

President Patrick J. Duffy's  
Address to the New York State Assessors' Association  
September 13, 2005

## **ETHICS, EDUCATION, COMMUNICATIONS**

Everything I know, everything I've learned, I have taken from other people in my life - my parents, my in-laws, my wife, my children, members of my immediate family. In more recent years, I have learned from my extended family - the assessors and their staff, both those gathered here tonight, and those that have preceded us in career and life. When you think about it, our own development as professional Assessors has followed the same path - we come into the profession, we listen, we learn, we do.

Joseph Younglove  
George Hess  
John St. George  
Harold "Babe" Conklin  
Sue Otis  
Andrea Nilon  
Cathy Conklin  
Rick Hubner  
Roger Tibbitts

The first few names were founders of this Association; the others are but a few that have molded the founding ideals and principles to where we are today. They all came from different backgrounds, different parts of the state, became assessors and ultimately served the common cause of their profession as best they could. They are no different than anyone sitting here in the audience. As it was sixty-five years ago, we are united here today as an Association dedicated to advancing a higher standard in professionalism, education, and ethics for all Assessors.

The challenges and temptations that would undermine the core values of this Association are abound. In recent years, we have suffered a collective black eye and tarnished reputation at the hands of an extreme few. Herbert Spencer once wrote, "Education has

for its object the formation of character.” It is our solemn responsibility to educate the legislature that those who would seek to advance their own personal agenda do not represent our profession. We seek to separate ourselves from them and them from us.

I am not convinced that any further legislation is required. The current laws have proven they work and should be allowed to continue without a knee-jerk reaction. The suggestion that new legislation is necessary will fail in its inception if it seeks to restrict the honest Assessor and fails to address the self-serving. We look forward to working with the legislature to identify all carrot and stick options. Ethics and Professional Standards is a mandatory course, every two years, for DOS certified appraisers. Perhaps the time has come to explore the same mandate for every Assessor upon appointment, re-appointment, election, or re-election. We have a long history of demanding a higher level of ethics, expectations and professionalism from our members. To this end, we shall not falter, we will not compromise, we will not shy away from our sworn duty.

We have a responsibility to our taxpayers, municipal governments and ourselves to educate not only ourselves but our staffs as well. At last year's Annual Conference, I happened to be sitting in the back of the General Session. From that vantage point I noticed a lot of gray hair and bald spots. When I looked closer I realized what I was looking at was not age but experience. 2007 is coming; whether we are elected or appointed - it's time to cultivate a new generation. No Assessor learned the job overnight, let alone in six months or a year. It is time to start imparting the experience on the next generation.

We must educate our town boards, city councils, village trustees, and county and state officials that we have the interest of our taxpayers at heart. We may not always agree on how to best serve that interest, but one must always bear in mind that disagreement doesn't mean disrespect. We must educate our state Legislature that, although well intentioned as some may be, the recent proliferation of exemptions serves to undermine the basic tenet of equality for all.

Every Assessor is a teacher - TEACH! Every Assessor is a mentor - MENTOR!

Communications . . . We have, over the course of the last sixty-five years, seen a revolution in the ways we communicate. In 1940, communications media were limited to phones and letters. Today, we have phone, e-mail, instant messaging, faxes, cell phones, Blackberries, palm pilots, and yes, we still have the phone and “snail-mail.” As an Association, we utilize most of these media. As an Association, we attempt to keep you, the members, in the loop via the Bulletin, IAO Journal, the Interim Update and the web site. I am proud to be part of this information highway and what it has accomplished. The other side of the road, however, is in need of some over due attention - specifically, we need to strengthen the flow of information back from the individual members and from our county associations. We are an Association that prides itself on serving the needs of its members. We, the Executive Board, will provide the leadership that you demand of us, but in turn, we need you to be our compass - you need to give us the direction you want us to go.

Over the past fifteen years, I've taken a lot from this Association - it is now time to give back. I am truly honored, and quite frankly, humbled by your vote of confidence, words of encouragement and acts of support.

At this moment in my life, a simple “thank-you” seems so inadequate, but it's all that I have left to say and it is all that I can leave with you - THANK YOU!