

# Presidents' Page

**com-mu-ni-ty** | kə'myoʊnɪtē | 1. A group of people living in the same place; 2. A feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.

For the past couple of editions, I have used objects I've found around the house as the opening to my President's Pages. My style was becoming so predictable that Pam Day commented: "Can't wait to see what pin or button you find in the attic or trunk of your car for next month!" The good news, dear colleagues, is my house lacks an attic and my car is an SUV—one without a trunk. This will be a month free of "pin or button...."

I have just returned from Chicago, where the American Medical Association (AMA) held the annual meeting of the AMA House of Delegates (HOD). As one of our association's representatives to the AMA, I thought it might be useful to share a few thoughts on the value to AsMA of being represented at the AMA. Unfortunately, that thought was overtaken by events and, as eager as I know you all are to learn more about the AMA, I think I'll defer those reflections to a later date (As Bob Orford, our Parliamentarian, might say: "It's tabled to a time certain").

At the moment, there is a small drama playing out in my community (community as defined in #1 above). Hopefully, by the time this page reaches you, it will have played out, although the official prediction is it will take more than 30 days before the curtain is finally lowered on this drama. I describe it as "a small drama" because on the cosmic scale it is really quite small. To those affected by it, it is the sole focus of their lives, at least for the present.

My last military assignment brought our family to Colorado Springs. Even though there are a fair number of Navy and Marine (and Coast Guard) personnel in the Springs, it is better known as an "Air Force town," the home of several large Air Force bases, including Peterson AFB, Cheyenne Mountain AFB (home of NORAD), and the Air Force Academy. Tucked in the foothills of Pikes Peak, it is the area that inspired Katherine Lee Bates' writing of the song "America the Beautiful." When I retired in May 2011, Deb and I decided that we couldn't think of a community we wanted to live in more than Colorado Springs. After 25 years of the military gypsy life—so familiar to many of us—we finally would be able to build some roots, in one of America's most beautiful cities.

One of the activities Deb and I really enjoy is being able to take advantage of the closeness to nature Colorado Springs offers. Ten miles west of us is a popular hiking area we have been to several times known as the Waldo Canyon Trail. Six days ago a fire started in the Waldo Canyon area and for those six days I've had a front row seat to the unfolding drama. Looking out a second floor window, I have been able to watch the smoke columns grow to the south and then move progressively northward, although still several ridgelines to the west of



**P. Glenn Merchant, Jr., M.D., M.P.H.**

the populated areas. That all changed in a matter of minutes 2 days ago when an isolated thunderstorm, sitting above the fire, sent the flames eastward at over 60 miles an hour. The fire jumped two ridgelines, creating what has been described as "an epic firestorm." Massive smoke clouds blocked all views to the west, and hidden in that cloud was a friend and colleague, who, with his family, was forced to grab what few personal belongings their cars could carry as flames moved within a half-mile of their home.

When the smoke finally cleared, their house was still standing, although more than 300 of their neighbors' homes were lost. This takes me to that second definition of community above: A feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. While the fire has tragically touched our neighbors, it has also created a sense of community spirit that is washing over the city. Families are pitching in to help strangers, opening their doors to those displaced. Boy Scouts are knocking at my door seeking donations. Most encouraging, politicians from opposite political viewpoints are coming together to tackle our community's pressing needs, without rancor or finger pointing.

I see many parallels in this for our association. The need to face challenges collectively, to work together for the common good, to pool our resources to build a community. I take great comfort from being part of such a community, both here in Colorado Springs and across the world, as a member of the Aerospace Medical Association.

Now I would hate to make our editor think I wasn't able to find something around the house to write about. It turns out the title "Presidents' Page" is not a typo—Presidents' should be plural. Our colleague, whose family had to leave their home behind, is one of the past authors of this page. Deb and I were pleased to be able to open our home to Bob and Gail Weien, and their daughter Molly (and Russell, the Jack Russell Terrier and five cats) until they're able to return to theirs.

Community. Turns out fires aren't the only thing that gives you a warm glow.