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FEBRUARY 8 2004

By TSB Staff

Town Hall Meeting Draws Crowd

More than 400 association professionals and business partners participated in the first of several "Town Hall" meetings on January 28, 2004, to discuss the proposed consolidation between the **American Society of Association Executives (ASAE)**, the **Greater Washington Society of Association Executives (GWSAE)**, the **ASAE Foundation**, and **The Center for Association Leadership**. If you're wondering why, just keep on reading...



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"We have a vision to provide two organizations that will provide services beyond your wildest expectations," said **Susan Sarfati**, CAE, president & CEO of GWSAE and The Center, in her opening remarks. "We are better together." **John Graham**, president & CEO of ASAE, called it "a historic moment" in the association profession.

Appearing on stage together, Sarfati and Graham delivered a Powerpoint presentation that detailed a proposed new organizational structure that would consolidate the activities of the four organizations into two entities: ASAE and The Center for Association Leadership. The concept of the consolidation was approved by the boards of each of the four organizations on January 15, 2004, and the Joint Leadership Team, also known as **JOLT** (no relationship to the soft drink of the same name) that developed the proposal is now gathering input from the association community and conducting due diligence to prepare a final plan for future board approval.

Under the proposed consolidation, ASAE and The Center would operate with separate boards linked in a new governance structure that includes cross-representation on both boards and a unified staff structure.

The current programs and services provided by The Center, GWSAE, and the ASAE Foundation, as well as ASAE education programs and other initiatives would be offered by the Center for



Association Leadership. Also, under this proposed structure, GWSAE would be consolidated into The Center, which would require a vote by GWSAE members.

Several questions were posed by participants, who asked for more information on the national reach and benefits of the consolidated organizations, how the unique culture and benefits of GWSAE would be preserved, and if financial reasons are behind the proposal.

An association professional from Kansas asked how The Center is going to handle offering education program nationwide that meet the content needs of small associations at a price point they can afford.

Graham and Sarfati responded by explaining that consolidating resources into one educational organization (The Center for Association Leadership), they would be better able to deliver programs across the nation and even internationally.

A few people commented that GWSAE has a unique culture and "mystique" that GWSAE members do not want to lose. Those in the Washington, DC region want to know if the atmosphere and culture of the consolidated organizations will preserve this.

"We have heard this comment loud and clear, and we are absolutely committed to having our positive, open, and welcoming culture continue," Sarfati replied. "GWSAE members have created the culture we now have, and their continued participation will help ensure that it continues. I have been in this job 10 years and I know what it means to be part of GWSAE and this community. I would never let this go away. I think the consolidation will make this community richer and give us resources to do things we have not been able to do."

GWSAE Chairman Greg Balestrero, chief executive officer of the Project Management Institute, based in Philadelphia, PA, added, "Susan has nurtured this culture and defined it with volunteer and staff leaders that have a 'zero tolerance' policy for not having this culture continue."

Graham and Sarfati were asked if financial pressures were part of the reason for the proposal. "We came together for the reasons we stated, which are the honest reasons," Graham emphasized. "The association community has faced challenging financial times, but none of the four organizations have financial difficulties. This is not driven by finances, but there will be some economies of scale that will benefit the organizations and the association community."

Sarfati added, "A long time JOLT decided that if finances are the only reason we should be go forward it was not a good reason. Our focus and reason for doing this is about the expanded opportunities and benefits we see in a consolidated structure. GWSAE and The Center are absolutely doing fine. GWSAE has never had a deficit budget or laid off any staff ."

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