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Local association execs may go national

BY SEAN MADIGAN
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Leaders of both the national and local groups that represent association executives are proposing a merger, and some local members are concerned the local community will get lost in the marriage.

The boards of the American Society of Association Executives and the Greater Washington Society of Association Executives recently approved the concept of pooling their resources and collecting only one set of dues.

GWSAE Chief Executive Susan Sarfati says she and John Graham, ASAE's CEO, have been "totally overwhelmed" with positive support. There was both positive and not-so-positive feedback at a Jan. 28 meeting about the proposal.

Not so thrilled with the plan: Joanne Dunne, executive director of the American Physical Therapy Association in Alexandria and a member of both organizations. She says she likes the community culture that comes along with being a GWSAE member and she's afraid it will disappear if the merger goes through.

"There's a tremendous need for building community locally," Dunne says. "Sometimes you need to come together and see your friends."

Paul Greeley, GWSAE's former chairman, says that while he endorses the plan, he wants to make sure younger members can compete for leadership positions within the new entity.

"It's local, we're here, we get involved," Greeley

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says. "I just think it needs to be said."

At the Jan. 28 meeting, Sarfati and Graham told several hundred members how the proposed merger would work: GWSAE, the ASAE Foundation and ASAE education programs would be consolidated into the Center for Association Leadership, a relatively new organization tied to GWSAE and also headed by Sarfati. The new group would be

called the Center for Association Leadership. The GWSAE name, as proposed, would be eliminated.

Sarfati would become executive vice president of ASAE and president of the center; Graham would remain ASAE's CEO. The center and ASAE would combine finances and office functions such as human resources and accounting. The organizations would maintain separate boards.

ASAE has about 23,000 members and

annual revenue of \$24 million. GWSAE (www.gwsae.org) has 3,800 members — about half of whom are also ASAE members — and revenue of \$12 million.

Sarfati and Graham say both groups are in good financial shape and the idea to merge is not being driven by financial considerations, as some members challenged during the Jan. 28 meeting.

ASAE (www.asaenet.org) cut staff twice following 9/11. The organization now has about 110 employees, down from 150. GWSAE and the center combined have about 35 employees. Graham acknowledges there would be post-merger staff redundancies, but says he expects the organization to employ about 140 people.

Both organizations are doing due diligence, and Graham hopes to present the findings to boardmembers by May. Two-thirds of GWSAE's voting members must approve the plan for the merger to go through.

"This is not a done deal," Sarfati says. Dunne adds: "I hope it's not."

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