

2009 in Review

by Nancy Somerville, Hon. ASLA
Executive Vice President and CEO
American Society of Landscape Architects

In this Annual Activities Report, I would like to review for you, our valued members, the activities and accomplishments of the past year—one most of us hope to never repeat.

ASLA used everything within its means to help members weather the steep downturn, including free résumé posting, special resource listings and networking opportunities via the website, and the acquisition of an NEA grant to underwrite attendance at the 2009 Annual Meeting for some who were hit particularly hard.

The Society itself was not immune. We had to scale back some programs, find efficiencies, and postpone some new initiatives. And like many of you, we had to reduce staff and institute across-the-board furloughs.

In making those cuts, we kept your priorities in mind—and we maintained both our focus and our momentum in the key areas of advocacy, public awareness, and sustainability.

Last year again saw continued growth in media coverage of the profession while staff also tapped a variety of social media opportunities to educate the public, serve membership, and establish landscape architects as an authoritative voice on a variety of fronts.

- In traditional media, placements were double those of just five years ago, with coverage extending from The New York Times to Woman's Day magazine, from U.S. News and World Report, where landscape architecture was once again identified as one of the top 50 professions, to Engineering News-Record, which emphatically endorsed the profession as the critical player in the sustainable design and construction movement.
- With ASLA support, 44 of our 48 chapters hosted public events and activities and reached thousands of students and members of the general public during National Landscape Architecture Month in April.
- The ASLA green roof continued to attract attention from across the spectrum, resulting in dozens of media stories, hundreds of visitors, thousands of website page views, and several instances of it serving as a location for filming by the BBC and others.
- Our authoritative voice was strengthened by a series of new, topic-specific resource centers on the ASLA website that, in addition to providing new, valuable information for members, attracted wide media attention, particularly in the blogosphere.
- Speaking of the blogosphere, ASLA's The Dirt blog consistently ranks among the top ten blogs covering landscape architecture and also plays an ongoing role in broader conversations about sustainable design and sustainable urban development. ASLA's YouTube channel has attracted well over 40,000 views, our Facebook group numbers more than 3,700 users, ASLA's LinkedIn network now tops 2,900, and our daily Twitter feed goes out to more than 1,500 followers.
- And last spring, in a targeted initiative, ASLA convened a Blue Ribbon Panel of design professionals representing landscape architecture, architecture, and planning to review

the National Park Service's Preliminary Preferred Alternative National Mall Plan. The comprehensive communications plan for the panel included press releases, a special National Mall web sub-site, videos of the panel's work and Mall tour, and a press conference. In addition to garnering coverage and establishing the profession as a leader in the future of this historic landscape, a subsequent NPS environmental impact survey specifically cited the Sustainable Site Initiative (SITES), our partnership with the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center at the University of Texas, Austin, and the U.S. Botanic Garden, as the standard-setter for all Mall repair and development.

On the federal advocacy front, ASLA was directly involved with many congressional offices on legislation related to livable and sustainable communities—from the climate change bill to the transportation reauthorization to green infrastructure for stormwater management. This included legislation specifically targeting green roofs and other landscape approaches to reducing carbon and saving energy.

Two pieces of legislation that ASLA worked closely on—Congresswoman Matsui's Energy Conservation Through Trees Act and Congressman Perlmutter's Green Resources for Energy Efficient Neighborhoods Act—were included in the Waxman-Markey bill, the energy and climate legislation passed by the House. ASLA is specifically mentioned in provisions of both of those pieces as an expert and advisor to assist with implementation — a major achievement.

As a steering committee member of the National Complete Streets Coalition, ASLA continued to advocate for the adoption of a national Complete Streets policy, which would call on national transportation planners to consider the needs of all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit users, persons with disabilities, senior citizens and our youngest citizens – our children.

ASLA also continued to raise the visibility of the Society before Congress. In 2009, I was pleased to moderate an ASLA-sponsored congressional briefing on "Landscape Architecture for High Performance Buildings" where Chief Administrative Officer of the U.S. House of Representatives Daniel Beard and David Yocca, ASLA, principal landscape architect and planner at Conservation Design Forum, educated congressional staff on how a building's site and surrounding landscape affect energy efficiency and sustainability.

I was also honored to discuss the role of landscape architects in planning and designing energy efficient homes during a congressional briefing on H.R. 2336, the Green Resources for Energy Efficient Neighborhoods (GREEN) Act, hosted by Congressman Ed Perlmutter, the bill's author.

We kept up our fight for funding for HALS--the Historic American Landscapes Survey. Last year, we signed on a record 31 members of Congress as supporters.

Key to this progress is your active participation. In 2009, nearly 3,000 ASLA advocates have sent more than 9,100 messages via our Advocacy Network to federal and state policymakers. This is an increase of more than 93 percent over 2008. Thank you for your support, and remember, every letter counts.

On the state level, our 50 by 2010 licensure campaign is in the home stretch. Michigan, Virginia, and Washington State upgraded their laws to practice acts this year, and Illinois strengthened its title law by adding a seal provision. The count is now 45 practice act states and 4 title act states, leaving only Vermont and the District of Columbia unregulated.

And before the year ended, we hit another important milestone. SITES benchmarks were released in November, along with a call for pilot projects, consideration of which is now underway.

LA CES, a collaboration of ASLA, the Canadian Society of Landscape Architects, the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture, the Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF), the Landscape Architectural Accreditation Board (LAAB), and the Council of Landscape Architectural Registration Boards (CLARB), debuted in 2009 and is now quite active. It establishes standards for evaluating continuing education providers and for ensuring that programs meet quality standards. There are now 78 providers participating in LA CES, and 20 state licensing boards, plus British Columbia, have deemed LA CES to be acceptable for meeting state continuing education requirements.

Through LA CES, you have access via the web to a database of approved providers and education programs. When you take courses, your attendance records are maintained within the system, and you can directly access these records.

None of this could have happened, of course, if you, our members, hadn't given of your time, your talents, and, yes, your dues dollars to support and advance these and other initiatives. From SITES, to our public and media outreach, to the model contract documents, to our successes in the halls of Congress and state legislatures – our accomplishments are your accomplishments.

Please always feel free to call, email, or write us with your comments and suggestions. Better yet, become actively involved in your chapter or at the national level. ASLA is blessed with a strong culture of volunteerism, but we can always use more help.

And, sincerely, thank you for your faith and your support. I look forward to seeing you at the ASLA Annual Meeting and EXPO in Washington DC, September 10-13, 2010.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy C. Somerville".

Nancy C. Somerville, Hon. ASLA
Executive Vice President/CEO
American Society of Landscape Architects