

President's Column
Washington Psychologist
January 2004

James E. McKeever, Ph.D.

The first official communication to all of you from a new WSPA President is often a review of actions taken by, or issues confronting, WSPA. But WSPA is more than the sum of these actions, and certainly more than something we pay our dues to in order to receive benefits, whether they be the services of Doug Wear and the central office staff, Lucy Homans our Director of Professional Affairs, Gail McGaffick, our Lobbyist, or our CE offerings. I want to talk of WSPA as an organic entity, which we create through our involvement, and which is the body and soul of psychology in Washington State.

In his book, Bowling Alone (recently reviewed in *Contemporary Psychology*), Robert Putnam laid out the thesis that as Americans turn more to TV and the internet and stay home, rather than joining together in active, voluntary association, the "social capital" of America has eroded. This was in the tradition of seeing associations among people as being central to the health and well-being of both individuals and the overall society. As psychologists, we know that community – interconnections with others – is one of the things that buffers stress, builds resilience, binds us together in common undertakings, and gives meaning to what we do.

Yet we are all very busy, tied to our clinical practices and intellectual endeavors, juggling our personal interests and time with friends and families. At the same time, human services – and mental health services in particular – have been under sustained attack for several years now, affecting both our patients' access to services and our own ability deliver services in a financial viable way. It seems increasingly hard to find balance in our lives.

Under such circumstances, how do we justify contributing our hard-earned dollars for WSPA dues, to say nothing of U-PAC contributions, APA dues, other more focused psychological organizations, CE offerings, books and journals, and so on? When we are trying to squeeze extra patients or professional activities into packed schedules, how can we justify taking time to attend WSPA activities or committee meetings, engage in lobbying for psychology on either the state or federal level, or representing psychology in the media? WSPA regular hears complaints that dues are just too high, that CE activities are too expensive, that someone would like to become more involved but doesn't have the time.

I struggle with these same dilemmas. My wife thought I was crazy to agree to be WSPA President at the same time as I had children at home, was shifting to a new job at Children's, and was facing college expenses. I have to be honest that at times I agree with her. When I was asked to consider joining the WSPA Council of Representatives 5 years ago I did not plan on being here today. It is a sacrifice for me to donate one to two week's worth of private practice income to meetings, to say nothing of the time for fielding e-

mails, writing columns and agenda, and doing whatever is required to represent psychology in Washington State.

Yes, we do make sacrifices when we join together in a cause. But when I think about my experiences with WSPA, and when I look at my colleagues, past and present, on the Board and the State Council, I am struck by how much all of us have gained by these sacrifices. The sense of joining together with others in a fight for a profession and a mission that we all hold dear, the friends we have made by coming together, and the contributions we all feel we are making to our profession, our state and our country have enriched our lives immeasurably. Psychology in Washington State is a community of wonderful, creative, dedicated individuals who devote untold hours to building WSPA into an organization that we are proud of because it speaks so strongly for psychology as a profession and a field of study, as well as for the needs of those we work with. It is not by chance that those who have already made substantial contributions to WSPA keep coming back to make further contributions. When we stand together we are stronger, and each of us who has contributed to WSPA feels this strength and this sense of community.

So I want to ask each of you to join in the work of WSPA in whatever way you are able. While WSPA continually strives to work efficiently and keep the costs of membership down, there is no way we can do the work we do without your financial contribution. And if you know other psychologists who are not members, try to get them to join too: we are stronger when we have more voices (to say nothing of the fact that increased revenue could then lead to decreased dues). In trying to keep costs down, we have restructured the work of our legislative consultant, and we will now need help from all of you in reaching out to legislators. Our committees always need your involvement. We always benefit from those of you who offer to do CE programs, and from those of you who come to our conventions and CE offerings. We need to develop more ways to make connections with those in more rural areas or smaller communities, as well as psychologists who bring diversity to our profession. Bring academic colleagues, students and early career psychologists into WSPA with you. At the very least, check our broadcast e-mails and familiarize yourself with our new (and developing) website.

If you do whatever you can to join with us in building this community of dedicated psychologists that is Psychology in Washington State, I promise we will do our utmost to make sure that your contributions yield dividends for you, so that you, too, can feel that same sense of excitement and mission that I feel. Like democracy, WSPA is not perfect, but it's better than the alternatives! Let us continue to work together for what we believe in, rather than bowl alone!