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## President's Corner

By Natalie  
Newman, SDA



The dark days of winter are gone and spring has sprung. Warmer weather and brighter days lead to increased motivation and energy. In this season, it is a start of better times, of growth, renewal, and new life being born. So if you have already broken your New Year's resolutions, now is the perfect time to resurrect them. It's easier to turn over a new leaf when trees are doing it too.

If you promised to clean out your closets or garage, now is the time to get started. If you planned to grow a garden, now is the time to plant your seeds. If you promised to lose weight or become healthier, spring ushers in a new season of fresh fruits and vegetables.

And for the Orange County Chapter, it is a time for celebration. This year, we are celebrating 25 years as a chapter! And as such, I would like to dedicate this issue to Betsy Nickless who has been dedicated to this chapter since its inception.

My first job in the A/E industry was at Steven Langford Architects, and Betsy was my manager. She has

been my mentor and friend ever since. Betsy encouraged me to become a member of SDA, has supported me and has been patient with me as I've relied on her in the different board positions I have held. I'm sure I speak for everyone when I say we truly appreciate her leadership and dedication to the Orange County Chapter and to her service and contributions on the National level.

Let us each continue to grow as valuable employees to our firms with the education SDA provides, cultivate new friendships while networking, and increase the membership of our chapter as we move forward as an organization.

There are still nine months left in 2008 and enough time to continue your goals, or get started on them, again.

## Inside This Issue

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## Honorary Members

Carl Irwin, AIA  
Geri Eckner

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### April 2008

**April 2**      **Business Meeting 5:30 pm**  
Meeting will be hosted by  
Bassenian Lagoni Architects.

**April 17**      **Luncheon Meeting 11:30 am**  
“Learn How to Make Great  
Hiring Decisions” presented by  
Doug Gfeller from Renaissance  
Executive Forums.  
Wyndham Hotel, Costa Mesa.

### May 2008

**May 7**      **Business Meeting 5:30 pm**  
Meeting will be hosted by  
Danielian Associates.

**May 14—17**      **2008 EDSymposium**  
Boston, Massachusetts.

**May 15**      **Luncheon Meeting 11:30 am**  
Convention Recap and General  
Roundtable Discussion.  
Wyndham Hotel, Costa Mesa.

### June 2008

**June 4**      **Business Meeting 5:30 pm**  
Meeting will be hosted by  
RNM Design.

**June 19**      **Luncheon Meeting 11:30 am**  
“Office and Client Etiquette”  
presented by Chantelle  
Cooper of Office Team.  
Wyndham Hotel, Costa Mesa.

### Looking Ahead

**July 24**      **OC SDA Chapter's 25th  
Anniversary Celebration**

**Sept. 6—21**      **Canstruction**

**Sept. 11**      **Project Playhouse**

## MEMBER BENEFITS

**Resource Library:** Books available for members to check out include *The Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell, *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz, and *Eats, Shoots, and Leaves* by Lynne Truss. Contact Janet Caprario by e-mail ([jcaprario@jzmkpartners.com](mailto:jcaprario@jzmkpartners.com)).

**Job Board:** Did you know that SDA maintains a Job Board? This includes persons looking for work as well as firms looking for qualified personnel in the A/E industry. Most of the positions are for administrative staff, as AIA maintains its own job board for licensed architects. If your firm is looking for a person with certain qualifications or if you know someone who is looking for a position in an A/E firm, please contact Betsy Nickless by calling (949) 833-9066 or by e-mail at [betsy@sladesign.com](mailto:betsy@sladesign.com).

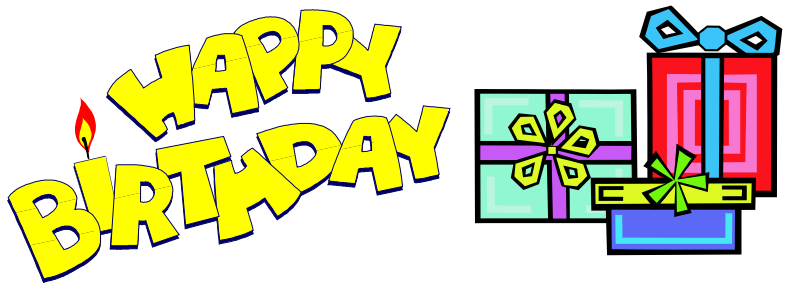
### Be Sure to Visit the SDA Web Sites

**SDA/OC Web Site:**

[www.sdaoc.org](http://www.sdaoc.org)

**SDA National Web Site:**

[www.sdadmin.org](http://www.sdadmin.org)



April 4  
April 8  
April 19

Janet Shotwell  
Susie Baumann  
Mike Rankin

May 1  
May 6  
May 9  
May 23  
May 24  
May 28

Janet Caprario  
Gail Dyer  
Karen Johnston  
Diane Sommerville  
Helen Palermo  
Paul Vincent

June 10  
June 11  
June 16  
June 26

Jason Ross  
Gina Lesley  
Marcy Fields  
Lorrie McConaughy

# USEFUL WEB SITES

Jump start your new year by using these helpful websites. Many times, you can save time and money by using these websites. These are some of the best online resources for health, travel and restaurant reservations. Please share this information with your colleagues, and be sure to add a link to them in your “favorites.”

## HEALTH:

With the cost of healthcare increasing dramatically, it is important that you become an educated consumer. Gone are the days of simply taking a physician's advice at face value. One of the biggest growth areas of the internet is delivering healthcare information online. However, few tools online are more popular, and more frustrating, than those that offer information about health and medicine. The following three websites have deep resources and health information at your fingertips.

## SOLUTION:

[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com): WebMD is a giant warehouse of health information, along with useful tools like an online symptom checker, health centers and educational videos. You can also sign up for various support groups and newsletter information.

[www.medstory.com](http://www.medstory.com): Medstory is currently in beta (testing). It is a powerful search tool that allows a user to search the web, clinical trials and research articles for health issues that are important to you. Each search provides a relevance to your initial search entry, along with the ability to refine your search with the click of a button.

[www.healia.com](http://www.healia.com): Healia provides similar search functions, but adds a layer of filters which will automatically refresh the search criteria and return exactly what you are looking for. Be careful when using multiple filters, as your results may vary.

## HOSPITAL PRACTICES:

Health care costs are rising, and it is more important now than ever to try to manage your costs – and quality. How does one determine physician and hospital quality and obtain out-

come studies? By connecting to hospital quality and pricing information online, you are now able to make educated healthcare decisions.

## SOLUTION:

[www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov](http://www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov): This website is sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services, which is the agency that manages Medicare and other government programs. This website allows you to compare hospitals on a wide variety of measurements. For instance, you can search to compare how the hospitals in your area stack up to the competition in areas like heart disease or surgical outcomes.

[www.healthgrades.com](http://www.healthgrades.com): HealthGrades is the leading website for health quality information on physicians, hospitals and health care providers. Once you register for the site, you are able to search for physicians. To obtain a report, a fee is assessed.

## TRAVEL:

Two of the most important aspects of travel – cost and comfort – can be well-managed by doing a little extra research up front. Travel can be grueling enough, so take out some of the pain by getting the best pricing on air travel, auto rentals, and hotels by using “opaque” websites. These unique systems connect buyer and seller at the lowest available price. The trick is that you don't find out the name of the hotel until you're done! Once you've booked, use the web to find the best seat in the house!

## SOLUTION:

[www.priceline.com](http://www.priceline.com): Priceline website is a touch slicker than Hotwire, with a savvier marketing flair. In addition to the traditional hotel/air/auto search, Priceline offers a “name your own price” program, where you can enter your dates, location and price to see if any hotels will accommodate. This is great for last-minute trips where you might have some flexibility in location, but still want a “4-Star” quality rating. It can be fun for the whole family!

Continued on Page 4

## WEBSITES (continued)

[www.hotwire.com](http://www.hotwire.com): With Hotwire, you can book hotels, flights and rental cars. Their best deals are with auto rentals, but you can book entire vacation packages as well. Simply plug in your travel dates and location, and then search for the best deals. When searching for a hotel, be sure to filter using the "Quality" rating. This way, you are assured of staying in the exact level of hotel you desire. Hotwire offers a "Low-Price Guarantee" on the hotel bookings.

[www.seatguru.com](http://www.seatguru.com): Air travel can be a grind. SeatGuru will help you avoid unpleasant seating arrangements by giving you details about each aircraft. To "know before you go", simply go to the website and look up the aircraft you're flying. Scroll your mouse over different parts of the aircraft, and SeatGuru will tell you which seats offer extra leg or elbow room and which seats to avoid.

### RESTAURANT RESERVATIONS:

The traditional method of booking a reservation – waiting for the restaurant to open, leaving a message and waiting for a return call - is a hassle. Rather than wasting time and scrambling to find another that can accommodate, use one of these sites below.

### SOLUTION:

[www.opentable.com](http://www.opentable.com): This site connects directly with upscale restaurants nationally. Look up your restaurant of choice by geographic region, then search the available times and book your table. You will find out immediately the seat availability and confirm your booking. Through the Open Table website, you can e-mail your party along with a map to the restaurant.

[www.zagat.com](http://www.zagat.com): To use the Zagat system, you must first join as a member. Once you have taken that step, you are able to make reservations, write reviews and view menus online. As a member, you will also be able to participate in the discussion boards, discussing various restaurants in your area. The Zagat site is very deep, but focuses mainly on large metropolitan areas.

**Source:** Contributed by e3 Financial.

## WEBSITE OBSTACLES

### Contributed By Betsy Nickless

When someone lands on your homepage, how clear is your marketing message? Is it easy for them to decide to do business with you or do they have to maneuver through a series of obstacles on your website to get the information they need?

Let's take a look at some of the obstacles on a website that sabotage the sales process:

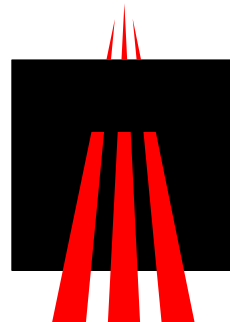
**Confusing Navigation:** How many times have you gone to a website, ready to buy, and then can't figure out where you need to go to make the purchase? If the navigation route isn't crystal clear, that problem needs to be fixed first.

**Confusing Jargon:** You may be an expert in your field but what about your customer? One of the biggest problems I find with website copy written by the business owner is that it is too technical. The content tends to be filled with jargon or words that would be unfamiliar to a potential customer or client.

**Confusing Marketing Message:** When someone comes to your website, they are looking for information to help them solve a problem. In order for them to get an answer to their problem, you need to make sure the answer is not hidden on your website or completely missing. It's vitally important that you have bold headlines that clearly express your marketing message in a way that is easy to understand.

**Conclusion:** Simple language, clear direction and benefit-driven content are key to a successful website. If you want to increase the sales on your website, maybe you just need to remove the obstacles that sabotage the sale process.

**Source:** Michelle Howe, MBA, President of Internet Word Magic, an Internet marketing and PR agency.



### SDA's Mission:

To promote the exchange of ideas and educate its members in the related disciplines of design firm administration.

# FRAUD AWARENESS

**By Natalie Newman, SDA**

Recent corporate scandals have brought to the forefront, for the public and the business community, the need for effective internal controls in companies, particularly controls over financial reporting and controls designed to prevent or detect fraud. This article will provide you with information relevant to establishing a culture of fraud awareness for your business.

Robert Kramer, who recently retired after 36 years of federal service, much of which was spent investigating tax evasion, defense contract fraud, bootlegging, cigarette smuggling, arson-for-profit, money laundering, conspiracy, and currently teaches "Fraud Examination" at Universities of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, shared the following information. And as I was listening to all the cases he has investigated, I couldn't believe there were so many ways to commit fraud.

The first topic discussed was 'What are typical occupational frauds to look out for in your company?' Skimming: taking money before it gets on the books. Cash Larceny: taking employer's cash without consent from petty cash box. Check Tampering: forged endorsements, altered payee, or fake check maker. Payroll Schemes: ghost employees, commission schemes, workers' comp, and falsified wages. Billing Schemes: use of false documents to pay a shell company, using an illegitimate vendor, or making personal purchases. Expense Reimbursement Schemes: mischaracterized expenses – personal vs. business, altered receipts, or reimbursing the same item more than once.

Now that you know what types of fraud are out there, you need to know why people commit fraud. And what in the world would make someone go to the extreme and steal from your business? Well, Robert said there are three reasons: *Opportunity*, *Rationalization*, and *Pressure*. If a person knows there are no audits in place or if there is a lot of cash on hand, and he/she is desperate enough for extra money, and if he/she feels like they have a good enough reason, then they will steal. So what can you do and watch out for to deter or prevent fraud within your company? Robert suggests one or more of the following:

- Internal and external audits. Hire and train an internal audit staff.
- Provide an anonymous reporting system.
- Job rotation or enforce separation of duties.
- Look for erasures, white-outs or other alterations of source documents.
- Keep approved vendor lists.
- Be on alert for unexplained increases in quantity of items bought.
- Investigate unusual purchases.
- Review credit card statement with expense reports.
- Keep blank checks secure.
- Use check stock with watermark.
- Check preparer is NOT the signer.
- Never sign a blank check.
- Compare payroll expenses with production records.
- Require all overtime to be justified and authorized in advance.
- Timecards go directly to payroll department.
- Require detailed expense reports with original receipts.
- Develop written guidance on what expenses are allowable or unallowable.
- Compare expenses to prior periods and to co-workers.



# MEMBER PROFILE—BETSY NICKLESS

By Natalie Newman, SDA

**Current Employer:** Steven Langford Architects

**Position and Description of Responsibilities:** Business Manager. I do pretty much everything except draw. Finance, HR, some IT, screen prospective clients, proposals, manage all administrative and financial operations of the firm. My job description is probably six pages long and growing . . .

**Length of Time at Current Employer:** 19 Years.

**Number of Years as an SDA Member:** 25 Years.

**Contributions to SDA:** Founding member of the Orange County Chapter, first SDA-National certified member in the OC Chapter; have held every Chapter officer position (some more than once); National Certification Committee Chair, National Education Services Committee Chair, Chair of the 2004 Chicago Convention, Co-Chair of the Boston EDSymposium08.

**Favorite Thing about the SDA:** The wealth of information, the willingness of members to share knowledge with others, and the amazing friends I have made all over the country, and especially here in O. C.

**Spouse:** Steve. Married almost 26 years. **Children:** Bethany is 22 and Jared is 18.

**If you could have dinner with three famous people,, who would they be?** Jesus, George and Laura Bush, My whole extended family (I know that's more than three and only a few of them are famous!)

**Favorite Music:** Contemporary Christian / Worship

**Favorite Meal or Restaurant:** Five Crowns (prime rib, creamed spinach, mashed potatoes) and Bistango.

**Favorite Color to Wear:** Red.

**How Do You Keep your Sanity?** Watch TV, work out at Curves.

**What Book are you Currently Reading?** *God's Smuggler* about a Dutch missionary who smuggled bibles behind the Iron Curtain in the early 1960s.

**What Music do you have in your CD Player?** Carrie Underwood *Carnival Ride*.

**Most Exciting Places you have Visited/Toured:** Alaska. In addition, my husband and I went to Mexico last year on a cruise while we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary, and I zip-lined in the jungle.

**Any other Interesting Tidbits Worthy of Print?** I met my husband at the car races. He was doing PR for a team, and I was in charge of Timing and Scoring. Both of my kids will graduate this year. Daughter, Bethany, is a nationally ranked college distance runner and specializes in the steeplechase. Son, Jared, is an amazing musician, is self-taught on the drums and has played professionally.



# MONTHLY LUNCHEON SEMINAR NOTES

## **New Employment Laws and Other Major Developments**

**Thursday, January 17, 2008**

**Presented by: Jerry Murase, Vice President, American Consulting Group**

- Military Spouse Leave: Required for firms with 25+ employees; must give spouses up to ten days off while spouse is on military leave.
- California employers required to notify all employees that they may be eligible for federal Earned Income Tax Credit within one week before or after W-2 or 1099 is issued.
- California minimum wage increased to \$8.00 per hour effective January 1, 2008. Also increases minimum salary for exempt employees to \$33,280 per year.
- Paychecks and/or pay stubs may only contain the last four digits of a person's SS#.
- Effective July 1, 2008, all cell phones must be hands-free when driving a motor vehicle.
- Employers with 50+ employees must have all supervisors trained to receive two hours of sexual harassment training every two years.
- Department of Health Services has revised I-9 form.
- Wage and Hour lawsuits are being filed against large employers for huge settlements. Claims range from overtime violations to meal and rest periods. Make sure that exempt employees are working at least 50% of the time on exempt duties.
- Employees need meal breaks within 5 hours from start of workday—pay one hour meal penalty when owed.

## **Roundtable**

**Thursday, February 21, 2008**

**Facilitator: Cindy Loomer, SDA**

- When payroll is reduced, be sure to reduce covered payroll for Workers' Compensation.
- Scrutinize phone bills and services—Can you reduce number of lines, what about long distance?
- Go "green" - Turn off lights, power off computers, turn off monitors.
- Be careful when reducing pay of employees—special issues relate to exempt employees' pay.
- Recycle paper, cardboard, plastics. (Foothill High School recycles for very little fee.)
- Bill clients for administrative time.
- Use airline miles to pay for travel.
- Collections: Get principals involved, implement liens where you can, start charging finance charges for late payments, etc.

## **Getting Free Money for Your Company**

**Thursday, March 20, 2008**

**Presented by: Mike Rankin, e3 Financial and Barry Menzel, Training Funding Source**

- Employment Training Panel (ETP) created in 1983 to encourage small employers (under 100 lives) to train staff. Designed to keep jobs in California.
- Once a firm is approved for the ETP, employer tracks hours of in-house training to submit at the end of the contract period and get paid for the training. Significant dollars are available for training.
- Employers must have 25% or more of revenues from customers outside California or provides services to customers who compete with out-of-California providers.
- Certain targeted business types, including architecture and engineering.
- Minimum earnings levels apply to trainees, which includes the cost of employee benefits.
- Types of training includes computer software, business, continuous improvement training, manufacturing, work processes, advanced technology, literacy. Includes anytime an employee is being trained to be more efficient and productive.
- To contact Barry Menzel, please call (562) 735-4195 or e-mail [www.TrainingFundingSource.com](http://www.TrainingFundingSource.com).

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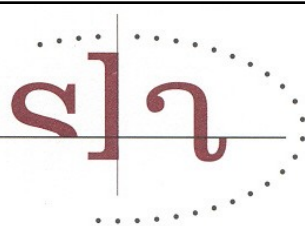
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**Michael S. Rankin**  
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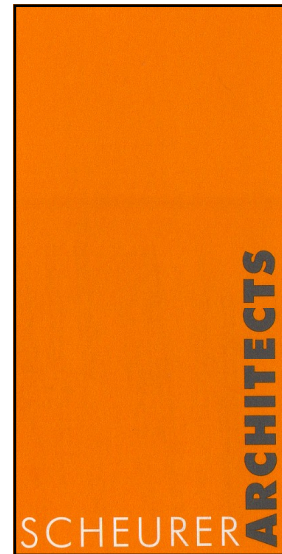
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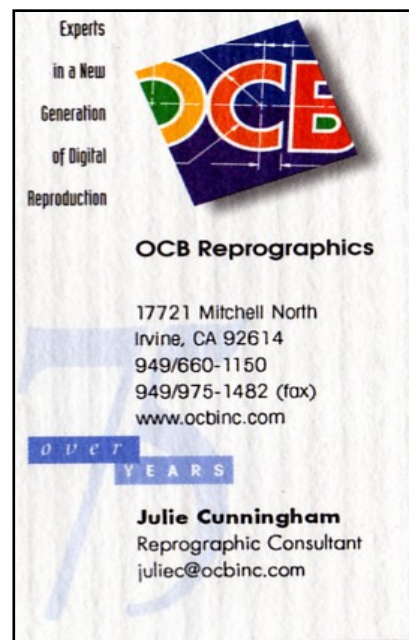
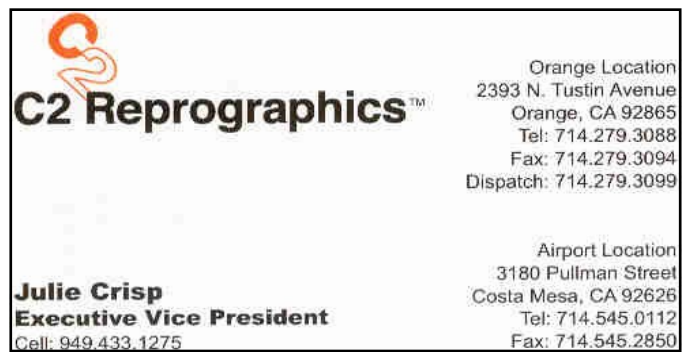
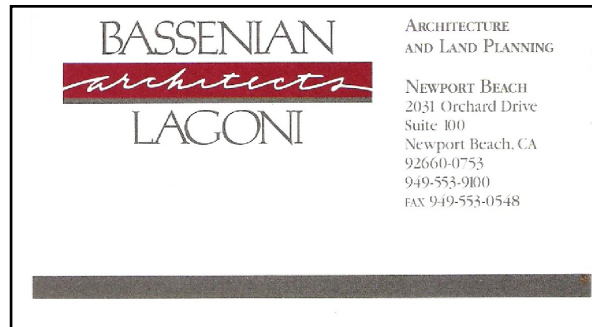
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And thanks to our fabulous proofreader,  
Betsy Nickless!

## LUNCH SEMINAR PAYMENT POLICY

**By Nancy Burt, SDA, Treasurer**

Just a reminder that your RSVP for monthly seminars is due the Monday of the week of the luncheon. Late RSVPs are assessed a \$10 late fee because we need to re-negotiate our guarantee with the hotel.

If you RSVP and then cannot attend or do not show, you will be invoiced for the meeting plus a processing fee (because we pay whether you are there or not).

We understand that emergencies happen, and we will try to be as accommodating as possible. Please understand that these policies are in place so that we can negotiate the best prices with the hotel.

Thank you in advance for your understanding.

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Melissa Driver  
Cannon Design, Inc.

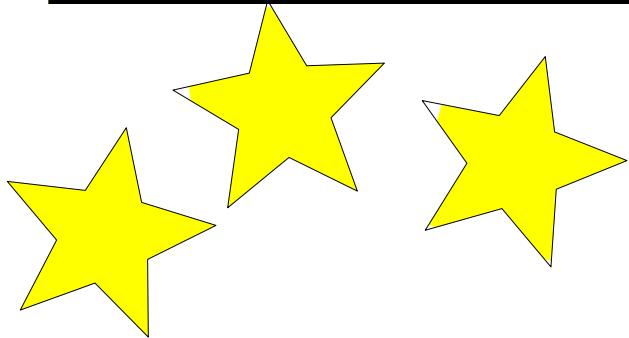
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## The Commentary

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