to delving into the payroll topic of the day. After dinner, as Chapter President, I call the meeting to order. Since there are always first-time attendees, they are invited to stand and be introduced to the membership. I then welcome them to the meeting and invite them to join the chapter. All old and new chapter business is addressed. Any upcoming APA events are announced. Members of the chapter who have recently obtained their CPP Certification are recognized and given APA’s sterling silver CPP lapel pin. Any members who have recently performed a task on behalf of the chapter, such as study group leaders, are presented with a certificate of appreciation. After all chapter business has been reviewed, the guest speaker for the evening is introduced. Once the speaker has delivered his/her speech, I ask if there are any further questions for the speaker. Before the meeting is adjourned, a winner is selected for our 50/50 drawing where half of the money collected goes to the winner and the other half goes to the chapter’s educational fund.

Q. As a Chapter President, how do you view APA National?

A. When I first joined APA and attended my first Congress, I immediately recognized the professionalism of the organization and realized that there were many individuals in my local area who could benefit from this Association. This motivated me to become more involved and active in my local payroll community. In my roles as Chapter Secretary and Chapter President I have found APA staff to be most helpful; they are willing to help with any situation or problem and are always there to lend a helping hand in any project that the chapter chooses to undertake. The friendships I have developed through APA National have been very rewarding and have far surpassed my expectations. I have the highest respect for APA National and look forward to a continued working relationship with them.

Q. What benefit does your chapter derive from APA affiliation?

A. Being affiliated with APA has given the SEPA Chapter many benefits. We continue to receive updates from Rita Zeidner and Scott Mezistrano, CPP in the Washington D.C. office, keeping us abreast of the many governmental changes and issues affecting the payroll industry. We are given the opportunity to have members of the National Speakers Bureau speak at our Statewide Conference. Recently the SEPA Chapter had the honor of being awarded third place in APA's Chapter of the Year Contest and Best of Show in the Chapter Pictorial Contest.

Q. Describe some of the different positions held by the chapter Board of Directors and how they work together to conduct the business of the chapter.

A. Currently, in addition to the position of Chapter President, the SEPA Chapter's Board of Directors consists of a Secretary, a Treasurer, a Chapter Coordinator, and a Government Liaison Officer. Our Treasurer keeps an accurate record of the chapter's finances and works very closely with me on how much we, as a chapter, have available to spend. All in all, the members of the board work well together. I remind everyone that if there is a task they cannot complete they should not hesitate to contact any other officers for assistance. This practice has worked very well so far with all officers being cooperative and understanding of each other's workloads.

Q. What are some key practices that have made your chapter successful?

A. It's a combination of things. Number one is leadership. Since its inception, the chapter has had hard-working and dedicated officers at the helm. Another is openness—all chapter leaders have maintained an "open door" policy welcoming comments and suggestions from the membership. Many of the decisions made on behalf of the chapter are first presented to the membership for their input. Though the Board of Directors makes the final decision, members' opinions are always taken into consideration.

Q. How do you feel APA National perceives the local chapters?

A. I believe APA National has great respect for the local chapters and appreciates the hard work that many of the chapters do to promote APA National. Personally, I have established many friendships with APA National staff through my membership with the local chapter.

Q. What are some of the most memorable chapter projects you have been involved in?

A. There have been many since I have been with the SEPA Chapter. Perhaps the most memorable would be preparing for the 1997 Pennsylvania Statewide Conference. As a member of both the board of directors and the planning committee, I had a great deal of fun working with my fellow members in decorating the hall, purchasing the gifts to give out to attendees and simply watching everyone who attended having a good time. Hearing positive feedback like "what a great conference!" reinforced my belief that we had done a very good job. The SEPA Chapter continues to be a strong chapter with many active members taking part in our projects.

Q. What barriers have you encountered as a Chapter President and how have you overcome them?

A. Barriers? Hmm...I would have to say that there is nothing that comes to mind that I would consider a barrier. The Board of Directors and the members of the chapter are just awesome people! If I had to pinpoint a challenge, it would be getting people to volunteer. All committees are open for volunteers, every member of the chapter is urged to get involved and help out in any way that they can. To any SEPA Chapter members who are reading this... Come on, get involved; don't be shy!

Q. Tell me about the connection between being active in your local chapter and crossing over to being active as a national volunteer.

A. Through my involvement at the local level, I received National recognition. I was first invited to lend a hand at one of the annual Congresses. The following year, I quickly volunteered to help out again. Those few hours of helping turned into a very rewarding experience as I had the honor of being appointed to serve on APA's Board of Advisors in 1997. Understanding the workings of the local chapter enabled me to make the transition to national participation smoothly. In 1999, I was appointed to serve on APA's Certification Board. It just takes a little initiative to get to know the APA National staff and let them know that you really are interested in helping.

Q. What types of NPW activities does your chapter try to organize?

A. We have been able to obtain both state and local NPW proclamations for the past three years. One of our members who works for the Philadelphia Electric Company has been able to have them scroll across the top of their very prominent headquarters building "PECO Energy Supports National Payroll Week." The chapter hosts a social evening during NPW where several local vendors come out to display their products while the chapter members enjoy some food, drink, dancing, door prizes, and of course, networking!

Q. What advice would you give to someone who is thinking about starting a chapter in their area?

A. My advice would be "Just Do It!" Although there are more than 100 chapters nationwide, there are still many areas that are in need of a local chapter. I would recommend starting out small and contacting payroll employees from local companies who may share your desire to start a chapter. The harder you look, the more people you will find who are interested in forming a chapter where they can meet their professional colleagues and discuss local payroll issues. The feeling of knowing that you can help others in our profession is one that words cannot describe.

Connie Connor, CPP has been working for the last 13 years as the Payroll/Accounting Coordinator for the National Board of Medical Examiners in Philadelphia, PA. She has been an active member of APA National since 1987.