



# Communicator

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*'Creating public awareness  
and understanding'*

## How clear is clear enough?

By Mark Dennis

Information/Communication Manager,  
City of Lake Elsinore

About the time of the American Civil War, Italian Astronomer Pietro Angelo Secchi invented a tool to help mariners chart the safest path through coastal waters.

The Secchi disk is a flat 20- or 30mm-diameter, black and white-patterned dish that is lowered into the water on a tether until it can no longer be seen. The longer the dish remains visible, the greater the transparency of the water column.

Today, the Secchi disk remains one of the most valuable tools in the study of water quality. For example, continuous Secchi disk measurements show that Lake Tahoe—one of the clearest lakes in the world—might not stay that way if sediments, nutrients and urban runoff get a permanent foothold in degrading water quality.

Measuring transparency in government has no equivalent to a Secchi dish. Therefore, how do we know when government is doing enough to protect transparency?

Every state has some variety of law mandating that all government business be conducted in open meetings to which the public has access. California has the Brown Act.

Transparency, or use of "sunshine laws," is a way of protecting fairness and ensuring the common good. They range from open meetings, to accommodating disabilities, to open

records and variations of the federal Freedom of Information Act.

Without a Secchi disk equivalent, public officials may sometimes be unclear about or too loose in their interpretation of open meeting law and what constitutes a meeting; many are ill-equipped to comply with The Americans with Disabilities Act; or may be caught being dead wrong in their interpretation of the Freedom of Information Act.



Without transparency in government, ethics watchdogs are quick to cite inadequate public access to information as the basis for corruption to flourish and back-room deals to determine spending in the interests of the few rather than the many.

The role of the PIO is often to facilitate transparency, or in the worst case, taking defensive action when transparency is questioned or broached.

During the 2008 CAPIO Conference in Lake Tahoe, media and legal experts and professional communicators will gather to discover 'how clear is clear enough?'

Our theme is taking transparency in government to new heights. Let us be your guide.

## When disaster strikes, you could be its voice

When a disaster comes to your community, you may find yourself a key source whose words carry important information and meaning.

When my family and I were evacuated during the San Diego wildfires four years ago, I remember listening to the radio long into the night and hearing calm, reassuring voices explaining what was going on. This



Bill Polick

President's Message

year I found myself one of those voices.

For four nights I worked the 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. shift at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), gathering information from my colleagues and telling all that I could to almost every radio

and television station in the County. In the first three nights alone, I did more than 100 interviews ranging from five to twenty minutes.

The other PIOs who shared my space on the overnight shifts, Tammy Glenn, Lesley Kirk, Tom Christiansen, Jose Alvarez, Linda Miller and Mike Workman, provided the information I needed. It was truly a (See **POLICK**, Page 2)

## Save the Date: Annual Conference set for April 16-18, 2008

It's not too early to mark your calendar for the annual CAPIO conference, which will be held this year in South Lake Tahoe from Wednesday, April 16 to Friday, April 18, 2008.

Conference headquarters will be located at the Embassy Suites.

Inspired by the clear air, clear lake and clear skies of the Tahoe area, the CAPIO board has selected "Taking Transparency in Government to New Heights" as this year's conference theme. Important topics like

building public confidence, encouraging citizen participation and facilitating transparency will be discussed.

More detailed information about the conference will follow in future issues of Communicator.

If you have any ideas or suggestions for making the 2008 CAPIO Conference our best yet, please email conference chairperson Mark Dennis at [mdennis@lake-elsinore.org](mailto:mdennis@lake-elsinore.org) or call (951) 674-3124, ext. 207.



**APRIL 16-18, 2008  
SOUTH LAKE TAHOE,  
CALIFORNIA**

## CAPIO seeks webmaster, membership chair

Any organization has its share of growing pains, and CAPIO is no different. The good news is, we are growing, thanks to members like you who demonstrate a commitment to excellence in public information.

The CAPIO Board of Directors is taking action to address the needs of our growing organization. Two new positions have been added by the Board of Directors: Webmaster and Membership Chairperson.

At the last meeting of the Board, information was distributed to board members regarding the redesign and revamping of the CAPIO website. We'd like our site to reflect the quality of our membership, and while our current website is functional and works, there are several features we'd like to add, including the ability for members to register and pay for conferences, workshops and other CAPIO activities.

We're also looking to ramp up the site's ability to post and maintain an

archive of listserv questions and responses for easy reference for our members; add a search function; create areas with templates for beginning PIOs such as news releases, emergency plans and other valuable tools.

And while our membership has grown steadily, we know there are many communicators out there who we need to reach out to and make aware of the benefits of joining our organization, as well as keeping current members involved and up to date. That's where the Membership Chair comes in.

If we are to succeed as a professional organization, we need as many members as possible to not only attend workshops and conferences, but to spread the word about the great things we do.

If you are interested in serving as the webmaster or membership chairperson for CAPIO, send an e-mail to Mark Mazzaferro, CAPIO Secretary, at [mmazzaferro@cityofvacaville.com](mailto:mmazzaferro@cityofvacaville.com).

## USEFUL LINKS

\*California Specialized Training Institute: [ww.oes.ca.gov](http://ww.oes.ca.gov); (CSTI is several layers deep; go to Divisions/Regions/Partners, then Ops/Planning/Training and there it is!)

\*National Information Officers Association: [www.nioa.org](http://www.nioa.org)

\*The Working Reporter: [www.workingreporter.com](http://www.workingreporter.com)

\*League of California Cities: [www.cacities.org](http://www.cacities.org)

\*The (extremely) Unofficial Crisis Communications & the Media (CCM) Survivor Site: [www.thedebster.com/csticcm](http://www.thedebster.com/csticcm)

## Polick, from Page 1

team operation.

Early on, we developed a message — if you haven't yet been evacuated, but feel threatened or uncomfortable, evacuate. The final numbers aren't in yet, but we know that more than a half million people were evacuated — the largest number for any wildfire in state history.

One thing that worked well for us was the relationship we have with reporters and editors. They know

us, have our cell phone numbers, and aren't afraid to call when they want information. Media was hungry for up-to-date facts and we had many to share. That came because we've done the drill enough to be comfortable with the staff working in other parts of the EOC.

Our message got out because we worked well with reporters who knew we were available. In our routine daily activities, many government

officials look at media as adversaries. In fact, they can be our assets from day to day and certainly in times of crisis. And the colleagues we share time and space with are even more important.

I'm grateful for all the people I worked with during the firestorms in October — that we know each other, work well together, and, more importantly, have practiced together.

# Awards ceremony highlights annual CAPIO conference

**C**APIO's Board of Directors are continually striving for ways to improve and stay current with trends and technology to offer top notch programs and recognize the best of the best in their respective fields. As a result, during the 2007 CAPIO conference in Yosemite we asked participants for feedback on how we could improve all aspects of the conference including the awards ceremony. Overwhelmingly we heard that what we needed most was to update the categories and criteria for entrants - well, you have spoken and we have obliged!

This year we have combined certain categories and we will now feature a New Media category, Crisis Communications category and New Member of the Year category. Also making its debut for the second year is the Photography category. In addition, we at CAPIO have moved into the 21st Century and will now be accepting DVD's in the video category!

Please watch your mailboxes in early January for the 2008 Call for Entries!

## Writing

Original writing for a program or project addressing a community or agency issue. Include the published copy and a hard-copy draft of one of the following: feature article, editorial, opinion piece, news release, speech, copy for advertisement or non-profit electronic message.

**Criteria:** effectiveness in communicating the issue, creativity and results.

## New Media

Highlight an agency or municipality's blog, podcast or webcast.

**Criteria:** Achievement of program objectives, creativity, effectiveness and scripting. Success in meeting goals will be given priority over production quality.

## Video Production

A video, series, advertisement, non-profit message, or cable T.V. access program produced for the public. The category includes advertisements and non-profit messages for television. Submit tapes in VHS (1/2 inch) format or DVD's. Maximum length is 20 minutes.

**Criteria:** Achievement of program objectives, creativity, effectiveness and scripting. Success in meeting goals will

be given priority over production quality.

## Public Safety Program or Campaign

A public safety or emergency services program or event.

**Criteria:** writing quality, creativity, graphic design, presentation and cost effectiveness.

## Special Innovation

This category is for novel entries that don't fit into any other category. Entries should demonstrate exceptional creativity and introduce concepts to public information that are both unique and applicable. Entries are subject to the same guidelines and criteria applied to all other categories.

## Community or Special Audience Newsletter

Publications (print or electronic) that educate or inform the agency's external customers about programs and services. Must be distributed at least twice a year.

**Criteria:** writing quality, content and design.

## Internal or Employee Newsletter

Publications (print or electronic) that inform an agency's employees about its programs, services and personnel. Must be produced at regular intervals and demonstrate a commitment to employee communication.

**Criteria:** writing quality, content and design.

## Special Events

A thematic public event designed to meet and measure audience participation, goals and objectives (i.e. open house, grand opening, ribbon cutting, dedication, etc.).

**Criteria:** originality, quality of materials, and the integration of marketing strategies and tactics to deliver the message to the target audience. Campaign entries should include a binder displaying all elements of the event and a one-page summary of its contents.

## Special publication

Publications such as an annual report, brochure, calendar, class schedule, etc. (excluding newsletters) are eligible.

**Criteria:** writing quality, graphic design,

presentation and cost effectiveness.

## Marketing/Communications Campaign

A thematic campaign designed to meet and measure audience participation, goals and objectives.

**Criteria:** originality, quality of materials, and the integration of marketing strategies and tactics to deliver the message to the target audience. Campaign entries should include a binder displaying all elements of the campaign and a one-page summary of its contents.

## Crisis Communications Program

A best practices on how a jurisdiction or agency best handled an episode of crisis communications in their own community. Emphasize the importance of strategy, media relations, outcome, and overall composure in handling such an unexpected catastrophic event.

**Criteria:** writing quality, creativity, poise, presentation and cost effectiveness.

## Web Site

An agency, department or issue-specific website.

**Criteria:** design, graphics, layout, photography, content, writing quality, information flow, user-friendly navigation and current and relevant information. Indicate the percentage of the site that is accessible to users with disabilities and describe access features.

## Photography

An original photo or photos - no stock photography - that capture(s) a photographic expression of the theme of a communications piece. No transparencies or prints should be submitted by themselves; submittals must be in context of a web page, PowerPoint presentation, brochure, poster, newsletter or other communications piece where photos are used to illustrate story content or a key idea. Please don't forget to identify the photographer!

**Criteria:** Appropriateness of the photo or photos to convey theme; technical quality; and creative uses of subject, lighting, composting or Photoshop effects.

## Member of the Year Award

Selected by CAPIO Board President at his or her discretion.



# CAPIO CAREER CORNER

For complete listings, visit [capio.org](http://capio.org)



## COMMUNITY INFORMATION COORDINATOR City of Claremont

\$5,196 - \$6,277 per month

We are looking for a highly motivated, self-starter, with excellent customer service skills to manage the City's public information and public relations activities.

The Community Information Coordinator will work closely with City Council members, the City Manager, and other City officials in developing public information strategies and documents. He/she will develop and implement a City-wide economic development marketing campaign and work with various Chamber of Commerce and other marketing subcommittees to promote the City.



CITY OF CLAREMONT

Qualified applicants will have three years of experience in public information, preferably in a municipal setting, and a Bachelor's Degree in journalism, public relations, telecommunications, or a related field. A Masters Degree is desirable. Visit the city website at [www.ci.claremont.ca.us](http://www.ci.claremont.ca.us) or call the Personnel Office at (909) 399-5450 for more info. Completed application required and must be received by Thursday, November 29, 2007 by 1 p.m.

## PUBLIC INFORMATION MANAGER City of La Mirada, California

Salary: \$5,548 - \$6,905/Mo

The City of La Mirada is seeking a talented professional to be a key member of the City's management team. This position reports directly to the Community Services Director and is responsible for coordinating a wide range of public relations activities, outreach activities and special events, and developing brochures, promotional materials, and news releases. Five (5) yrs. of increasingly responsible administrative experience involving the development of public information and community outreach programs. A Bachelor's degree and CDL are required. Master's degree is desirable.



An exceptional benefits package includes a fully paid 3% @ 55 retirement formula (CalPERS coordinated with PARS), fully paid medical insurance, a \$250/month auto allowance and a 9/80 work schedule.

Deadline to apply is Friday, December 7, 2007, 4:30 p.m. For further information regarding this outstanding career opportunity call (562) 943-0131 or visit the city website [www.cityoflamirada.org](http://www.cityoflamirada.org). EOE.

# CAPIO CODE OF ETHICS

**D**id you know the CAPIO Board of Directors adopted a Code of Ethics for its members, developed from the codes of a number of prestigious organizations ranging from the International City Managers Association to the American Society of Journalists. It addresses the importance of dealing with the public and the media in a fair and appropriate manner and serves as a reminder that we should make each decision as if it was being viewed on national TV.

**I will** be dedicated to the concepts and principles of democratic government.

**I will** affirm the dignity and worth of public service and continually strive to maintain the public's confidence by serving the public interest and putting the public trust before all else.

**I will** respect the public's right to know the public's business and will strive to create and maintain effective relationships with the media to foster those

important communications.

**I will** adhere to the highest standards of honesty, accuracy and truth and will be accessible, knowledgeable and credible when speaking for my agency.

**I will** never knowingly disseminate false or misleading information and will act promptly to correct errors.

**I will** make every attempt to accommodate and educate members of the media by presenting information in a clear and concise fashion.

**I will** strive to be the best source of information for my agency and if I do not know the answer to a question, I will find it or find someone who does.

**I will** never speculate, guess or lie.



**I will** respect privileged information as it protects the public good.

**I will** seek no favor and believe that personal gain secured by knowledge of information is dishonest.

**I will** take the time to strengthen my individual capabilities, and to encourage lifetime learning and professional development for myself and others.

**In the event** of an emergency or other disaster, I will reasonably put the needs of my agency and the community it serves ahead of my personal concerns.



CAPIO is a leading statewide membership organization with 300 members throughout California. Based in Sacramento, CAPIO strives to offer innovative ongoing training and educational opportunities to public information professionals while promoting ethics and integrity in public service. For more information, visit [www.capio.org](http://www.capio.org).