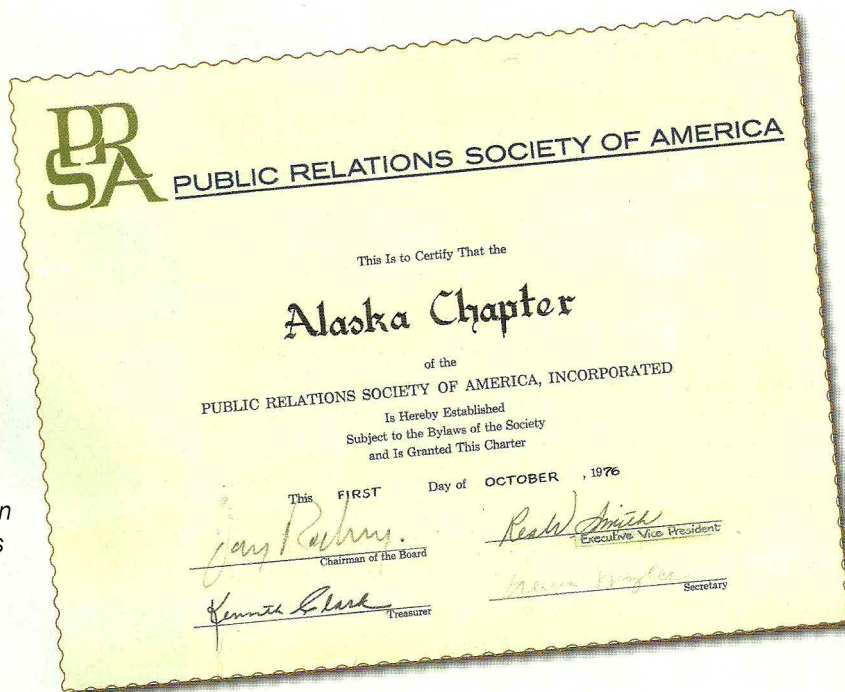


PRSA Alaska Plays Vital Role at 35

Provides learning and networking opportunities

BY SUSAN SOMMER

The charter given from the Public Relations Society of America when the Alaska Chapter was formally recognized.



Public relations can make or break a project, a public figure or a company. Think controversial blueprint, politicians or introduction of a neighborhood liquor store. While PR is clearly only a piece of the whole enterprise pie, its role is often undervalued and its practitioners relegated to supporting cast. The Public Relations Society of America exists to help PR professionals overcome these obstacles as well as foster standards, learning opportunities and networking among its members. Alaska's chapter of PRSA celebrates its 35th year in 2012 and forges ahead as the state's premier organization for the industry.

ALASKA CHAPTER, NATIONAL REACH

PRSA Alaska, based in Anchorage, has about 130 members statewide and offers monthly networking luncheons, professional development seminars, webinars, a job bank, education opportunities, a mentorship program, awards recognition and accreditation preparation. Monthly subchapter luncheons are also held in Fairbanks. Members work

in numerous industries and include 14 accredited in public relations and seven PRSA fellows.

The Alaska chapter was founded by Anchorage-based Bruce Pozzi, who is still an active member. The group was certified in 1977.

"We give quality council and advice. You don't have to go to the bigger city," Pozzi says. "We've grown up, we've become professional. We're damn good!"

PRSA Alaska members call Pozzi the "George Washington" of the chapter; he was first and second year president, the first Alaskan to earn the APR (Accredited in Public Relations) credential and became a national PRSA fellow in 1993.

The state is no longer a communications desert since the introduction of email and the Internet, and its PR professionals have played a significant part in national public relations circles. Three PRSA Alaska members have served on the organization's national board of directors and seven local communicators have been inducted into its College of Fellows. To be inducted a person must dem-

onstrate a footprint on the profession through accomplishment, community service and leadership.

LUNCHING AND LEARNING

Committees within the local chapter include those focused on advocacy, accreditation, awards, education, fundraising, membership, mentorship, programs, publicity and statewide unity. The monthly luncheons, though, are what everyone really looks forward to.

And no wonder, with guest speakers such as Ann Wylie, owner of Wylie Communications Inc., who shared her knowledge of how important writing is to good public relations. Jim Lukaszewski was another recent featured speaker at a local chapter luncheon. As a national leader in crisis communication strategy and strategic counseling, Lukaszewski shared his expertise and insight with Anchorage and Fairbanks members at a half-day seminar focused on how to be a company's trusted strategic adviser.

Longtime PRSA Alaska member Vivian Hamilton, who is accredited in

public relations, is a national fellow and works as communications manager for the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, says the best placement within an organization for the PR professional is directly reporting to the CEO. "Public relations is responsible for the reputation of the entire entity," she says, making a case for having direct access to executive management for its global view of the business.

PRSA makes it easy for college students to take advantage of the group's offerings, too. The University of Alaska Anchorage is home to a chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America and works closely with the journalism department to foster relevant skills for Alaska's work force.

Volunteering within the organization is another way to learn about the PR world. President of the Alaska chapter for 2012, Kirsten Schultz says, "Through volunteering I've connected with members from a variety of different industries across the state. We all bring different experiences and abilities to the chapter. It's through those relationships I've learned the most about our profession."

BUILDING TRUST

The PRSA Code of Ethics governs members' professional activities and is also meant to be a model of good behavior for anyone working in the PR field. Ethical practices and interaction with clients and the public should adhere to values such as advocacy, honesty, loyalty, professional development and objectivity.

The Code advises professionals to "protect and advance the free flow of accurate and truthful information; foster informed decision-making through open communication; protect confidential and private information; promote healthy and fair competition among professionals; avoid conflicts of interest; and work to strengthen the public's trust in the profession." Should PRSA members encounter an ethical matter they need more in-depth guidance on, they're invited to talk with the organization's Board of Ethics and Professional Standards.

"We work to educate the community about PRSA's Code of Ethics and the role public relations professionals serve

as strategic advisors," says 2011 Alaska chapter president Emily Ford. "Most importantly, PRSA Alaska makes connections. What I have valued the most about my PRSA Alaska experience is the opportunity to make connections with communicators from across the state, to learn from my peers and to have other public relations professionals to lean on for professional guidance."

Ford says if she had to describe the Society in just three words, they would be "valuable, dynamic, informative."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR PRSA ALASKA?

With an always uncertain economy, fewer employers are paying professional membership fees for their staff. Many PRSA Alaska members end up paying for the monthly luncheons out of their own pockets. In response, PRSA Alaska tries hard to provide excellent value to members by hosting more nationally recognized speakers of high caliber at discounted rates, as well as informative webinars and other educational offerings.

Carla Beam has been a PRSA Alaska member for more than 30 years. This PR expert, now vice president for University Relations and president of the University of Alaska Foundation, shares her vision of how crucial the role of the state's PR force is to public policy issues: "We have a strong university system to help us research and formulate the kind of approach and dialogue that just might be a model for other parts of the country and world. This requires us to be as much visionaries and leaders as we are skilled public relations technicians."

What about those communicators just entering the PR industry? asks Kirsten Schultz, "Whenever young professionals seek perspective on the job market here, the first thing I advise is joining PRSA's Alaska Chapter." The professional development opportunities, she says, are available nowhere else in the state, and the relationships they form will connect them to a statewide network of professionals willing to mentor and advise them throughout their careers. "It's an unparalleled resource for all professionals, no matter their level of experience." □

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