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Going from Better to Great
Executive Director Scott English Announces Organizational Changes

This month, I celebrated my third anniversary as Executive Director of the American Philatelic Society with thousands of fellow members at StampShow/National Topical Stamp Show in Columbus, OH. It’s amazing how time flies, but I want to thank all of our members for the warm welcome in this stamp family.

When I interviewed for the position of Executive Director, I told the search committee and the Board that it would take five years to transform the organization from where it was to where we wanted it to go. Unlike the private sector, we have not had the luxury of radical transformations or experimenting with ideas and failing. So the plan to change had to be deliberate and thoughtful. By and large, the members and the Board support this approach and have provided great energy and talent to move the needle.

Over the past three years, the APS team has focused on delivering services effectively and efficiently to strengthen the organization’s finances, reduce debt, and unite the hobby. We are now financially strong, and we have to use this opportunity to invest in growing our membership and delivering information to stamp collectors of all ages. Things have gotten better, but we are aiming for great.

To accomplish this ambitious goal, I am pleased to announce we have formed a Senior Leadership Team to focus on the areas where we need to improve outcomes. With our new leadership team, we will work to make the APS more relevant in the modern age and recruit new members 24/7 and 365 days a year.

Meet the Team

Rick Banks, Chief Administrative Officer: Rick joined the APS in 2004 as Controller and Director of Internal Operations. He has previously worked for Arthur Andersen & Co., Piper Aircraft, and Vice President of Finance with Bellefonte Lime Company. Banks graduated from Penn State University in 1976 with a Business Administration degree.

Though he loves his alma mater, Rick is an unapologetic fan of the University of Alabama Crimson Tide and makes an annual sojourn to Tuscaloosa with his three sons. Over these past
three years, Rick’s leadership has been critical to getting us to the strong financial position we have today.

Ken Martin, Chief Membership Officer: Since 1980, when Ken joined the APS, he’s been one of its most loyal members. He joined the APS staff in 1995 in the Sales Division and has held numerous positions including Executive Director and most recently, Chief Operating Officer. Ken is also active in the Centre County community including leadership positions with the American Red Cross, State College Rotary, Central Pennsylvania Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Historic Bellefonte, Inc.

Within our hobby’s grassroots, everyone knows Ken. He skipped his own college graduation to help set up for AMERIPEX in 1986 and staff the Junior Philatelists of America table for all 11 days! There is no better choice to lead our recruiting efforts than someone who has that kind of passion for the hobby and the APS.

Martin Kent Miller, Chief Content Officer: Miller joined the APS staff in 2017 as Editor of The American Philatelist and Philatelic Literature Review. His role grew in 2018 as he took over the modernization effort to overhaul the APS website. At StampShow/National Topical Stamp Show 2018 in Columbus, Martin did a demonstration of the new site for APS members and is working on implementation to be launched by Labor Day.

As Chief Content Officer, Martin will lead the APS efforts to expand philatelic writing and information beyond the monthly journal to digital writing, video and other online content. He’s been a member of the APS since 2008, but a collector since he was a young boy.

Strategic Plan

In Columbus, we did mid-point review of the 2016 Strategic Plan for the APS and APRL Boards and the members present at the show. Progress has been strong in some areas, needs improvement in others, and some items should be eliminated. Our primary focus in the 2016 plan was to eliminate debt, improve operational efficiencies and deliver information in new ways.

Progress

In the three years, we’ve taken a debt of effectively $5.6 million and have brought it to $3.9 million as of this month – this includes making accelerated payments of more than $900,000 over the past 15 months.

We retired one of five bank mortgages for the APRL in 2017 with the sale of Position 76 of the Inverted Jenny. In Columbus, we raised enough money to retire the $600,000 we borrowed in
2016 to pay for unexpected costs from zoning requirements during the construction of the new library.

Our cash operating surplus has more than tripled in three years from $175,000 at the beginning of 2015 to $630,000 today.

The APS team shifted our education focus to provide more courses for adult and member collectors, exceeding our goals for “On the Road” courses and the annual Summer Seminar.

We built real philatelic partnerships with our national affiliates through joint shows with the American Topical Association in 2018 and now 2019 in Omaha, as well as another first ahead in 2020 when the APS, ATA, and the American First Day Cover Society will hold a joint national show in Hartford, CT.

Still to Come

We proposed overhauling the APS website, creating a virtual library of philatelic journals and literature, and pushing more content across the digital platforms. We did not have the talent to get these projects done on time. Thankfully, when Martin Miller joined the staff, he took over the project earlier this year and is working to get it back on track. We are very close to completion on the site and plan to roll it out in September. There will be more elements to the site as time progresses, so keep tabs on our blog to get the latest.

Online Education has been a goal since our 2004 strategic plan and remains one today. This is most in-demand service from APS members and stamp collectors. This is going to require some investment of time, people, and applications. We are blessed with a large number of philatelic experts on any topic and we should be bringing them together with fellow collectors. As part of our website overhaul, we will be putting together a plan to make this happen.

Membership continues to decline. The Strategic Plan promised to strengthen the grassroots by getting APS Chapters more linked and having them serve as active recruiters, as well as working harder to identify prospective members elsewhere and recruit actively. This is a data-driven project and requires a broad knowledge of the philatelic community and Ken Martin is uniquely-talented to get this project moving and successful.

The Challenge Ahead

At the mid-point of the 2016 strategic plan, I believe we’ve accomplished the critical elements of that roadmap, in particular amassing an energized member base and financial resources to move aggressively to address these critical challenges. I requested the Board create a committee to work with this team to develop a new five-year strategic plan to make a serious
investment, not in our survival, but our growth. APS President Bob Zeigler and APRL President Ken Grant have enthusiastically endorsed this request and assembled a joint committee to work with us on a plan.

**Joint Strategic Planning Committee:**

From the APS Board: Bob Zeigler (President), Cheryl Ganz (Vice President), Bruce Marsden (Treasurer), Rich Drews and Mark Schwartz (Directors-at-Large)

From the APRL Board: Ken Grant (President), Patricia Stilwell-Walker (Vice President), and Ken Nilsestuen (Treasurer)

Previous strategic plans have produced reports that sit on shelves, so thanks to the APS and APRL Boards and the great team we have in Bellefonte for supporting the vision and working to make it happen.

The Committee work is underway and will report back to the APS Board at AmeriStamp 2019 in February with a plan to move ahead. I will continue to update members as things develop, but if you ever want to share your thoughts on this or other subjects, please contact me at scott@stamps.org or 814-933-3814.

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**About the American Philatelic Society**

With nearly 28,000 members in more than 110 countries, the APS is the largest, non-profit organization for stamp collectors in the world. Founded in 1886, the APS serves collectors, educators, postal historians, and the general public by providing a wide variety of programs and services.

The mission of the Society is:
- to promote stamp collecting for people of all ages
- to offer services to its membership and to philately in general, including knowledge and education, which enhance the pleasure and friendliness of stamp collecting
- to initiate and coordinate new programs for the benefit of stamp collecting and of all collectors
- to represent the United States of America in the world body of philately
- to assist its members in acquiring and disposing of philatelic materials

The Society is entirely supported by membership dues, gifts, and the sale of publications, souvenirs, and services.
The American Philatelic Society is located in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania and online at www.stamps.org.