

PERSPECTIVE

The NAEP Remembers Jim Roberts

John H. Perkins

The National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP) mourns the loss of our friend and colleague, Jim Roberts, who died November 25, 2007. In this brief tribute, I'd like to record my memories of him and his professional contributions. Several other members of the NAEP also sent me brief statements to include.

It's hard to write about *working* with Jim Roberts, and the reason is simple. Every time I had the pleasure and honor of "working" with him, work turned to fun. Jim, you see, had such an immense supply of optimism and good spirit that not one iota of drudgery or tedium ever intruded. Productivity? Oh my, yes. But fatigue? Never.

I first became acquainted with Jim's style when he became President of the NAEP. Jim's term began very much in the midst of rebuilding the Association after the financial challenges of the mid-1990s. Jim's infectious energy and enthusiasm added tremendously to the success of this effort.

After Jim's term as President was over, I welcomed his continued active participation on the NAEP Board of Directors. True, he brought that good humor to every meeting, but even more significant was his total commitment to the advancement and health of the Association.

Jim strongly supported the international dimension of the NAEP's work. In his own consulting practice, he contributed to problem solving in Taiwan and elsewhere. Sweden became a special place of interest for Jim, and he brought interesting Swedish contributions to NAEP meetings and to this journal.

One of Jim's most important contributions to the NAEP arose from his keen appreciation of combining practice and theory. With an academic colleague, he contributed a stimulating piece to *Environ-*



Jim and Sylvia Roberts, 2005 NAEP Annual Meeting (Photo by Robert Morris).

mental Practice on the importance of injecting practice into the teaching of environmental studies.¹ I remember with delight how Jim worked on this project with his trademark vim and vigor.

Jim, for many years, worked to make the NAEP's Code of Ethics a living, vibrant part of professional environmental work. I was thus delighted a few years ago when he and his wife, Sylvia, came to The Evergreen State College and talked to my class. For weeks afterward, the students kept talking about the ethics of environmental problem solving. Jim's enthusiastic good nature and wisdom clearly left an impression on them.

Jim left a marvelous, effective, positive image that inspires those he touched. But remem-

ber, with Jim the work turned out to be fun! He was a remarkable man and I'm thankful I had the chance to interact with him.

The Thoughts of Other NAEP Colleagues

I first met Jim in the early 1990s when he asked me if I was interested in being a founding member of the International Committee of NAEP. His vision was inspiring and soon I found myself, with Jim's infallible encouragement and enthusiasm, crafting a mission statement for the Committee. This was early in my involvement with professionals in NAEP, but this moment sparked a life relationship with Jim and NAEP, and a knowing that

POINTS OF VIEW

I was in the company of a consummate environmental professional, a dear friend and human being.

Ron Deverman
Vice President and Senior Environmental Services Manager
HDR, Inc

I first met Jim when we attended a CEQ-sponsored meeting on Reinventing NEPA. Jim was looking for ideas to implement CEQ recommendations for improvement. I suggested the concept of integrating NEPA with an ISO-14000 EMS. Jim immediately saw the logic in the concept and asked me to prepare a white paper outlining the strategy. Our team approved the paper, Jim signed it as President, and NAEP issued it to CEQ with a strong recommendation. It was later published and the rest was history. We became good professional comrades. He was akin to a mentor, and I never hesitated to consult with him in the future.

Charles H. Eccleston, PhD, CEP
Independent Consultant

What a sad day this brings, as well as an opportunity to call to mind all of the amazing transitions that Jim facilitated for NAEP. Jim hated being incapacitated and I am glad he is past that and has moved on to peace and painlessness. I have lost a dear friend and we have all lost one of the most loyal supporters that NAEP has ever had. His contribution to the field of environmental science was only surpassed by his contributions to the well being of all people. What a guy!

Cynthia Fridgen, PhD
Michigan State University (retired)

When Jim resigned from the NAEP Board of Directors, he indicated his desire to “spend his marbles” doing things that really mattered and made a difference. He talked about creating a west coast (or regional) ware-

house to provide food and supplies for individuals in need and working with Native Americans. In retrospect, he used his remaining “marbles” doing those things he loved most: helping people and being with his family. I believe it was a wise and inspired decision, a lesson for us all.

John S. Irving
Sitewide Environmental Support
Battelle Energy Alliance
Idaho National Laboratory

I knew Jim for a short time compared to many in NAEP. He was the main reason I decided to become active on the Board of Directors and, with a little coaching from him, I have yet to regret the commitment. He was a good man who always had something good to say. He was a positive influence on me and he helped make the issues of normal life slip away in his gentle voice and his warm personality. I miss him, as we all do.

Paul B. Looney, CEP, CSE, PWS
Senior Project Manager
Volkert Environmental Group, Inc.

I loved this great man and mentor. Jim and I spent many hours discussing NAEP, its promise, mission, and future. He was dedicated to the organization's success and to the profession in general. He consistently urged me to assume a leadership role in NAEP and in life. His words were always sincere, passionate, and trusting. His legacy of leadership, passion, and optimism has touched his professional and personal family.

It is a legacy to be proud of and I already miss Jim dearly. However, he left me a gift and I will use it while I walk my own path in the profession.

Brian R. Moyer, CEP
HQ IMCOM-Europe

I will always remember Jim as a wonderfully warm person of incredible faith who

cared deeply about other people and the environment and who worked his whole life to leave the world a better place than he found it.

Kent Norton
Director of Environmental Services
Michael Brandman Associates

Jim was a genuine man who dedicated himself to the environmental profession and NAEP. He was someone I could rely on to tell me like it is. Truly a great person. Those who had the opportunity to know him were enriched by it.

Joe Pinto
Department of Transportation
Maricopa County, Arizona

I'm struggling to find the words to describe Jim only because I know there are others who knew him much better than I. He and Sylvia stayed in my home in the spring of 2006 while touring various NAEP chapters to present his “Winnie the Pooh and Ethics Too.” I enjoyed having both of them stay in my home and will cherish making breakfast for them in the morning and talking about their life together, their children and grandchildren. To me Jim exemplified a person most of us can only aspire to be like. He was intelligent, funny, gentle, caring, loving, respectful, principled, enthusiastic, and mostly, a genuinely beloved man. I will miss him.

Nanci Regnier
Regnier & Associates, Inc.

Jim Roberts was the most compelling influence for my support of California AEP's affiliation with NAEP. Later, Jim's enthusiasm for NAEP inspired my continued support for this Association by serving as its Treasurer. So, although I currently don't practice environmental planning on a national level, Jim Roberts' spirit continues

to inspire my enthusiasm to ensure NAEP's financial sustainability.

Brian R. Smith, AICP
Advance Planner
City of Santa Maria, California

Jim was an individual who clearly saw the "big picture" in every little thing he did for

NAEP. Whether serving on the Board of Directors or working internationally, he saw the organization and his related actions as agents for change towards a brighter future. I will always remember his big smile, warm demeanor, and keen mind.

Douglas K. Zang
Regional Environmental Manager
Wilbur Smith Associates

Note

1. W. B. Clapham, Jr., and J. A. Roberts, 2003, "Resolving Conflicts in Educational Practice: Why Universities Should Hire Practitioners," *Environmental Practice* 5(3):197–198.

Address correspondence to John H. Perkins, The Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA 98505; (fax) 360-867-5430; (e-mail) perkinsj@evergreen.edu.