

Message from the Chair



Giving Back |

BY **FREDERICK E. SCHEA, CMA, CFM, CPA**

I've just returned from a life-changing experience. No, it wasn't the IMA Annual Conference & Exposition (although that was a wonderful opportunity that I was proud to be part of). For the past three years, I've participated in the Appalachia Service Project (ASP), a volunteer organization that provides home repair for low-income families in Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Our team drove 500 miles to West Virginia to spend a week making several families' homes "warmer, safer, drier," in the words of the ASP. From sleeping on cots in an elementary school classroom, to sitting on miniature-sized chairs in a gym, to meeting families whose primary worries were whether they would have enough food for supper or be safe from the spring rains—it was a humbling experience that allowed me to meet people who live lives very different from my own.

While service with the ASP may not be for everyone, countless opportunities exist within our communities to make a difference at nonprofit and volunteer organizations like it. I believe that, as accountants, we have

a social responsibility to do so. We offer a unique set of financial and managerial skills that many nonprofits—which often devote more energy to fulfilling their mission than to keeping up with business matters—eagerly need. Whether it's serving as a treasurer or financial advisor, helping to assemble a budget, or even getting out there to repair a roof, these volunteer roles give us a chance not only to give back to others, but also to move beyond our comfort zone and make us better people—and better professionals—because of our service.

Many companies now recognize the benefits that such volunteer service provides. Just look on the websites of numerous well-known

organizations, and you'll see how they tout the opportunity to give back to the local community as a benefit of employment.

I'm pleased that IMA also furnishes ways to give back to our communities, particularly to young people who are interested in pursuing management accounting. For one thing, IMA continues to offer direct financial support to students. This year alone we gave away more than \$35,000 to students through our Memorial Education Fund and Stuart Cameron McLeod Society scholarships.

We also recently began working with the National Academy Foundation (NAF), a nonprofit partnership between business leaders and educators that serves high school students in primarily urban but also suburban and rural districts. Through a cooperative agreement, IMA members now can volunteer to speak to high school students about the profession, as well as offer internships that provide real-world context for classroom learning. You can learn more about this partnership at www.imanet.org/relations_partnership_NAF.asp.

On a smaller scale, but equally as important, another great way to give

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back is to become a mentor to a local high school or college student—or even a new hire within your company. The time you spend could really shape the course of someone's future.

It's easy to think that someone else will step up to fulfill these volunteer roles, but that's not always the case. As a volunteer for the Boy Scouts of America, I've participated on the board of review of nearly 400 Eagle Scout applicants. Recently, I was struck by the enormous volunteer effort—of Scoutmasters, business leaders, and teachers, among others—that helped one Scout achieve his Eagle distinction. I thought to myself: "If we don't do it, it doesn't happen." I invite us to consider that challenge. You can reach me at fschea@imanet.org. ■