Happy New Year! We hope that you and your family had a happy, healthy holiday season. We look forward to working to increase your enjoyment of the hobby and to more effectively promoting the hobby.

By the time you read this, the fourth quarter Philatelic Literature Review should be available on our website as a pdf file. The PLR focuses on indexes, book reviews, current philatelic research projects, and highlights of the American Philatelic Research Library holdings. It includes literature exhibit award winners and a clearinghouse of literature for sale. Subscriptions to the 96-page 6 x 9-inch quarterly are available for $18 per year for U.S. residents. Check out the pdf file to see if this publication might be of interest. (Note that the pdf will include color illustrations while, other than the cover and wrapper, the hard copy mailed to subscribers is not in color.)

Not long after the PLR appears on our website, the January issue of The American Philatelist will also be available in a digital format — actually two different formats, a pdf format and a proprietary Flash-based format similar to that used by Linn's and the Numismatist. This first digital AP issue will be available to everyone, regardless of their membership status; however, subsequent issues will only be available to members. The digital format will not replace the hard copies you are used to receiving in the mail (unless you want to go green and request such). It will be an additional member benefit. I prefer hard copies myself, but the digital version will offer some advantages including search capabilities and clickable links in both articles and advertisements.

Members are invited to try out both digital versions and provide feedback to me at kpmartin@stamps.org. Your comments will help us improve the online AP and assist us as we consider making past issues of the AP available digitally (on our website and or via CD-ROMS).

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I’m hoping that I will be able to announce a new member service or benefit every month in 2010. This is going to be a real challenge as our staff has been cut by 20 percent to achieve a balanced budget. The balanced budget includes all depreciation and excludes most donations as we want your gifts to be able to help us do more. To achieve this we are relying more on volunteers. Connie Hines and Vincent Lewandowski are two recent additions.

Connie, who is not a stamp collector called one morning in late October to volunteer, and she was here working that afternoon. She began helping to assemble the registration packets for Classics 2009 and the Postal History Symposium, and then came back to assist with registration on both the Friday and Saturday of the show. Since then she has helped out with Education and Youth and with our dues processing.

Vincent recently moved to our area when his wife accepted a new position. While he is seeking employment, he is helping out in our Library.

While both of these volunteers found us, we are also seeking support through the Experience Works government program, which provides minimum wage and insurance for qualifying participants to work at
nonprofits. We are also pursuing volunteers through the Retired Senior Volunteer Program. And we haven’t forgotten about the majority of members who live outside of Central Pennsylvania. We’re working on plans for the July 26–30 Volunteer Work week, which I have mentioned previously. Next month’s American Philatelist should provide full details and provide an opportunity to sign up.

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In my September column I mentioned Kathy Johnson, who surfaced after nearly thirty years of relative philatelic inactivity. She has not wasted any time reestablishing herself in the hobby. Kathy visited the APS in May for the Women’s Festival, in June for the Summer Seminar, and in August/September (over her birthday) to help us identify cost savings and new revenue streams. She has also become a member of the Finance Committee, the Long-Range Planning Committee, and the Membership Committee. Now, I am happy to welcome her as the newest member of the APS Board, appointed to fill the vacancy from Bob Odenweller’s resignation.

Bob suffered a fall in late September, and while a full recovery is expected, it was not happening as quickly as he hoped, and with all his many other commitments to the hobby he felt that he did not have the time his position on the APS board required. We will miss his wisdom greatly and wish him a speedy recovery.

Kathy is a superwoman but with her Board appointment requested that we find a replacement for the Membership Committee. Rebecca (Becky) Magyar, previously mentioned in my July column, has agreed to add this position to the formal and informal responsibilities she has been providing to the APS. She filled in this past year when our Youth Coordinator had an extended absence because of health issues. Thankfully, Janet Houser is fully recovered, but Becky is still helping. Becky also laid out the newest member of the Long-Range Planning Committee, appointed to fill the vacancy from Bob Odenweller’s resignation.

We were very pleased with a wide variety of first time visitors for Classics 2009 and the Postal History Symposium at the end of October. We were not surprised that some traveled from places abroad, including England and the Czech Republic. However, I was surprised two weeks later when, without any other event to attract them, we had a Library user from Nairobi, Kenya and one from Glasgow, Scotland.

While the APRL is an often under-appreciated world-class resource, we need all libraries to carry stamp collecting publications so that the beginner who may not know about the APS or APRL can grow in his or her understanding and enjoyment of the hobby. Some members purchase either a single volume or a full set of Scott Catalogues on a periodic basis. Public libraries have not been immune to the economy and many have had to cut their catalogue subscriptions. The APRL generally receives sufficient donations of Scott Catalogues, so before you recycle your old catalogue consider checking to see if your local library needs and would accept them.

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I’ve greatly enjoyed meeting James, Jimmy, and Melissa, our inaugural class of Young Philatelic Leader fellows. While their term runs through our August StampShow in Richmond, Virginia, we are now soliciting applications from fellows (as well as financial support) for the second class. Visit our website or contact us for details.

The Education Department also has been busy developing courses for 2010. Registration is now open for our thirty-first annual summer seminar. We’re also trying to take courses on the road to all parts of the country and have courses planned in conjunction with Westpex (“Computers in Philately,” April in San Francisco), Napex (“Washington-Franklins,” June in Washington,
DC), the Minnesota Stamp Expo (“Revenues,” July in Crystal, Minnesota) and Florex (“Printing,” December in Orlando, Florida). We also will offer a course at the American Philatelic Center in Bellefonte (“Expertizing First Day Covers,” in June) and at StampShow (“Computers in Philately,” August in Richmond, Virginia). Contact Gretchen Moody in our Education Department for more information.

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With January comes your opportunity to vote for the best article in last year’s American Philatelist. Use the wrapper of this issue to help decide the winner of the third annual United States Stamp Society Barbara Mueller Award.

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Our thanks to Schuyler Rumsey who recently made a five-year $10,000 commitment to the Society. Also thanks to a member who wishes to remain anonymous who has agreed to provide a $10,000 matching gift if we can get ten APS dealer members to each contribute $1,000. Richard Clever of Asia Philatelics has already stepped forward, so we only need nine more dealers to get the $10,000 match!

All gifts, cash and in-kind, no matter how small, help. As I write this, dues have started coming in and with the dues will be many gifts. Unless requested otherwise your names will be published in our April recognition issue of The American Philatelist, but we don’t want to wait that long to thank you publicly. Your support is tremendous.

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We hope you have paid your dues. If you have not, please do so as soon as possible. (If you don’t plan to renew you can save us the cost of follow ups by letting us know.) If we don’t have payment by January 15 you may see an interruption in the delivery of The American Philatelist and if dues are not received by the end of January, a suspension in other services including Sales Circuits.

I hope to see many of you at our February 19–21, 2010 show in Riverside, California. For those of you who can’t make it to the West Coast, I’d also enjoy talking to you at the Sarasota, Florida show, February 5–7. Both should be excellent shows and offer a change of climate for many of us in the more northern areas of the country.

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P.S. After the deadline of this column, we learned of the death of APS Past President Bill Bauer. An irreplaceable friend of the hobby, Bill will be missed by many.