

2nd Quarter, 2006 – Chairman’s Letter to the Membership

Myths and Questions

Over its 40 years of existence, a number of misconceptions have managed to work their way into the SCA’s mythology. While some baffle the mind to think how they might have evolved, others have more understandable origins. Among the more persistent are the ones surrounding the Corporation, its composition and operations. What follows are clarifications aimed at dispelling prevalent myths and the answers to some of the most common questions. I hope you find these of interest and value.

Myths

The Board recycles the same people over and over again.

While it is true that some Directors go on to become Corporate officers, or vice versa, the number of “retreads” is surprisingly low. As of this writing, there have been 84 Director terms since the inception of the SCA’s Board of Directors. Only 10 people have served more than one full term as a Director. Out of those 10, one served three full terms, three served two full terms, five served one full and one partial term (to replace a Director who had to step down early), and one served two partial terms. Also, of the 74 people serving as Directors, only seven went on to become Corporate officers, and of those seven only one served more than one term as a Director.

Part of the reason there have been repeat Directors is twofold. In some instances, a sitting Director left before the end of their term. Normally, when a new Director is chosen, that person has at least a quarter to get up to speed and become familiar with policies, procedures and current issues. When someone leaves early, that seat needs to be filled immediately, so it is better to fill it with someone who is ready to go, such as a former Director. The second reason is simpler: some individuals enjoy serving the SCA, and may throw their hats into the nominee pool more than once.

The Board and Corporate officers are the same people.

The SCA’s Board of Directors consists of seven individuals. Currently, there are five senior Corporate officers (not Board members) who report to the Board, and therefore do not have the same decision-making authority. In the past, it was routine for Directors to also hold a Corporate officer position such as that of Treasurer or President. Today, this is no longer the practice, though the Chairman of the Board could hold the President’s position, this would only happen in an extreme case (and the Chairman would have to be utterly insane to want to do both jobs, anyway). This may account for the perception that the Board and Corporate officers are one and the same.

Board members are paid.

Not a penny – they are all volunteers. Aside from five salaried and hourly staff members at the Corporate office, the only other officers who receive any monetary compensation are the Society Seneschal, Society Exchequer, Executive Assistant, the *TI*'s art director and editor, and the *Compleat Anachronist*'s editor. And those remunerations are token gestures at best.

The SCA's membership is dwindling.

Membership in the SCA remains at all-time highs, and through all of 2005, there were more than 32,000 paid members. This figure does not take into account the membership of the affiliate Corporations in Finland, Australia, New Zealand and Sweden.

All the Directors always vote the same way.

The Board is composed of some of the Known World's most forceful personalities. It's hard enough for us to agree on what kind of pizza to order, let alone come to a consensus on issues with serious ethical considerations. It is true that some issues do draw unanimous votes from the Board, but certainly not all. Just taking sanctions as an example, since 1996, the Board has had to vote on 238 motions (some individuals received multiple sanctions). Of those, there were 28 occasions where the voting was not unanimous; mostly because of casting a dissenting vote, though there were a couple abstentions, as well. That is more than a 10-percent dissent rate. There were also scores of motions where a Director recused themselves (a recusal is when a board member removes themselves from discussion and voting). This usually occurs when a Board member lives in the same Kingdom as the individual named in the motion, or knows the individual well enough that impartiality might be difficult.

You can only get on the Board if you know someone already on the Board.

Since I have been on the Board, there was only one time that a majority of the other Directors was even *familiar* with a nominee being considered. Sometimes, one or two of us will have previously met a candidate, but more often than not, none of the Board members knows the nominees beyond possibly name recognition. That is why input from the membership is so important to us. We rely on the commentary we receive when selecting new Directors. So, this is my opportunity to remind everyone reading this column to send us your comments. If you have thoughts on one or more of the nominees on the list, please send them to us. Your thoughts are invaluable.

Common Questions

How are Directors elected?

As a general rule, a new Director is chosen every six months at the meeting prior to the one in which a Board member is due to step down.

In the weeks prior to voting, each Director reviews the list of nominees kept by the Board's recruitment ombudsman. Unlike the list you may see published on the SCA's web site, *Tournaments Illuminated* or your Kingdom newsletter, the Board keeps a master list that also contains the commentary sent to the Board regarding all the nominees, that only the Directors ever see – never the Corporate or Society Officers. It is worth noting that after a Director is elected, his or her name and commentary are purged from the list, ensuring that members' comments remain confidential. The Board also keeps a business résumé and an SCA résumé that each nominee is asked to send in.

Each Director goes through the list, carefully reading the commentary and résumés, and selects those candidates they feel best fit the current needs of the Board. There are several reasons why a nominee might get passed over – sometimes it's because of the comments sent in by the membership; other times the Board may be in need of specific professional or SCA experience, such as a financial background or time in the marshallate. Additionally, the Board likes to avoid having more than one person from a particular Kingdom on at the same time. This is not a hard and fast rule, merely a preference (there have been times when we have had two concurrent Board members from the same Kingdom, but they are rare instances).

When the Directors have each shared their short lists of candidates, the Chairman asks the senior Corporate Officers and some Society Officers for their thoughts. Some Board members will also make discreet, private inquiries to gather more information prior to the meeting.

At the meeting where the actual voting is to take place, each Director shares their opinion on the candidates. Since the vote for selecting a new Director must be unanimous, there is usually much discussion on the merits of those under consideration before a vote is taken. Just because a nominee does not get voted on at one meeting does not preclude them from ever being voted in again. A nominee is not removed from the list unless their nomination expires, they request their own removal or they are elected to the Board.

There are circumstances where the selection of a Board member does not occur on the six-month schedule. This usually happens when a Director ends their term early because of resignation or removal. In such cases, an emergency conference call may be called to fill the seat immediately. In order to function, the Board need not continuously have all seven of its seats filled, but it is best to operate with a full slate of Directors as much of the time as possible.

Why have so many more sanctions been handed down from the Board recently, and why would a person be sanctioned?

While it does seem as though there are an increasing number of sanctions of SCA members and participants, here are some insights to put it in perspective.

The SCA has reached an all-time high of 32,000+ paid members, with an estimated equal number of non-member participants. So, with a swell in members and other participants, it is logical to expect an increase in the number of sanctions that have to be imposed.

In recent years, our membership, especially the officer corps at the local and Kingdom levels, has become much better trained and educated in their use of the SCA's Governing Documents. The resultant improved understanding of grievance and sanctions procedures means that those tools are being used more often now. It is likely that proportionally, there were just as many issues years ago as today, it's just that people were not as aware of the tools available to them.

Today's membership is less tolerant of those who transgress modern laws or the SCA's Governing Documents, or who endanger the Society in some way. Members are more likely to hold each other accountable than in years past. While specifics as to the nature of recent offenses can't be shared, we can say that it takes more than mild mistakes to warrant a sanction. The most common reasons include: malfeasance, sexual misconduct, assault and repeated disregard for the SCA's rules.

Also, bear in mind that almost all sanctions originate at the Kingdom level, not Corporate. The Board does not go looking for sanctions to hand out, and usually only gets involved if requested. Speaking for myself, it is the single most distasteful part of my job as a Director, and I would just as soon not have to do it. Unfortunately, it is a sad fact we have to contend with.

The Board is always studying ways to help its membership along and steer clear of behavior and activities that may land them in trouble. Above, I said the SCA's officer corps is better educated in how to begin the sanctions process. I also believe it is better educated in how to help folks avoid problems. The Society Seneschal has gone to great lengths to make sure officers understand that sanctions are only a last resort, after all other attempts to help have been exhausted.

Rumor, misperception and SCA-urban myth will never go away entirely. It's only natural that some of it will continue. But a few can have counterproductive effects or be downright destructive, making the need for verification of extreme assertions that much more important.

Have you got a myth you would like dispelled or a question you'd like answered? Send an e-mail to chairman@sca.org and I'll do my best to answer.

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Q3 '06: inside the Corporate Office