

2010 MEDALS & AWARDS

AGI MEDAL IN MEMORY OF IAN CAMPBELL

Presented to Vicki Cowart



Vicki Cowart
Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains
(formerly at Colorado Geological Survey)

Citation by Vincent Matthews

It is a pleasure and an honor to present the American Geological Institute's Medal in honor of Ian Campbell for Superlative Service to the Geosciences to Vicki J. Cowart. I first learned of Vicki's outstanding leadership abilities when we served together on the Board of Directors of the Association for Women Geoscientists Foundation (AWG) in the 1980s. Vicki helped found AWG and served as its first national President. In her real job at that time, she was District Manager for Schlumberger Well Services responsible for operations in the Gulf of Mexico.

Cowart grew up in the heart of Arizona's mining country. She traveled east to Worcester Polytechnic Institute where she received a B.S. in Physics *with Distinction*. Returning to her beloved west, she received an M.S. in Geophysics from the Colorado School of Mines (CSM). For the next three decades, she maintained strong ties with CSM by serving the Alumni Association in a variety of positions including President, receiving CSM's Young Alumnus Award, CSM's Distinguished Achievement Medal, and she currently serves on CSM's three-member, Board of Trustees.

Her service to her profession is not restricted to CSM. She doesn't just join organizations; she actively participates and contributes to them. These contributions are

commonly significant and have been formally acknowledged by a number of organizations.

She served in positions of responsibility for the American Geological Institute, American Institute of Professional Geologists, Alliance of Professional Women, Association of American State Geologists, Denver Geophysical Society, International Women's Forum, Western States Seismic Policy Council, National Academy of Sciences/ National Research Council, and the Society of Exploration Geophysicists. Her contributions to the geosciences profession and society are recognized with various awards from the American Institute of Professional Geologists, Association of American State Geologists, Colorado Citizen's Leadership Excellence Award, Association for Women Geoscientists, Rocky Mountain Association of Geologists, Colorado Women's Forum, International Association of Geophysical Contractors, and YWCA Women of Achievement.

Vicki's career in the geosciences includes exploration work in the mining and petroleum industries. She was an Exploration Geophysicist for Skelly, Mobil, and Impel. She moved into management positions as District Geophysicist for American Quasar and Area Geophysicist for Atlantic Richfield. This background led to a successful, seven-year stint with Schlumberger. Perhaps her greatest contributions came during her decade as State Geologist of Colorado.

I have been a fan of the Colorado Geological Survey (CGS) since 1971, and was therefore delighted to learn in 1993 that Vicki had been named Director of CGS. She was never one to shrink from a challenge, but she inherited a daunting task.

In 1992, CGS' funding was unstable, its reputation was tarnished, and it faced an uncertain future. Vicki set to work with vigor to fix these problems. She developed a strategic plan, developed increased and new funding sources, and built a supportive constituency of staff members, citizens, and elected officials. She worked tirelessly to educate policy makers and citizens about the importance of geosciences and the natural resources industries to the people of Colorado. And, she was successful.

State funding was stabilized and increased three-fold. Federal grants increased six-fold under her tenure. The number of publications was increased dramatically and several won national awards. She established the CGS' first geologic mapping program which has now produced over 90 geologic maps. She established mineral and mineral fuel consortia, built an industrial constituency,

and developed program funding for a revitalized natural resources program.

Vicki enhanced the effectiveness of CGS' traditional program in geological hazards by establishing the CGS Geological Hazards Conference, a regular public education and outreach meeting on geologic hazards, land use and development issues. The conferences raised the standard of practice of geotechnical engineering, and in the case of conferences in the Colorado Front Range, led to changes in county regulatory practices.

Under her leadership, CGS led the nation in research on the problems related to development on heaving bedrock and swelling soils in the Colorado piedmont. She directed publication and distribution of these research results. That award-winning publication, *A Guide to Swelling Soils for Colorado Homebuyers and Homeowners*, has sold over 250,000 copies.

Her re-establishment of CGS work in water quality and ground water led to the award-winning, *Atlas of Colorado Groundwater*. She reached out to Colorado citizens and students with publications on Colorado geology, including a popular publication *RockTalk* that is enjoyed by thousands of readers annually.

Vicki hired me in 2000, and I was again able to observe first-hand her outstanding leadership qualities. She developed internal management training systems to establish a cadre of young, effective managers from within the existing staff of scientists within CGS. She created internal communication and reporting mechanisms that significantly enhanced operational efficiency of agency.

I often observed her speaking to a variety of groups about the importance of geosciences. She was an articulate and effective advocate and I was always proud that she was my State Geologist. Her role in educating state and national policy makers on the importance of geoscience programs was extremely beneficial to CGS and the people of Colorado.

As State Geologist, she actively participated in the Association of American State Geologists and its educational activities for national policy makers. Her many significant contributions through this organization were recognized when she was elected President in 2001 and granted Honorary Membership in 2003.

In my judgment, Vicki Cowart's public service is the epitome of the stated purpose of this award "to recognize contributions by members of the Association to public affairs and to encourage geologists to take

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a more active part in such affairs.” She has been active in educating state and national politicians, the general public, and thought leaders through a variety of vehicles. This education has included the application of geology to the general welfare in the areas of petroleum, land use, and conservation of natural resources. Vicki’s record of public service is one that can rarely be matched, is a challenge to the rest of us, and most certainly is a shining example of what one person can achieve in this arena.

Response by Vicki Cowart

Receiving the Ian Campbell Award is an honor I never imagined. I am touched by Vince Matthews’ citation and thank the AGI nomination committee and Member Society Council for this recognition. I’ve known 16 of the past recipients of the Ian Campbell Award through my work with the Association of American State Geologists, and it is a singular privilege to see my name on a list with theirs.

Congratulations to all of this year’s award recipients. To find myself among such illustrious company is an unexpected pleasure. I’d like to give a shout out to two special people I admire and am proud to call my friends. From our early days in the Association for Women Geoscientists, Marilyn Suiter, this year’s recipient of GSA’s Bromery Award for the Minorities, has been a source of inspiration and good times for me. Jon Price, who is being honored with the 2010 GSA’s Public Service Award, was a mentor and pal during our time in AASG together. Special cheers to my good friends, Marilyn and Jon.

I left the position of Colorado State Geologist in 2003. Coming back for this surprising honor, seeing old friends from the geo-world, lets me imagine what it would feel like to watch myself receive a posthumous award.

It was hard to leave the Colorado Geological Survey. Being the Colorado State Geologist is one of the best, most fun jobs ever. The work is rewarding, and the

community of State Geologists and people who care about geoscience-related public policy are smart, lively, and engaging. I left for a new world I didn’t know much about but have found to be rewarding. Still, across the years, I think fondly of the people and the work I left behind. To be called back, to receive this honor, is a thrilling experience.

Leaving a 25-year career must be like leaving the land of your birth for a long ship voyage to new lands. At first, you wave to the people on shore. Then, leaning against the rail, you watch the land recede. Eventually, the old world disappears; you turn to new work at hand. You think about what they are doing back “home”: budget, legislative session, the AASG Liaison trip. But soon, your new responsibilities take over. You adjust to a new world, with new routines, new people, and pressing new issues.

Eight years of engaging, rewarding “new” work is enough time to lose track of the details of the old world. I remember the people, the friendships, the sense of camaraderie and accomplishment, but Modern Health has replaced the SEG’s Leading Edge as my plane time reading! I’m not current on the status of the Geologic Mapping Act – but I can give you great detail on what’s up with Health Care Reform. I’m honored to be an Honorary Member of AASG and AWG, but as I scan the newsletters and emails, I recognize fewer names. My accent has changed and I’ve probably forgotten some of my old language.

Of course, I continue to admire geoscientists, who make significant contributions to the well-being of our world, finding or better using energy and resources, or through geological engineering, making it safer to live on our ever-changing world. I’m happy to have my work as a Trustee of the Colorado School of Mines as a place where I can still contribute to Colorado and geoscience education policy.

It was a great joy working with the people of the Colorado Geological Survey and I admire the work they do – providing the citizens and policy makers of this amazing state information to make good

decisions. The work I do in my new world may seem different – but it actually is similar: working for good policies and providing useful information for people to make good decisions is the common language between my old and new worlds.

I vividly remember the time a woman called me as State Geologist to ask what to do about the rockfall near her house, and the large boulder perched above the house. “Ma’am,” I asked, “are you calling me from inside the house?” “Yes,” she answered. “Well, in that case, please gather up your kids, get safe, then call me back after you are out of harm’s way. Then we’ll talk.”

That’s not so different from the teenager who comes to Planned Parenthood to find out if he has a life threatening infection like HIV. First determine if he has the disease and get him treatment. Then provide the information and education he needs to protect himself and others going forward.

Useful, and sometimes life saving information that helps individuals, families and communities – and ultimately society as a whole - is what my old world of the state geological surveys and my new world of Planned Parenthood have in common. And, like geoscience, this work is a calling, not just a job. In both cases, it is important and rewarding work.

My admiration for the people from my old geoscience world make this award deeply meaningful to me. Groups like AASG, AWG, SEG, AGI, AIPG, CGS and CSM – and the extraordinary geoscientists of those organizations contribute much to the well-being of our world. Working with them was educational, inspirational, and rewarding back when I was a “real” geoscientist. I am humbled to be honored by these folks today. Whatever success and accomplishments I have in this world are rooted in what I learned from these people.

Being invited “back home” for this very special event evokes good memories and reinforces the pride I feel about my origins among you in the world of geosciences.

Thank you.