

## President Column for May

### 2008 International Year of Planet Earth will expand public awareness of the importance of geology and geophysics

By Linda Sternbach

This year is anything but ordinary! It's the Year of Planet Earth! HGS and GCAGS volunteers are busy with program planning for a joint meeting of the Gulf Coast Association of Geological Societies (GCAGS), the Geological Society of America (GSA), and the Tri-Societies (Agronomy, Crop Science and Soil Science). This historic mega-convention will take place October 5-9, 2008 in downtown Houston. Attendance could top 10,000 geoscientists! HGS is the host society of the GCAGS segment of the meeting. HGS Past-President Dave Rensink is General Chairman of the convention, and HGS former Treasurer Ken Nemeth is ruling as President of the GCAGS. Registration information is on the website <http://www.gcags2008.com>.

I thought that was big, but it turns out the scope of the "Year of Planet Earth" will feature efforts among geoscientists around the world. The Year of Planet Earth (website: [www.yearofplanetearth.org](http://www.yearofplanetearth.org)) is actually a multi-year program 2004-2010, founded by the United Nations earth science division (UNESCO) and the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) and supported by geo- societies we all know well: AAPG, SEG, GSA, and SEPM, as well as AIPG and AGI. The Houston Geological Society is participating in this public outreach through the leadership of HGS member Ralph Baird, president and CEO of Baird Petrophysical and a founder of PetroDevelopment Advisors, LLC (Figure 1). Ralph is volunteering as Chairman of the Year of Planet Earth Development Committee. Baird has been a supporter of International Geophysical Year projects (IGY), forerunners of Year of Planet Earth, for a long time. Baird reminded us, "This is the 50th anniversary of the highly successful, Earth science-focused, IGY programs. When IGY started, Sputnik was launched; NASA was started the following year; it was the beginning of DARPA, the predecessor of today's internet; continental drift was confirmed and accepted; the Van Allen radiation belts were discovered. International Geophysical Year (IGY) was inspirational as an international collaboration by peaceful, dedicated geoscientists." The mission of "Year of Planet Earth" is to move forward on the original vision.

In March, Baird organized a meeting of local G&G leaders downtown and we got to hear about the International Year of Planet Earth plans from Dr. Ed de Mulder, IYPE executive director, who resides in Trondheim, Norway (Figure 2). The International Year of Planet Earth aims promote and expand the knowledge accumulated by the world's 400,000 Earth scientists. Many of the current programs are focused on studying groundwater, geohazards, health, climate and energy resources. One interesting program is called OneGeology in which scientists are trying to create a world surface map at a 1:1 scale. See the effort at <http://www.onegeology.org/>.

Baird's March meeting in Houston featured well known AAPG leaders like Larry Woodfork and Marlan Downey. Woodfork (Figure 3), retired geologist from West Virginia, is chairman of the International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE) non-profit corporation. GSH, the Houston Museum of Natural Science, and other societies also sent representatives. Linda Wuest, executive director of World Affairs Council of Houston, explained how this is also the year of the WACH "Global Energy Initiative", an outreach program designed to increase energy awareness among Houston's college, business, law and high

school students. HGS member Steve Tobias recommended WACH programs and the website at [www.wachouston.org](http://www.wachouston.org) for geoscientists who want to be informed about energy issues and policy.

Want to know what is good about this? Why is this important to HGS members? Dave Rensink summarized it by saying, "Due to both "Year of Planet Earth" initiatives and hosting the combined GSA/GCAGS convention in Houston, this is the first time so many earth scientists are getting a chance to meet together to plan programs. This is a tremendous opportunity to communicate both with the public and with diverse geoscientists when they meet in Houston in October 5-9."

Ralph Baird is on the right track when he said, "It is important to involve video in outreach to the public." He is working with Dan Molina (ex-NBC anchor, now a consultant) on video and voice commentary clips that will describe Year of Planet Earth programs to students, academic scientists, and politicians.

One of my concerns is that energy and environmental geoscientists don't communicate outside of the limited reach of geo-societies. The public, especially young people, get their news from video, internet clips, and YouTube. In order to educate the public on energy resources, the petroleum business, climate change, and environmental geology issues, geoscientists need to be more aggressive in putting facts and debate into appealing visual media, and get that broadcasted. I think the Year of Planet Earth organizers are showing that they will make progress in communicating and educating the public. The progress on the Year of Planet Earth programs will unfold as the year goes on, and I am glad HGS, AAPG and GCAGS will be a part of it.

Figure captions

Figure 1

Ralph Baird, geophysicist and president of Baird Petrophysical and a founder of PetroDevelopment Advisors, LLC, is chairman of the International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE) Development Committee. Baird, an HGS member, is leading an effort to involve local Houston G&G leaders in "Year of Planet Earth" public education programs.

Figure 2

Dr. Ed de Mulder, Executive Director of IYPE, Norway, was a featured speaker at the Year of Planet Earth planning session. Linda Sternbach, HGS President, attended the March meeting along with other G & G leaders, including GSA/GCAGS 2008 General Chairman Dave Rensink.

Figure 3

Larry Woodfork, retired geologist from West Virginia, is chairman of the International Year of Planet Earth (IYPE) non-profit corporation. AAPG Past-President Marlan Downey also attended the Houston IYPE meeting in March.

Figure 4

The International Year of Planet Earth aims to ensure a greater and more effective use by society of the knowledge accumulated by the world's earth scientists. The International Year runs from January 2007 to December 2009. The International Year of Planet Earth is a joint initiative by UNESCO and the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS). AAPG, GSA, SEG and SEPM are partner societies. HGS is providing volunteers.

