

Acceptance of the Distinguished Public Service Medal of 2000

RICHARD S. FISKE

National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560, U.S.A.

Mr. President, members of the society, and guests:

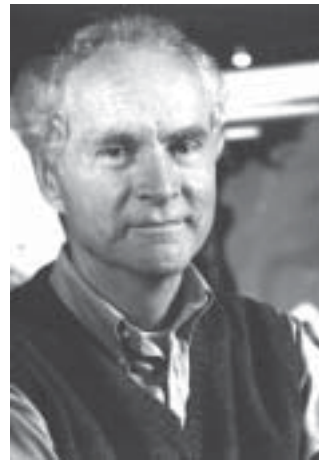
I begin these brief remarks by expressing sincere thanks to the Mineralogical Society of America for awarding me the Distinguished Service Medal for the year 2000. I greatly appreciate this honor.

Public service and the public's understanding of science are extremely important matters. After all, how can we expect the public to support our work if there is not some semblance of understanding "out there" of what we do and why we do it? Over my career, I have been fortunate to have been employed by two organizations that place great importance on serving the general public—the U.S. Geological Survey and the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian, where I've been since 1976, has as its mission statement the goal to, "increase and diffuse knowledge." And by diffuse, they do not mean spreading knowledge among our scientific colleagues—they mean communicating with the general public in as many ways as possible.

As many of you know, the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, where I am employed, recently opened a new and permanent exhibit hall entitled Geology, Gems, and Minerals. This was hard work for us curators, as Sorena Sorensen and Jeff Post (who are in this audience) can attest, and we encountered a never-ending series of problems along the way. But now the hall is finished, and millions of people are passing through it each year. During the 30-year life of the hall, it is no exaggeration to say that more than 100 million people will be exposed to the geological wonders of our natural world. This is big business, especially when you think that nearly 24 000 people enter our museum every single day!

Now, it's one thing to diffuse earth science information to the general public, as we do at the Smithsonian, but what about trying to broadcast the results of one's own research? This is tricky ground, and we all know of situations in which half-baked findings have first appeared in newspapers and popular magazines, far in advance of peer review. Self-promotion is generally frowned upon—and with good reason.

But, having said that, and without asking anyone for permission, I decided to try a little of it right here at the Reno meetings. As I was preparing my GSA abstract, in which I describe collaborative studies with Japanese colleagues of submarine silicic calderas along the front of the Izu-Bonin Arc, I



left room at the bottom of the page for what I call the Broader Audience Message. This reads: "Volcanologists, working mostly on land, have basically ignored the notion that caldera volcanoes, similar to the Crater Lake structure in Oregon, might exist in the present-day oceans. Recent studies show that they do, and the very first one explored in detail has been found to host a large and actively growing sulfide deposit extraordinarily rich in gold and silver. This discovery is sparking scientific and economic interest in sea-floor caldera volcanoes."

Interesting stuff, huh? But I stand before you today to report that not a single member of this broader audience has rushed up to me to say how interested she or he is in our work. Did we fail? Maybe so. But I would venture that if 200 or 400 of the abstracts at this meeting had such a message, science writers, journalists, and other interested people could quickly browse our thick abstract volumes and gain much easier access to our work. It might even make it easier for us professionals to better appreciate the research of colleagues working outside our own particular fields of expertise.

I guess the bottom line here is that none of us should feel absolved from public service involvement. It's all well and good for the MSA to award me this wonderful medal, but that does not let any of you off the hook. Get involved! Get innovative! Do something!

But, in the meantime, thanks very much again for this honor.