

## **Changing the face of the Inland Empire Section in 2013**

*By Miguel Angel Vazquez, AICP*

*Edited by Lorena Mejia*

*January 9, 2013*

“Let’s make 2013 a year that changed the face of the Inland Empire Section”. That was the punch line from Aaron Pfannenstiel’s candidate statement for the Inland Empire Section of the American Planning Association (IES/APA) Director’s seat. And guess what? He got elected and now he leads the IES/APA in the midst of insurmountable challenges our profession continues to battle as a result of countless of externalities resulting from the great recession. I concur with his view that in spite of gloomy indicators affecting our profession, there are “still a lot of opportunities out there and a strong demand for learning and expanding”.

There is no certainty that changing “the face” will be a slam dunk for Aaron and the Board of Directors, but what is true is that the work that was done under the Immediate Past Director Leisa Lukes has certainly paved the way for this vision to sprout. Hosting the successful 2012 APA CA Conference in Rancho Mirage was the most significant accomplishment for the IES/APA Board last year. It provided for an opportunity to reinvigorate our professional essence, to learn new trends, reaffirm great planning practices and for networking amongst our peers. Aside from this “once in a blue moon” opportunity to make an impact, the real work at the IES/APA Section level is what matters the most, however. Our Board has dedicated countless of volunteer hours to address the most pressing needs for our members. Knowing that planners have also been victims of the recession’s collateral damage and that disposable income for many of them to pay for planning training or workshops has gone down, our Board began to explore creative approaches to assist. Collaboration with our professional connections has been a key component to deliver FREE of charge high quality training, including Certification Maintenance accredited workshops for planners who are members of the American Institute of Certified Planners. One of the Board’s major partners is the Riverside County Department of Public Health. This organization, which the IES/APA Board recognized with three awards of excellence last year, has provided an avenue for our members to explore one of the most important and exciting emerging trends in our profession: Healthy Communities. This partnership has brought other organizations together to develop relevant sessions designed for the whole range of our planning hierarchy. They include The California Endowment, the Local Government Commission, the Prevention Institute, the Advancement Project, the Western Riverside Council of Governments, the Riverside County Health Coalition, the Cities of Coachella and Moreno Valley and private sector firms such as Raimi+Associates and Fehr and Peers to name a few. Our Board is very grateful to the amazing array of dynamic and knowledgeable speakers who have contributed with numerous pro-bono presentations.

We also provided events at reasonable cost which were conducted in partnership with organizations such as the California Planning Roundtable, the American Public Works Association, the Association of Environmental Professionals, the US Green Building Council and the Coachella Valley Association of Governments. A major partnership with Loma Linda University has begun through the University’s “Healthy Communities by Design” annual conference. Members of our Board actively participated in

organizing the 2012 two-day event and secured 11.5 CM AICP credits for all the sessions. All in all, the IES/APA provided in the past year opportunities to earn nearly 32 CM credits for its AICP members (not including CA APA Conference sessions). An astonishing accomplishment!

The Planning Commissioners' workshop was one of the most well attended events in 2012. I should mention here that Board Member Matt Burris, AICP LEED AP was recently appointed to the City of Jurupa Valley's Planning Commission (the newest City in California!). We are very proud of his success and we look forward to continue to work with him as he has moved from the position of IES/APA Professional Development Officer to IES/APA Planning Commission Representative.

Speaking of changes in the IES/APA Board's faces, we are very pleased to announce that the IES/APA Section now has a fully staffed Board. We want to acknowledge our diverse new leaders who have stepped up to the plate to build capacity among our fellow planners for no other reward than garnering sense of service and accomplishment:

- Julie Rock, a seasoned planner has assumed the elected position of Professional Development Officer,
- Karen Peterson with the City of Upland has been appointed as Vice Chair of Awards Program,
- Leila Namvar with the City of Indio is the new Membership Coordinator,
- Gustavo Gonzalez from the City of Riverside is the new Section's Historian,
- H.P. Kang with Hogle-Ireland is now the California Planning Foundation Liaison,
- Miguel Gonzales with the City of Pomona will lead the Young Planners Group and
- Linda Huynh with the City of Santa Monica is the new Student Representative.

That is not all what is happening in the Inland Empire Section, though. This fabulous 2013 brought us the news that two award nominations from our section garnered APA National Awards of Excellence:

1. National Planning Excellence Award for a Grassroots Initiative: Cathedral City's Environmental Conservation Division (ECD) Kids & Community Program — Cathedral City, California.
2. National Planning Excellence Award for a Planning Advocate, Michael Osur, Deputy Director, Riverside County Department of Public Health, California.

We are very proud of these accomplishments.

Finally, as the immediate past IES/APA Section Historian, I want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to serve in that capacity. Instituting and organizing the annual historical symposia has been an amazing and rewarding experience that I believe has influenced our membership to consider pre-history and history as a path to create a sense of place, sense of belonging and a sense of identity when conducting planning activities. I look forward to supporting Gustavo Gonzales in his efforts to continue this important work. As the appointed Art VULUPS liaison, I will continue to be engaged and exercise creativity as an essential ingredient to promote our profession while demystifying its complexities.

Wherever you are, you can help Aaron and our Board to change the face of the Inland Empire Section of the American Planning Association by providing ideas, networking avenues, attending our events and

most importantly, by volunteering your time and sharing your own capacities with the rest of our fellow planners and communities.