



## The Future Direction of the American Philatelic Society

**W**ith a hotly contested election behind us, it is time for the new board to consider the future direction of our Society. A larger than life issue during the election was the future funding and completion of the Match Factory project. I agree that the completion of this project in a fiscally sound manner is important. However, I do not feel that it is the most important issue that we are facing. Let's also hope that this project does not become the singular focus of this new board.

### Moving Beyond the Match Factory

There are at least two issues, which can be said to be intertwined, that are just as important, if not more so, than the edifice in Bellefonte, Pa. They are declining membership and the services provided to the membership.

Reversing declining membership needs to be at the top of the "to do" list. If a target is set to improve the dues paying membership over the next four years by 25 percent and the target is achieved we will be well on the way to a sound fiscal foundation. I could not buy into Bob Lamb's assertion, during the campaign, that we lost membership just like every other organization during his tenure. Look at the results of the Linn's survey on stamp collecting that were featured in a recent issue. There are over two million people in this country that collect or save stamps and our membership bounces between 40,000 and 45,000 collectors. That is just two percent of the collecting community. Linn's statistics had to come from somewhere and that somewhere contains the names and addresses of those two million collectors. I think the board should consider hiring a company that specializes in building membership to attack this problem. Why not negotiate for the use of the Amos Publishing list, the U.S. Postal Service list, the Nutmeg email list, the Charles Shreve email list, the Mystic list and any other list that has been built over time? Maybe we should also employ a mailing list company to assist in the project. Just think: with the right ongoing program, if we were able to increase that two percent to say four percent, we would double our membership.

The second issue reflects the services members receive for their annual dues. During the election season I occasionally monitored different stamp chat rooms on the Internet to see what collectors were saying about the candidates. One topic that kept coming up was the perception that some collectors have about value received for their annual membership dues. I was surprised at the large number of negative posts. While I strongly disagree with their comments it does point out a problem. The Society

does not do enough to hit members over the head with all of the services they receive. Having dealt with associations, on a day-to-day basis, in my former life I can tell you that the truly successful ones constantly bombarded their membership with "this is what I've done for you lately". By improving the perception among members of the value received it will also serve to make it easier to attract new members. Another benefit of fostering this image is that you create a reason for people to join.

A second part of this issue is that fading American ethic: superior customer service. The American Philatelic Society's national office needs to do away with the cold, impersonal robotic phone system. When a member calls APS they should be greeted by a human being and not complex choices to reach the person he/she would like to speak with. An association is all about the people it serves on a personal basis and the person who answers the phone sets the tone (no pun intended) for the caller's first impression about the Society.

We have a great staff working for us in Bellefonte; we have an amazing monthly publication, world class library, and other products and service that no other collectibles organization offers. If the board will take the time to focus on ways to showcase "the nuts and bolts" to not only the membership but the collecting world as well, we should not have a problem attracting members.

As a country we found a way to put a man on the moon; as a Society we ought to be able to find a way to double our membership.

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