

2004 GSA Distinguished Service Award

John E. Costa's Citation for Peter W. Lipman

In presenting Peter W. Lipman with the Geological Society of America's 2004 Distinguished Service Award, John E. Costa began by observing that Lipman was already well known within the geological community for what Costa characterized as his "magnificent scientific accomplishments." Lipman had built an internationally distinguished career in volcanology through detailed geologic mapping, studies of both ancient and active volcanic systems, investigations of enormous submarine landslides associated with Hawaiian volcanoes, and research on volcanic hazards. Costa noted that Lipman's fieldwork had taken him particularly to the volcanoes of Hawaii and the San Juan Mountains of Colorado.

The Distinguished Service Award, however, recognized a very different aspect of Lipman's contribution to geology: his service to the Geological Society of America and, in particular, his role in helping the Society confront a serious financial crisis.

Lipman served as a GSA Councilor and member of the Executive Committee from 2000 through 2003 and was closely involved with the Society's Budget, Finance, and Audit committees. He assumed these responsibilities at a difficult time. GSA was facing the combined effects of a sharply declining stock market and an operating structure in which annual expenditures exceeded revenues by approximately \$3 million. Continuing to cover operating deficits by drawing on the Society's investments and endowment was clearly unsustainable.

Costa emphasized that Lipman brought an unusual combination of scientific judgment, personal financial experience, and familiarity with philanthropy to these problems. Rather than simply accepting established practices, he became an influential participant in—and, according to Costa, a leader of—the group of GSA officers and staff attempting to restore the Society to financial stability. Working with other elected officers, a new Executive Director, and a new Controller, Lipman helped subject GSA's finances and operations to rigorous scrutiny. Existing assumptions were questioned, policies reconsidered, expenditures examined, and new approaches to budgeting and financial management adopted.

The process was not easy. Restoring financial stability required difficult decisions and substantial changes in how the Society operated. But the effort succeeded. Costa reported that GSA was reaching the point at which its operating budget, apart from its research-grant program, would again be supported by operating revenues rather than by continuing withdrawals from the endowment.

Costa was particularly emphatic about Lipman's personal contribution to this turnaround, stating:

"I cannot overstate the influence of Peter Lipman"

on the discussions and decisions that brought about GSA's financial recovery.

The significance of Lipman's contribution therefore extended well beyond balancing a budget. By helping GSA establish a sustainable financial foundation, he helped protect the Society's ability to support geological research, publications, meetings, education, and future generations of geoscientists. Costa concluded that Lipman's judgment, financial insight, and willingness to devote substantial time and effort to GSA had helped assure a strong future for the Society and made him particularly deserving of the 2004 Geological Society of America Distinguished Service Award.

Peter W. Lipman's Response

Peter Lipman responded characteristically by declining to regard the financial recovery of GSA as his accomplishment alone. He emphasized that the award really reflected the work of a much larger group of elected GSA officers and members of the Society's professional staff who had confronted the financial and organizational problems together.

Lipman recalled that when he joined GSA Council in 2000, newly installed leadership was beginning to recognize the seriousness of problems that had accumulated over a considerable period. The Society faced what Lipman described as an "unsustainable situation." Resolving it required more than minor adjustments to the annual budget; it demanded a multiyear reassessment of GSA's finances and operations.

As a newly elected Council member, Lipman became deeply involved in that process. He acknowledged that the necessary changes involved difficult decisions and, in some cases, painful actions. GSA had to find ways simultaneously to increase income and reduce expenditures. The essential objective, however, was not merely financial: those changes had to be accomplished without undermining the Society's scientific mission.

Lipman believed that this had been achieved. GSA had substantially improved its financial position while preserving its fundamental role in supporting and promoting the earth sciences. He therefore regarded the Society's recovery as a collective accomplishment involving GSA officers, Council, committees, management, and staff rather than the achievement of any one individual.

Lipman concluded his response by reflecting more broadly on professional service. Participation in organizations such as GSA, he suggested, brings rewards that are quite different from those associated with scientific research. Service provides opportunities to develop new friendships, encounter unfamiliar problems, learn from people with different expertise, and grow personally through participation in decisions outside one's normal scientific work.

Most important was the satisfaction that comes from contributing something useful to the scientific community—the feeling that through professional service one can genuinely make a difference.

Costa, J.E., 2004, Citation for Peter W. Lipman, GSA Distinguished Service Award, in *2004 Medals & Awards*: Boulder, Colorado, Geological Society of America, unpaginated.

Lipman, P.W., 2004, Response to the GSA Distinguished Service Award, in *2004 Medals & Awards*: Boulder, Colorado, Geological Society of America, unpaginated.