

# CONSTRUCTION WRITERS ASSOCIATION

# A Concise History

*By Tom Kuennen*



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**T**he occasion of the Construction Writers Association's Golden Anniversary in 2008 is a good opportunity to take a brief look at how the association evolved, because today's construction writers benefit from the volunteer work and strong foundation on which their predecessors labored decades ago. Here's a quick look at how the Construction Writers Association (CWA) began and changed through the years.

### How CWA Began

The Construction Writers Association was incorporated in the state of New York in 1958. It was founded following a gathering of construction magazine and newspaper editors and writers covering the 1956 meeting of the Highway Officials of the Atlantic States in Atlantic City.

CWA's organizational meeting, at which the first officers were elected, was held at the Conrad Hilton Hotel, now the Chicago Hilton and Towers, during the January 1957 meeting of the Associated Equipment Distributors there. If the association dates its inception from the incorporation date, CWA celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2008.

"The driving force behind the formation of Construction Writers Association was Robert F. Boger, publisher of *Engineering News-Record* and later a McGraw-Hill vice president," said founding member E.E. "Gene" Halmos in 1998. "Boger had been the publisher of *Aviation Week* before coming to the construction books (including the now-defunct *Construction Methods*) and was much taken with the prestige and clout exercised by the Aviation Writers Association, of which he was a member and sponsor."

Boger settled on Halmos as the main organizer, because he was then the only

high-ranking, non-civil engineer on the staff of *ENR* — Halmos was managing editor — and offered to pay for incorporation and any other expenses that might occur.

"I was interested for another reason: We are all engaged in writing about a business — construction — in which professional status has real value, a la ASCE, NSPE and the AIA," Halmos said. "But most writers — although engineers or construction professionals — had no such status. I, and those like me who came from journalistic backgrounds, had no professional 'home' of our own. Although some of us were members of various press clubs, such clubs really weren't home to us. The members, most of them working for the general daily press, weren't concerned with the sort of news that interested me and my readers. So discussions and activities really didn't concern me and didn't offer me any advantages professionally. Finally, those of us in construction writing needed some place to exchange ideas, swap sources and stories, and help out with peculiar problems we faced."

Halmos used *Standard Rate & Data* and other sources to determine that there were about 200 publications concerned with the construction industry. "There were very few horizontal papers covering the whole field (i.e. *ENR*, *Contractors & Engineers*) but plenty in more vertical fields such as *Roads & Streets* (later *Highway & Heavy Construction*), *Water and Sewage Works* and *Concrete Products*. In addition, there were the major associations and societies in the field that had their own publications, PR organizations and some major manufacturers. There was an ample 'universe' from which to draw membership.

A lot of letter writing by Halmos to many of the editors whom he knew followed, but

Construction Writers Association



not much else, until the meeting in Atlantic City. “There was a considerable group of writers in attendance,” Halmos said, including Bill Quirk, Jim Jenkins, Ed Weilepp, then editor for *Kansas Construction*, Art Faber of the Associated Equipment Distributors, John Rehfield (then with a predecessor of *Construction Equipment*), Duane Cronk (then a freelance writer in Washington), Halmos, and others.

“At that meeting, we decided the idea of forming CWA was good and we should go ahead, using as our basis the statement in the later-adopted Constitution and By Laws that stated the purpose of the association,” Halmos said. The purpose later was engraved on metal plaques that were distributed to members.

Weilepp was elected the first president of CWA, following its organizational meeting in Chicago Jan. 27, 1957. Other officers included vice president Jenkins, *American Road Builder Magazine* of the American Road Builders Association, Washington, D.C., now the American Road & Transportation Builders Association, and secretary-treasurer George E. Symons, *Modern Highways Magazine*, New York City. Other founders included Quirk, editor, *Contractors & Engineers Monthly Magazine*, and Halmos, senior editor, *Engineering News-Record Magazine*, both of New York.

“The organization, a professional society,” said an early CWA release, “has as its main objective the improvement of standards of construction writing throughout the industry, and adequate recognition of these writers.”

“It [the organizational meeting] was in a sample room at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago in January of 1957, provided to us through the courtesy of [AED editor and future CWA president] Art Faber,” wrote Weilepp in 1998. “There were about 20 of us there, covering the AED annual convention.

“As the editor of a small, one-state construction publication, I was the ‘compromise’ candidate to get the thing started. At least two big national books were after the ‘honor,’ and to forestall a battle which could have killed the organization for a couple of years, I was elected. I was re-elected a year later as we struggled to get going. I also did the work

of secretary — or my girls in the office did — and we had no treasurer because I don’t believe we collected any money those first two years.”

In 1998, long-time member M.D. “Doc” Morris, P.E., then a senior editor with McGraw-Hill’s *Construction Series*, and 1997 Silver Hard Hat winner, said seeing founding member Halmos at CWA meetings “harkened me back to the early Fifties in New York City, when I was a green kid among the likes of him, Bob Dodds, Ed Cleary, Hank Perez, and Bill Quirk.”

Morris said that Quirk’s kindness and technical acumen was spread widely, which is the kind of networking that CWA is all about.

“Bill and I stayed close friends for the rest of his life,” Morris recalled. “Over those years I began teaching technical writing, expanding some of [Quirk’s] first lessons to me. By helping me, Bill Quirk indirectly helped 15,000 subsequent students to write better, and countless readers to get lively, profitable information, all from the kind concern of a true professional.”

### CWA in the Sixties

In 1964, wall-hung metal plaques were distributed to members, with the CWA logo at top, a banner in which the member’s name was to be engraved and the purpose of the association, to which CWA members subscribed:

*To establish and maintain the highest standards of quality and veracity in the gathering, writing and dissemination of information concerning the Construction Industry; [and] To advance the cause of the Construction Industry in the interest of its own progress and in promotion of the national welfare.*

CWA’s first newsletter appeared in July 1963. “As you know,” the first newsletter assumes optimistically, “our last annual meeting decided that we should issue some sort of newsletter to our members – to keep them abreast of what the organization and its officers and committees have been doing – and eventually to provide a forum for exchange of ideas, suggestions and news of members. This, then, is our first



Ed Weilepp, first president of CWA.





try.” The newsletter was to be issued quarterly and the first issue contained a pull-out annual roster.

Mid-1963 found CWA in a determined membership campaign. “Our membership roster has begun to grow substantially, within the past month or two, for the first time in a couple of years,” CWA reported.

In March 1964, CWA conducted its first annual Construction Writers Seminar at Michigan State University in East Lansing. Halmos and CWA president Faber met with the U.S. Bureau of the Census to improve and refine the reporting of construction industry statistics in the United States. Until 1964, the address of CWA moved as the secretary-treasurer changed; that year it was established at Halmos’ office in Washington.

ing, with two dozen registered. That year the association also joined with Ohio State University to help establish an industrial arts curriculum in U.S. junior high schools. With industrial arts courses then being all but mandatory in most junior high schools, CWA said the potential existed to reach some four million students in the first four years of the program.

That year the association also pondered its future. A special meeting was held March 1, 1967, at the Hotel Commodore in New York City to determine how CWA could rejuvenate itself and determine new missions. International Harvester sponsored a cocktail reception and dinner. The meeting found that CWA should hold three regular meetings each year, in different cities. Before con-

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“**The organization, a professional society, has as its main objective the improvement of standards of construction writing throughout the industry, and adequate recognition of these writers.**”

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By June 1964, CWA had 43 regular and 10 associate members, which would grow to 49 regular and 15 associate members by January 1965. Some 23 members attended that January’s annual meeting at the Conrad Hilton, CWA’s first “full-dress” meeting with its own program, again held in conjunction with AED’s convention. Journalist Don Gehring conducted a morning session on photography and use of photos in publications, and the Census Bureau discussed construction stats and how their presentation would change. The AED and the Wire Reinforcement Institute underwrote lunch and a cocktail hour, respectively. Later that year CWA considered holding regional meetings in Washington, New York, Chicago and the West Coast.

In 1966 CWA eliminated the associate membership category, making all members the same status. Membership fees were harmonized at \$12.50 per year, \$77 in 2006 dollars.

In January 1967 CWA abandoned its tradition of co-locating its annual meeting with the AED meeting in Chicago, opting to hold its annual meeting at the Americana Hotel in Miami Beach. Attendance was disappoint-

ing, with two dozen registered. That year the association should first focus on improving services to members, such as developing a membership directory, in lieu of the existing bare-bones membership list. Preparation of guides for the submittal of photos and press releases was to be undertaken, and a job matching program instituted.

That May, in addition to a regular meeting in New York City, a meeting was held with great success in San Francisco, engaging western editors, freelancers and publicists.

In 1968, as opposition to the ramped-up interstate highway program swelled, CWA pledged support to the American Road Builders Association as it launched a new public relations effort, dubbed TRIP, or The Road Information Program. To TRIP — to be headed by former Pennsylvania Good Roads Association director Don Knight — CWA offered editorial services, individual volunteers, mailing lists and moral support.

Late 1968 saw the creation of CWA’s first awards, the *Silver Hard Hat*, presented to a member for outstanding writing or editing that served to advance the construction

industry, and the *Man-of-the-Year*, presented to an outstanding individual in the construction industry. Two guidelines were that the *Man-of-the-Year* not be a CWA member and be an individual who had not been widely recognized previously.

In 1968, for the first time, the association also participated in the annual American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO, now AASHTO), and the ARBA (now ARTBA) Public Information Workshop, now known as the National Transportation Public Affairs Workshop (NTPAW).

Then, during CWA's annual meeting at the Feb. 15, 1969 – during the CONEXPO “Road Show” in Chicago — the association awarded its first *Silver Hard Hat* to Halmos, and the *Man-of-the-Year* – now renamed the *Silver Hard Hat* – to John M. Harbert III, president of Harbert Construction Corp. of Birmingham, Ala., in view of his outstanding PR efforts in promoting public acceptance of construction.

### Struggle in the Seventies

The *Silver Hard Hat* awards were deemed so successful that in 1970 their expansion was discussed. The outcome was the creation that year of the *Robert F. Boger Memorial Award for Excellence in Construction Reporting*, “in honor of our late colleague from McGraw-Hill, CWA's first supporter, and without whose efforts, indeed, the organization would not have been formed,” the association said.

Also in 1970, the association sought to establish CWA rooms at industry meetings and conventions around the country. For example, a room was established at a state DOT meeting in Salt Lake City. And a Canadian CWA meeting took place in Montreal in conjunction with the International Road Federation's 6th World Highway Congress.

In 1971, CWA moved its annual meeting from Chicago to Washington to help celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Highway Research Board (HRB), now the Transportation Research Board (TRB). This important meeting was planned by D.C. members such as Don Knight and Hugh Gillespie, former director of public relations for the National Asphalt Pavement Association, but moved recently to the HRB. The



meeting was held at the Shoreham Hotel and the Terex Division of General Motors hosted the annual dinner. The first Boger award was presented to John Rehfield, editor of *Construction Equipment*, for his seven-part, forward-looking series, *Breakthru '70s*. The Boger then carried with it an honorarium of \$25, \$125 in 2006 dollars.

Membership in CWA was 58 as the Seventies began. Chicago meetings were continued successes, but the association continued to deal with disappointing meeting attendance in locations other than Chicago. While some four dozen attended the annual dinner in D.C. in 1971, CWA was unable to attain a quorum at its business meeting that next day, complicated in part by the fact that AED was meeting simultaneously in Las Vegas, and many members were there. A new membership drive was planned later that year.

The result was a record six new members approved by the board at its February 1972 meeting in Chicago. There, over 50 enjoyed an awards dinner sponsored by Ford Finance Co.

CWA held its annual meeting in January 1974 in Las Vegas. “The decision to follow AED to Las Vegas was conducted after lengthy deliberations,” the newsletter reported. “The committee considered the consequences of CWA attempting to put together a program, say, in Washington — getting some important speakers, for instance — and then having only a few members show up.” AED, it was thought, would attract many individuals who had business

Tom Kuennen, a CWA member since 1985, is the author of this CWA history.



with both groups. “Also considered was the probable difficulty of getting a publisher to OK an expense-account item to cover a trip to Washington for no other purpose than to attend a CWA session.”

Membership rose to 66 even as the association removed inactive members from its list. Unheralded in 1974 were what must have been CWA’s first woman members, Maggie Gerloff, *Contractors & Engineers Magazine*, who became CWA’s first female director, and Betty Ann Rose of Gurnham & Associates Inc. In October 1974 Gerloff bore a daughter to great acclaim, another first for an in-office CWA director. By 1977 Rose and Joan Finch of the Building Research Advisory Board in Washington were board members. Voting membership remained stable at 63 and members were urged to bring in new blood.



Greg Sitek, CWA president from 1981-83, is still active in the association and won a CWA journalism award in 2003. The award was presented by Tracie Christie.

### Toward Today's CWA

In 1978 CWA made its first move toward what is now today's CWA by scheduling its annual meeting for November in Washington, D.C., independent of any other association. “The daylong meeting would wind up by providing real copy for many of us, and certainly better background on matters of interest for future editorial use,” the association opined. “Final item would be our annual dinner and awards ... it would finally allow CWA to stand on its own feet as an association.” The meeting was deemed such a success that it was to be repeated in 1979.

But through the Seventies meetings gener-

ally were lightly attended. The board launched yet another “rejuvenation” effort in 1978, for the first time sending out promotional material to a mailing list of 75. As was observed, many of the members belonged only for the newsletter, and to receive and be on the all-important membership list, which could be used by members for mailings when done in accordance with bylaws. By December 1979, membership hit 100, the highest ever.

In 1980 the annual November meeting returned to Chicago. Then another annual meeting was held in January 1981 to coincide with the CONEXPO show—conducted on a six-year cycle at the time—at Houston's Astrodome.

Also in 1981, a contest was launched to redesign CWA's 23-year-old logo, which had been designed by member Jim Jenkins. Complaints included the fact that the logo was too “busy,” the reporter in the logo was wearing a soft (not hard) hat, and that the backhoe shown was cable-operated, while the entire industry had gone to hydraulic.

But attendance remained CWA's main problem. Attendance for the November 1981 annual meeting — held on its own in Arlington Heights, IL — was only 13, and worse yet, to hear the wailing, was that CWA failed to find a corporate sponsor for the event, resulting in out-of-pocket expenses for the association of \$1,034 (\$2,439 in 2006 dollars). That so few members attended, and such expenses occurred, sent shockwaves through the association. But under the leadership of president Greg Sitek, CWA was in the black by the next year. CWA's new logo, which is still used today, was selected by the end of Sitek's term as well.

In response to the failed meeting, CWA went back to piggy-backing its meetings with industry associations when it held its March 1983 meeting in Atlanta in conjunction with the Associated General Contractors. “Right now, CWA (alone) is not reason enough to have a national meeting on its own,” read one member's comment. “It is very difficult to get both the economic and interest justification to attend CWA meetings only,” said another.

“CWA has been largely a ‘low-key’ organization,” read one more. “Most of the reason

[sic] for belonging to it has been social in nature and for keeping up with happenings in our particular corner of the industry.”

Lastly, a final member comment sounded the alarm: “The intent and purpose of CWA is laudable,” the commenter said. “However, in these days and times, sentimentality alone will not keep CWA together. We are either going to have to become an organization people will want to belong to, or we are going to have to go out of business.”

Nonetheless, CWA persevered. In November 1984, CWA experienced a bit of glamour when it held its annual meeting in New York City, in conjunction with the media kick-off for the 1987 CONEXPO. Attendees enjoyed hospitality at the Vista International Hotel above Battery Park, and were feted by C.I.T. Financial Services at the Windows on the World restaurant at the World Trade Center. The next day there was a CONEXPO presentation, followed by a harbor boat ride and VIP tour of the Statue of Liberty, then under reconstruction.

### May Meetings in Washington

CWA moved closer to today’s format in 1985 when it held its first annual May meeting in Washington, D.C., much of which was hosted by ARTBA – quarterbacked by ARTBA’s Randy Russell, a very long-time CWA member — as a means of introducing its new publicity staff. That year C.I.T. hosted a lavish, memorable awards dinner at the Four Seasons Hotel in Georgetown, capped with complimentary cigars and *digestifs*. Members who were there have agreed that it was the best hosted CWA dinner in memory. But the festivities were followed by sadness with the untimely death of Russell in August 1985. CWA’s *T. Randolph Russell Awards* for editorial excellence and achievement in newsletters was created in 1991 as a memorial.

These successes notwithstanding, by 1988, the association was at another existential crossroads. The overwhelming informality of the annual meetings still was attractive to old-line members reconnecting with each other, but had little appeal to young careerists who were looking for more job- and industry-oriented content. Meeting attendance was plummeting and a question mark hovered above CWA.

The challenge was summed up in 1988 by 1989-90 president Don Merwin, who wrote CWA had two choices, to be either a social organization or a serious organization.

Regarding a social organization, he said “If that is the limit of our existence, then let’s do it right and have a once-a-year bash somewhere a little more classy than the Holiday Inn,” where they recently had met. But, he said, the serious organization would be “dedicated to studying issues that have an impact on the construction and construction-publication industries. Frankly, I like both ideas.”

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Merwin said the social networking should be encouraged, but that CWA needed to “set up a meaningful program that will attract some of our own members, and then use that as bait for prospective new members.”

Merwin recommended legislative sessions, panel discussions on construction and publishing, presentations by Boger Award winners and coordination of meetings with other industry associations or conventions. But he also said CWA should throw in the towel if attendance stayed flat.

“The overriding issue in all of this is member interest,” Merwin wrote. “If we do a good job, the rest will either follow, or they won’t. Confident that we have done everything possible to make CWA a well-packaged, interesting organization, we can assess the results. If [only] 15 members show up, I will make a motion that we disband.”

“Emphasis should be placed on the professional development of members, as well as service to the industry,” said long-time member Thelma Mrazek. “This includes annual meetings with excellent programs, as we have had. It would also mean a regularly published newsletter with items about what is happening in the construction





CWA's long-time secretary-treasurer, Gene Halmos, was a fixture at our Washington DC meetings throughout the 90s. In 1999, he talked with Jan Tuchman, editor-in-chief of his former employer, ENR, who later served as CWA president.

industry press ... this would be of special interest to younger members or independent writers ... we should provide more."

In response, CWA expanded its programs. In 1988, as an outreach to more members elsewhere in the country, the Midwestern meetings were relaunched in Chicago. Beginning in 1989, the newsletter was typeset instead of typewritten. By 1991 CWA vice president Vera Steiner was able to report the third successful Chicago meeting drew the highest attendance so far, a total of 25.

### Expansion in the Nineties

In 1990, Halmos brought his long tenure as secretary-treasurer to an end. One of CWA's co-founders in 1957, he had served with distinction since 1961 as secretary-treasurer, an astonishing 29-year period of service.

After a two-year apprenticeship to Halmos, Thelma Stevens Mrazek became Secretary-Treasurer in May 1990. She was succeeded by Marla McIntyre in May 1992. Marla, who also worked at the Associated General Contractors of America, contributed her CWA remuneration, approximately \$1,000 a year, to AGC in return for use of their copier, postage and her time. When she completed her service at the end of May, 1996, she turned over a substantial CWA savings account. Having nearly a full-year's budget in the bank, CWA's leadership was able to invest in its future by hiring a professional association manager, Sheila Wertz.

A new, intensified membership drive was launched in May 1990, spearheaded for the first time by a Membership Committee. Its goal was to double the membership from 119 in one year. It was noted that the current membership represented only about 37 of the more than 200 publications in the construction field, and very few of the allied fields eligible for membership. By April 1992, membership had grown to 201 members.

As CWA sought to expand its membership, a proposed merger of CWA with the



Construction tours have become a unique feature of CWA meetings. This group toured the construction site of the new National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution in 2003. Those identified include 1. Chris Fisher (CWA director), 2. Mike Anderson (president 2007-8), 5. Ed Rehfeld (director), 6. Paul Bertram (member), 7. David Wood (president 1997-8), 10. Larry Flynn (member), 11. Gordon Wright (president 2000-01) 12. Don Marsh (president 2004-5).

National Association of Real Estate Editors was considered briefly. CWA Secretary-Treasurer Mrazek was able to report in the negative that "CWA has just begun to tap the reservoir of construction writers, and the membership drive is gaining momentum." The injection of hundreds of real estate writers was both unnecessary, as CWA was beginning to stabilize, and would turn the direction of the association astray.

CWA bylaws. In 1995, at Steiner's suggestion, the CWA board scheduled a fall midyear meeting for Chicago. Once the midyear meeting was well established, the chapter effectively disbanded because its education and social needs were being met by the national meeting.

In 1994, a member needs assessment survey was distributed to CWA members, and a long-range planning committee recommend-

“The coming of the 21st century saw the growth in CWA in terms of membership, industry awareness, meeting attendance, prestige of its many awards, financial volume and stability.”

Instead, Steiner proposed active recruitment of new members from sectors that were eligible for membership, but had not been approached consistently. "Our membership drive should be focused on exploiting our natural prospect base, i.e., the magazine editors, public relations agency writers and construction industry manufacturers' publicity personnel serving the construction industry as currently defined," she said.

Steiner also pointed out that the growing association was putting terrific burdens on volunteer staff. "The growth in CWA activities during the last year alone has clearly added a burden to the office of our Secretary-Treasurer," she wrote.

Also, 1991 saw the last Boger award presented to a single individual, that to Jim Olszynski, *Plumbing & Mechanical Magazine*. Beginning in 1992, the Boger award was presented to Nancy Solomon, *Architecture Magazine*, but with honorable mentions to four individuals. In 1993, the Boger award was divided into categories including *Feature Article*, *Special Report* and *Editorial*.

As part of its membership recruitment efforts, CWA members held meetings for local members in several locations. The most successful effort was held in Chicago, where Vera Steiner amassed a prospect list of over 100 locals and hosted luncheons, with programs, for several years. She also wrote bylaws for the Chicago chapter and had an article on chapters approved for the

ed a long-range plan which established mission and goals that included hiring a paid newsletter editor to improve communications among members. Wertz, a CWA member who had edited *Interior Construction* magazine, was hired for that purpose.

The Interstate Highway System marked its 40th anniversary in June 1996, and in response, CWA members heard all about highways at its annual meeting in D.C. one month earlier. CWA member Will Wilkins, executive director, and Bill Outlaw, director of media relations for TRIP, outlined TRIP's efforts to develop publicity about the interstate system in conjunction with the anniversary.

But on the same program, Roger S. Johnson, president of SciNews-MedNews of what was then CompuServe's Journalism Forum, started members thinking about the burgeoning Internet as both an information source, but also as a digital competitor to the dead-tree based publications represented in the room. CWA would expand its exploration of cyberspace on behalf of its construction industry members, making it a part of presentations, newsletter articles and culminating in both an awards program for digital media, and a powerful, practical website.

When Marla McIntyre decided to end her service as secretary-treasurer in 1996, Wertz was hired for the slot based on her 20-plus years of experience managing trade associations, many of them



Thelma Stevens Mrazek, secretary-treasurer 1990-92



Marla McIntyre secretary-treasurer 1992-96



Sheila Wertz, executive director 1996-2008



Deborah Hodges, new executive director as of June, 2008





Getting together during the 2004 annual meeting were three CWA presidents – Jack Roberts (2003-4), Jenni Prokopy (2005-6), and Don Marsh (2004-5).

construction-related. She served as an anchor which enabled the association to present a professional, serious face to the industry not possible when managed by volunteers with many other career responsibilities, and the subsequent growth in CWA validated the new position.

In late 1997, one of the most well-respected New York City members — Kneeland “Ned” Godfrey — died at age 62. Godfrey joined the staff of *Civil Engineering Magazine* of the American Society of Civil Engineers in 1966 as associate editor, but soon rose to the post of editor, which he held for 16 years through 1986. He wrapped up his career with the Institute of Management and Administration. Following his death, in 1999, Godfrey was honored by CWA through the establishment of the *Kneeland Godfrey*



Preparing for the new century, CWA leaders held a planning session. Executive Director Sheila Wertz, Marty McIntyre (president 1996-7), Kirk Landers (director), Gordon Wright (president 2000-01), and Don Marsh (president 2004-5) were led by Ron Worth (president 1999-2000).

*Award for Body of Work*, to honor journalistic and writing ability, demonstrated through a large sample of writing from the preceding year.

In 1998, Wertz updated CWA’s Mission & Goals statement and then-president David Wood added the inspiration — a plan to create a marketing communications task force that would increase CWA’s visibility, drawing new members and creating opportunities for more CWA activities. The mission and plan were approved by the CWA Board. The task force, later renamed the Publicity and Promotion Committee, has been responsible for dozens of press releases, a Top Five Construction Stories of the Year survey, creation of a CWA website, and much more. This activity has underpinned CWA’s success over the next decade.

With the emergence of the Internet and its accompanying technology, in 1998 CWA began acknowledging this latest form of journalistic enterprise with its annual *Website Awards*. The Website Awards were later expanded to cover promotion-oriented websites. In 2006, the awards were again expanded, this time to honor *Electronic Communications* as well.

### The New Millennium

The coming of the 21st century saw the growth in CWA in terms of membership, industry awareness, meeting attendance, prestige of its many awards, financial volume and stability. Not to mention creation of a well-designed website and increased usage of e-mail both for individual and mass communications among members.

In April, 2001, Wertz wrote in a staff report, “I recently reviewed CWA’s historical files and found a financial report prepared by Marla McIntyre in April 1996. By her estimate, CWA had \$12,000 in income and \$10,000 in expenses five years ago. A note on her report indicated that CWA had 86 paid members plus 14 honorary members. At that time, the fall meeting was new, there was no website and there was no marketing communications task force or activity. CWA’s current income and expenses are roughly three times larger, and our current paid membership is over 250. Our board is larger, there is much more activity, and we



CWA receptions highlight several industry meetings. Here, CWA member Rod Sutton presents Sharon Holling (CWA president 2006-7) with a birthday cake during the CONEXPO reception.

are a much stronger organization today. “

CWA served its manufacturer/association/advertising/PR members with an awards program of their own in 2001. The *CWA Marketing Communications Awards* program recognized another important aspect of construction writers’ efforts, focusing on advertising, corporate communications and public relations.

And in 2004, CWA added photojournalism to the mix with awards now called the *Gordon B. Wright Photography Awards*. Awards are given for single photos and for series. These awards honor a CWA past president and frequent meeting photographer who was an editor for *Building Design & Construction* for over 30 years.

In 2005, CWA resurrected the West Coast meeting. Held in January in Las Vegas – in conjunction with the World of Concrete exposition which opened the next day – members heard a panel on water supply

improvements in southern Nevada, the Hoover Dam Bypass Project, an enormous concrete arch bridge then under construction, and the fundamentals of speechwriting.

Tempering this excitement was the passing in 2005 of Halmos. For years his presence at East Coast meetings was a given, and it was a joy to hear his rare if sometimes long-winded stories of the “old” Construction Writers and his experience in World War II, which he summed in his 1996 book, *The Wrong Side of the Fence: A United States Army Corps POW in World War II*. (The book is out of print, but readily available from Amazon resellers.) Halmos was twice the recipient of the CWA Silver Hard Hat Award, our highest honor.

Today’s CWA meetings are three-day affairs, including seminars, site tours, banquets, panels and association business. Regular meetings are typically held in May in Washington and October in Chicago, with informal receptions and get-togethers held in association with major expositions and meetings.

Thanks to CWA’s growing membership base and exciting program content, no longer must meeting planners hold their breath, praying for a good turnout for the panelists. Thanks to CWA’s loyal and esteemed sponsors and supporters in the business community, no longer do CWA directors keep their fingers crossed, hoping to break even on an event.

On its 50th anniversary, CWA will boast over 300 members and an annual budget over \$70,000. Wertz, who will retire as of June, 2008, has used the more professional title, CWA Executive Director, since 2001. And she will turn over a substantial savings account to the new Executive Director, Deborah Hodges, in hopes that Hodges and the CWA Board of Directors will be able to take CWA to the next level of activity and excellence over the next decade.

Much has transpired in the five decades of CWA. The formative years were exciting, but it’s clear that CWA has more going for it now than at any point in its history. Truly, these are “the good old days” for the Construction Writers Association. •

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*Compiled in January 2008 by Tom Kuennen from CWA newsletters, documents, and transmittals from principals involved in the creation of CWA.*

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## Construction Writers Association

[www.constructionwriters.org](http://www.constructionwriters.org)

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CWA is a non-profit, non-partisan, international organization for professional journalists, writers, editors, photographers, marketers and publicists serving the information needs of the construction industry. In addition to its journalism, photography, marketing communications and website/electronic communications awards programs, CWA provides educational meetings and networking opportunities for its members. For more information, visit the Construction Writers Association website at [www.constructionwriters.org](http://www.constructionwriters.org)