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President’s Message: Summer 2023 July/August

By Jessica Benner



2023-2024 WAML President, Jessica Benner in Vancouver, BC, Canada

Summer Greetings WAML members!

I am thrilled to be the incoming President of WAML. Since my first meeting in San Diego in 2018, I fell in love with WAML, as I believe many of you have over the years. I was welcomed and encouraged. I was told that there are opportunities for leadership, and here I am!! I do feel a bit odd since (as far as I know) I am the first President from the East, working in an institution in Pittsburgh, PA which is squarely NOT in the West. Yet the welcoming nature of WAML and all it has to offer makes it

attractive to folks from the East and Midwest who see its value and have joined in recent years. The pandemic accelerated this in one way by making the conference virtual and more accessible to people across the globe. Yet, there was already interest from outside the West. My first act for the organization was participating in the Vision and Mission Taskforce in 2019, where we discussed how to incorporate this broader interest into WAML's new Vision and Mission. Ultimately, we settled on expanding the scope to "western North America and beyond", which allowed WAML to retain its roots in the West but remain open to all. I hope my position in the East is an asset to the organization.

Most of my work on the Board to this point has been planning our annual conference with Past President & Conference Host, Evan Thornberry and our Virtual Host, Heather Ross. The conference – August 9th-12th, 2023, in Vancouver, BC, Canada – will be our first in-person conference since the pandemic. We have been working to offer hybrid options, including presentations and regular meetings. So, we encourage anyone who wants to attend but cannot make it to Vancouver to attend virtually, you can do so for free! The pre-conference workshops will not be available virtually and we have decided not to record any of the sessions this year; however, we do hope to host a few virtual workshops this year, which may include one of the workshops being given in-person at the conference so stay tuned. This year we will have a hybrid Memorial before the Banquet for two important WAMLites who passed this year, Stan Stevens and Phil Hoehn. Feel free to drop in virtually or in-person to pay your respects on Thursday, August 10th (from 6:30-7:00 pm PDT/9:30-10:00 pm EDT). You can check out the full program on the Conference Website.

Now I give thanks. My first thanks goes to Georgia Brown for agreeing to chair the Communications Committee – a new iteration of the Web Communications Committee – this coming year as we figure out its new rhythms. I also want to say THANK YOU to Past President Evan Thornberry and Secretary Becky Seifried, who are rotating off the Board, new Past President Kat Strickland, and our steadfast Treasurer Bruce Godfrey, who will remain on the Board with me this year: they are all stellar collaborators. Lastly, a big WELCOME to our new Board Members, Secretary Lena Denis and Vice-President/President-Elect Meg Miller! I can't wait to start working with them this year. In this new year, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or the Board – execboard@waml.org – if you have ideas, concerns, or dreams for WAML events, or just want to chat. We want to hear it.

The picture I have provided is me in Vancouver, hugging a tree in the Provincial Forest near UBC. If you are coming to Vancouver, you can do this too on Day 2 of the conference! I hope to see many of you in Vancouver and virtually over the next year.

Till next time, my door is open,

Jessica Benner
WAML President 2023-2024
Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA.

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