



**Gary Marx** joined AASA in 1979 and is credited with ramping up the organization’s communications and publishing efforts, including media outreach, member surveys, and the expansion of *The School Administrator* into a monthly magazine.

Marx, who worked with AASA until 1998 and continues to work as a communications consultant, talked with freelance writer Glenn Cook as part of coverage of the association’s 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**AASA was flourishing financially when you arrived as the communications director, and you brought a similar entrepreneurial outlook to publications and member services. Why was that important to you?**

“In associations, a lot of people want to do a lot of wonderful things, but the association also has to produce enough revenue to support them. Many of the publications that were being produced were sort of driven by a grant or a joint project of some type. AASA was doing some really good things with its newsletter and some of its publications, but they were ready for the next step forward. They weren’t necessarily motivated by a hard look at the needs of the people in the field, and that’s one of the things I tried to do.

***The School Administrator*, which debuted as a one-page newsletter in 1943, was expanded into a monthly magazine in January 1981. Was this part of your plan all along?**

“Publications, in whatever format you choose to produce them, give your organization a voice. They provide information and stir debate while serving as a way to communicate what is important. Paul Salmon was there at the time, and it was his unstated dream to have a magazine. When we produced the first *School Administrator*, he patted that magazine and said, ‘This is just great. Everybody is going to love it. But I want you to be prepared because you’ve created new expectations.’

“And I think AASA has met those expectations, with the magazine and newsletters and now the webinars and e-publications it has put out. Jay Goldman has done wonders with the magazine, and worked to create what is truly a remarkable piece of work.”

**Do you think print publications still have a place, or are they going the way of the pay phone?**

“I do. Visible member services always have been important to associations, and they still are. Some have shifted online. In fact many of them have, and it’s so accessible. But I still believe there’s value to be found in print, especially when you are a membership group like AASA. Unless there’s some kind of price, people tend not to appreciate its value.

“The problem is that we’re so flooded with electronic communications now. It’s good and we need it, but it’s become so much that it’s difficult for us to remember what we’ve filed, what we wanted to pay attention to, because we have so much of it. Some of the packaged, printed material is almost easier to keep track of, because when you have it on a shelf it will be looking at you.”

**You are known for your integrated approach to publications, communications and member services. Most of this information came from member surveys that you developed. Why was that information so important to you?**

“The challenge for AASA, and any association really, is having products that you can sell and that become valuable go-to tools for your members. It will always be important for members to know what their association is doing with them and for them.”

“Looking at member surveys, if you’re thinking creatively, it’s not just what you have in front of you, but what the results tell you about the needs that you haven’t necessarily identified. We were always looking in the white space, always looking to figure out what else is there that we don’t have written down in front of us. That helped us develop products. We had one book, *Parents: Partners in Education*, that was translated into six languages and sold almost one million copies.

“We would later use the survey results to create critical issues reports that we later used as background documents in pitches to news media. We weren’t trying to sell something, but we were trying to be good advisors and counselors. I always looked at it as, ‘We’ll let you know our point of view and our stand on an issue. If you’re looking for others to talk with who have different points of view, we’ll advise you on that. If we believe in our position, it will withstand scrutiny.’ And people would call us for that reason. They knew we were credible.

“Digging up information and putting it together with familiar information creates new knowledge, and that’s what we need to do to legitimately communicate with all of the broader publics. My attitude was and is that education is important to everyone, but we often don’t make that connection to them.”

**You left AASA in 1998, but have remained extremely active in communications work. Why did you choose to leave then?**

“I’d been there 20 years, and I make it a practice to stay in touch, but it got to the point where I wanted time to do more writing and speaking on public education. I needed to be able to go out and do that without all of the other duties that come with the responsibilities of the association. I had 20 good years there, and developed friendships all over this country with some wonderful, talented people. We continue to talk with each other and build on each other’s ideas. So while I have lost the organizational bond with AASA, the personal and intellectual bond never stops.”