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Changes. And More Changes. By Anne J. Swager, Hon AIA



Our communications committee has elected to take on the daunting but worthwhile task of a communication plan for AIA Pittsburgh.

When my daughter Betsy was in junior high

she brought home an intriguing assignment which I can still remember. She had to name five or maybe ten things that her parents had used but that were no longer relevant for her. The only one I remember was the slide rule. My father, an engineer, was extremely adept with a slide rule and I actually was reasonably proficient in high school. Of course that was back when a (as in one) computer took up a whole room and calculators needed cords and cost what a really good PDA/cell phone costs today. By college I could no longer use the slide rule or at least I didn't need to. We had computer labs and calculators on every desk.

Dick Rittelmann's intriguing and important article on the future of the architectural profession in this month's issue talks about many of these profound changes—in how we work and how we receive communication. You need to read his article to get to his conclusions but it will be well worth your time...I promise.

I hesitate to enumerate the changes the AIA has undergone since I started for fear that I will instantly become a dinosaur in your eyes but the changes have been many. The publication you're now reading is a product of a brainstorming session from about 18 years ago. In many ways it has not changed much since its debut issue. Certainly the editorial content has evolved and the graphics have been redone but its mission of a newsletter/magazine or as one member of the communications committee opined "the face of AIA Pittsburgh" has largely remained the same.

What has happened is that *Columns* has been joined by *eColumns* and the website. We only do direct mail occasionally and our directory is online. While we have a variety of communication tools, it's not always clear to us what is getting read and, more importantly, what matters to you.

That's why our communications committee has elected to take on the daunting but worthwhile task of a communication plan for AIA Pittsburgh. Eric Ostth, AIA is leading (quite capably I might add) this effort with the

help of Donald Zeilman, AIA who is now chairing the committee. We're happy to say that the committee includes new members Michael Kuchera, AIA and Roxanne Sherbeck, AIA who have much to offer.

The plan will examine our communication tools and evaluate their efficacy with you, the architect, and also our other target audiences. What outcomes should you expect? A change in the design of the different products for one and, at the very least, a clearer understanding of what information comes from what source.

After all, we not only want you to read what we offer but we also want you to be able to retrieve the information if and when you need it. Our ability to do this well will take resources and it will take your willingness to let us understand what you need and what you want.

In March we ran a brief reader survey of *Columns*. By brief, I mean it took less than three minutes to fill out online unless you added comments which many of you did. My favorite statistic is that 23% of you have kept every issue of *Columns* you have ever received. Your biggest complaint? The illegibility of the print. We were pleased with the response and we sincerely thank all of you who participated.

Expect more surveys. We know you have too much to do and so we promise to be brief but we need your input to move forward and to be successful. And we will listen.

If there is one constant in my years with AIA Pittsburgh, it is your willingness to engage with us. No matter how much information there is, and it grows exponentially every day, sharing with each other—as opposed to assuming what the other understands—remains at the root of effective communication. So please let us know what's on your mind by any method—email, letters, phone calls or face-to-face. We relish the opportunity to talk with you.

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On the cover: Members of AIA Pittsburgh's Programming Committee: (TOP) Ken Stehle, Assoc. AIA, WTW Architects; Jenn Neal, AIA, Astorino; Tom Price, Assoc. AIA, Strada; Carl Bolton, Assoc. AIA, Perfido Weiskopf; (Bottom) Ana Migone, Assoc. AIA, WTW Architects. Photo by Tracy Certo.