Preaching to the Choir

PROFESSIONALISM

BY ROBERT RIETZ

CLERGY OF ALL DENOMINATIONS complain about preaching to the choir—delivering a great sermon to the eager attention of the handful of people who are already sufficiently dedicated that they've gotten up early to come and sing in the service. The choir members listen attentively, nodding, laughing in all the right places, clearly absorbing every word.

But others in the congregation are a different story. They may gaze into nothingness, write grocery lists on the program, even doze off (snoring lightly) before the service is done. They're not bad people. Quite the contrary, they're decent, law-abiding individuals who hold down responsible jobs, pay their bills on time, love their families, and try to do the right thing in most cases. But for a variety of reasons, their attention is focused elsewhere, and no amount of pulpit pounding will bring it back.

Sometimes, writing about actuarial professionalism feels a lot like preaching to the choir. The Council on Professionalism works to develop actuaries' professional standards of conduct, qualification, and practice, and to support the profession's discipline process. Those of us who are involved in council projects agree that a high level of professionalism is an actuary's most important asset, enhancing the credibility of both the individual and the profession as a whole. We write articles and discussion papers, participate in webcasts, give speeches at national actuarial meetings and local clubs, present mock ABCD hearings, devise professionalism cartoons for the *Update*, and even distribute lapel buttons proclaiming our slogan: "Professionalism Counts!"

Yet we suspect that some actuaries who are less attuned to professionalism issues might not be really hearing what we have to say. Actuaries are busy people, and reading an article or attending a session on a professionalism topic may not always seem like the optimal use of precious time. Still, we think most actuaries want to do work that reflects a high level of skill and integrity, and that the tools developed by the profession can help them achieve that goal.

So we wonder: what are the best ways to deliver the message that professionalism counts, not just for the actuaries who work on the council, but for every member of the profession? What would make you read the next discussion draft and comment on it, or attend a professionalism session at a meeting? Please e-mail your thoughts, ideas, and inspirations to the council at **professionalism@actuary.org**. We'll use them to bring the professionalism message to all of our members.

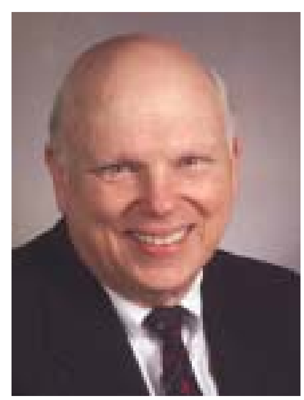
Robert Rietz is the Academy's vice president for professionalism issues.

Rugland to Receive Farley Award

DURING THE COURSE OF HIS CAREER, Walter S. Rugland got to know Jarvis Farley quite well. Farley was, in Rugland's assessment, "a Renaissance actuary, who could work anywhere. He was more than a technician. He was very smart, but he was a practical manager."

The same could be said of Rugland, who will be receiving the Jarvis Farley Service Award at the Academy's Oct. 27 annual meeting in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

Because his father, Walter L. Rugland, was the Academy's fifth president, it might have been expected that Rugland would have some involvement with the Academy. But his commitment, which began with a stint as the Academy's secretary from 1974 to 1976, has continued for nearly 30 years. Rugland served on the Academy's board of directors from 1977 to 1980, moving off the board when he took up the chairmanship of the Committee to Study the Requirements of Professionalism. As that committee evolved into the Committee on Qualifications, Rugland was deeply involved in the development of the Actuarial Standards Board. During the same time period, Rugland served as an Academy vice president and as member of the Life Practice Council. In 1992, while serving as president of the Society of Actuaries, Rugland became involved in restructuring the International Actuarial Association and did pioneering work in the development of international qualification standards. As a result of that work he was awarded honorary fellowships in both the British Institute of Actuaries and the Scottish Faculty of Actuaries.



See **FARLEY AWARD**, Page 8

Farley Award, *continued from Page 7*

Having joined the Academy in 1968, Rugland has seen the institution grow and change. And he likes what he sees.

"The Academy has blossomed from a think tank to an action tank," Rugland said. "It can operate as a resource. It doesn't take political positions, but what it does take are positions based on the professional experience of actuaries. It does a pretty good job looking out for the interests of actuaries, but not in a self-serving way. And that's been tricky."

As for the future of the actuarial profession in a changing global economy, Rugland couldn't be more optimistic. "I keep asking the question, if we didn't have the profession, would we invent it? I think we would," Rugland said, explaining, "There is a growing gulf between short-term thinking and long-term thinking. Short-term thinking is sequential, long-term thinking is strategic. And actuaries are trained to be long-term thinkers."

Rugland's own actuarial career began with a job in the actuarial department of Connecticut General Life, which he took shortly after graduating in 1961 from the University of Michigan's graduate business school. Rugland joined Milliman & Robertson in its Chicago office in 1975, moving to Hartford to start Milliman's office there in 1980. After retiring from Milliman in 1998, Rugland became chief operating officer of the Aid Association for Lutherans in Appleton, Wis., retiring at the end of last year.

About his decision to follow in his father's footsteps as an actuary, Rugland admits, "I couldn't decide to not become an actuary."

In fact, Rugland said, math was never his best subject. But he also thinks good math skills are only part of what makes a good actuary. "It's the ability to conceptualize what the numbers tell you. You can look at a project or a report and see whether it makes sense or not, and what you are pulling on is your actuarial knowledge and sensitivity."