

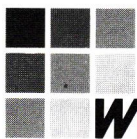
COLUMNS





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The Pittsburgh Chapter AIA serves 12 Western Pennsylvania counties as the local component of the American Institute of Architects and the Pennsylvania Society of Architects. The objective of the Chapter is to improve, for society, the quality of the built environment by further raising the standards of architectural education, training and practice; fostering design excellence; and promoting the value of architectural services to the public. AIA membership is open to all registered architects, architectural interns, and a limited number of professionals in supporting fields. Chapter Headquarters: CNG Tower, 625 Liberty Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15222 Telephone: 412/471-9548; FAX: 412/471-9501.

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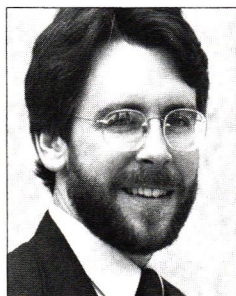
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View Point: Grassroots 1991 — Surviving the “Meeting Machines”

Robert S. Pfaffmann, AIA, 1st Vice President



Grassroots *n.*, “the fundamental level or source; ordinary people, the rank and file of a political party or other group.”

It doesn't take long to develop a certain amount of cynicism about AIA National, much like that which we often reserve for our Congressional representatives in Washington, DC.

As I dutifully waded through the blur of meetings, workshops and briefings at the 1991 Grassroots Leadership Conference, I kept getting the impression that the Grassroots planners and staff were not really interested in what we had to say except when the subject was dues. Throughout the presentations it was clear that many of the staffers and leadership had forgotten that the majority were attending for the first time. Nowhere was this more evident than in the poor planning for the Capitol Hill lobbying visits. Fortunately for the Pittsburgh delegation, we did get to meet informally over breakfast with PSA's impressive new state lobbyist who knows his way around the overscaled halls of Congress.

As I adjusted to my four-day internment at the Grand Hyatt Hotel (complete with Liberace-like piano floating on an island in the lobby pool!) I realized that I was not alone in my frustration with the conference. At one point, we even heard suggestions we walk out on the scheduled events and set a new conference agenda. Many felt a truly grassroots “architects congress” might be more effective than some of the canned programs that teach you, for example, not to stand in public with your hands in front of your crotch!

Most of the real useful learning doesn't happen in the underground ballrooms but in “the spaces in-between,” the coffee shops, backrooms and bars of these meeting machines. There you can compare notes with a fellow chapter leader from any number of cities, making the whole grassroots experience worth our time and the Chapter's money.

Maybe we ought to just hold the conference in the hotel lounge next year!

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On the Cover

A sun-dappled entryway greets visitors to Riverside Commons, the renovated May Stern Warehouse. Read on for a true rags-to-riches, grave-to-cradle story. *Abandoned Warehouse*, page 6.