After having the distinct pleasure of serving as PRSA’s chair and CEO in 2012, I’m pleased to report that it was a year of progress and promise for our profession and the Society. There are many reasons for this progress. First, there’s no more waiting and hoping for a seat at the table. We have it. Public relations and communications professionals are reporting to the C-suite at a growing rate.

A second reason for our progress is that social media platforms are creating new opportunities for public relations professionals daily, from leveraging new means of engagement to managing the latest management missteps gone viral. Public relations pros are essential in the enterprise.

Finally, marketers have a new appreciation for public relations, as branding and reputation management converge. For these reasons and others, public relations and communications budgets are on the rise. The investment firm Verona Schuler Stevenson says that spending on public relations and word-of-mouth marketing grew more than 14 percent in 2012, to $7.3 billion. And public relations is expected to account for more than half of that spending.

Against that backdrop, we’re reflecting on and celebrating our progress during the past year in building the strategic pillars that underpin our organization.

The first strategic pillar is Advocacy. One way we deliver on this mission is by making sure that we represent our members’ viewpoints on the professional issues they care about most, and on broader economic, business and societal trends that impact our profession. PRSA took the lead in advocating the role and value of public relations to the federal government during a Senate investigation of the federal government’s use of public relations and advertising services.

William M. Murray, CAE, PRSA’s president and COO, and I traveled to Capitol Hill to meet with staff directors for the two senators who initiated the investigation — Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill and Ohio Sen. Rob Portman. We met with them to understand the scope and intent of the investigation and to discuss its implications. To date, no further action has been taken in this investigation.

Also in 2012, PRSA entered the debate over whether “paid advocates,” including public relations professionals, should be allowed to edit Wikipedia entries on behalf of their companies or clients. Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales says “no.” PRSA says “yes.” We believe that plainly false or inaccurate information should not be allowed to exist within an informational resource relied on by 470
million unique visitors every month. PRSA is a member of the Facebook group Corporate Representatives for Ethical Wikipedia Engagement — CREWE, for short — and has been participating in that dialogue.

To be clear, PRSA understands and supports the notion that public relations professionals must respect and follow the policies and procedures set forth by the Wikipedia community. But we also support the notion that public relations professionals are in the best position to know whether a company or client is portrayed accurately in the public domain, and that the Wikipedia community should decide the accuracy and propriety of the information we post.

Another strategic pillar for PRSA is The Business Case For Public Relations™. In 2012, we looked for ways to augment and complement the resources that have been assembled under our campaign The Business Case for Public Relations, a set of tools and resources that you can use today to educate others about the role and value of our profession.

In 2012, three major PRSA initiatives helped us support and broaden our Business Case campaign. First was PRSA's continued effort to modernize the definition of public relations for the digital era through an open and collaborative effort. PRSA and 12 global industry partners provided a platform for public relations, marketing and communications professionals to express their views on what a new definition of public relations should look like.

Our goal was not to change the perception of the public relations profession. Our goals were to freshen PRSA's own definition of public relations, which was last updated in 1982. We also wanted to show the blogosphere that we were listening and responsive to the calls coming from various quarters to update the definition of public relations for the digital era.

Finally, we wanted to create a brief, dictionary-like definition that captures the essence of what binds us all as public relations professionals. We wanted a definition that all practitioners could use as a baseline that takes into account the nuances of their particular practice areas, work environment and industry specializations — the very same differences that make gaining consensus on a standardized definition so difficult.

After nearly a year of research, abundant commentary, hundreds of suggestions and nearly 1,500 votes, we completed the process, which began in 2011. Our new definition is as follows:

“Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics.”

Second, we complemented The Business Case for Public Relations through our M.B.A. Initiative. Introduced in 2006, the M.B.A. Initiative is a multi-year effort to advocate the importance of strategic
communication and reputation management training in the nation's M.B.A. programs. We have crossed a vital threshold in bringing this program to fruition.

In a third initiative, PRSA promoted The Business Case for Public Relations with an awards program that showcases the public good served by our profession. PRSA launched PR Serving America in June 2011 to draw attention to the philanthropic efforts of our members who have employed their public relations skills to strengthen and preserve the local communities in which they live and work.

Our deepest thanks go to past PRSA Chair and CEO Gary McCormick, APR, Fellow PRSA, and his employer, HGTV/DIY Network, for making the PR Serving America initiative possible through their generous sponsorship.

Speaking of Community and community service, lots of good news originated from the various PRSA communities in 2012. I saw it firsthand during my travels when I visited PRSA Chapters in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Portland, Cleveland, Knoxville, Fresno, Silicon Valley, San Francisco, Dallas and Sacramento.

Each time I visited a PRSA Chapter, I was reminded of the outstanding local communities that our volunteers create and nurture. This is one reason why many members say their local Chapter is PRSA.

Our Chapters remain the heart and soul of PRSA. We are all parts of the whole, but PRSA is only as strong as each of our communities, which is why we continue our outreach. Every three months, we ask each member of the Board of Directors to reach out to every PRSA Chapter, Professional Interest Section or District president. The calls are intended both to keep our communities abreast of what’s happening at National, and to help maintain open lines of communication.

Meanwhile, PRSA's Professional Interest Sections are growing, averaging a 10 percent increase in members in 2012. Nearly 7,000 PRSA members are now also members of a Section. The star of this group is our New Professionals Section, which is growing at about 20 percent annually.

There was also good news coming out of PRSA's Districts in 2012. Each of our Districts brought together Chapter members through conferences and other events. In addition, the Midwest District held its first-ever conference.

It’s also important to remember that we are part of the global community, and a great deal of what we do often finds its way around the world. As a reflection of this, at our annual International Conference, held Oct. 13-16 in San Francisco, we had more than 100 colleagues from 25 countries in attendance. Also in 2012, I accepted invitations to represent our profession in the Middle East, China and Russia — at no cost to PRSA. We also remain active in the Global Alliance, which has provided an excellent way for our members to network across the world.

Our next strategic pillar is Diversity. As a professional association, we welcome practitioners of all races, genders, ages, ethnicities and sexual orientations, and our diversity of thought as an organization runs deep.

But we still have a long road ahead of us before we can truly say that our profession reflects the diversity of our society. Our Diversity committee is focused on goals such as encouraging more ethnically and culturally diverse individuals to pursue careers in public relations. Resources created by this group include webinars, a diversity toolkit, Conference breakout sessions, content development and networking.
The next strategic pillar for our society is **Education**. Of course, the big news for 2012 was that PRSA is now providing professional-development webinars — both live and on-demand — to our members for free.

By the end of 2013, thousands of our members will have participated in one of our 63 free webinars on a wide variety of topics. We hope that you’re taking advantage of this terrific new benefit.

Our final strategic pillar is **Ethics**, which remains a critical and central focus for PRSA. Our member surveys have shown that the emphasis we place on ethics is one of PRSA’s most important and appreciated benefits.

Our focus, quite simply, is on educating professionals about the role of ethics in public relations. We do this by critiquing, celebrating or raising red flags on relevant ethics-related issues such as fake product reviews, non-disclosure, plagiarism, unpaid internships and blogging, among others.

Playing on the British war slogan, “Keep calm and carry on,” we created a special poster that sets forth PRSA’s professional values and provisions of conduct to commemorate Ethics Month in September.

Feedback on the poster via Twitter and Facebook, which included a number of photos of the poster hanging in member offices, has been positive.

Last year was indeed one of progress and promise for PRSA, and every member had a role to play in the Society’s success.

I thank each and every one of you for your passion, your dedication and your hard work.
Accreditation
The Accredited in Public Relations (APR) credential remains valuable to the practitioners who earn it; to the agencies, clients and organizations they represent; and, perhaps most important, to the profession itself.

To help applicants prepare for the Examination for Accreditation in Public Relations, PRSA worked closely with the Minnesota, National Capital, New York, New Jersey and San Francisco Chapters on developing and hosting APR Boot Camps.

These camps featured three-day preparation programs that culminated with an opportunity to sit for the Examination. Four APR Boot Camps were held in April, August, October and November, with similar programs planned for 2013.

Finances
Faced with the prospect of reducing or possibly eliminating certain member benefits, the Leadership Assembly passed a proposal to increase member dues by $30, effective Jan. 1, 2012. This marked the first dues increase in 10 years. Not only did the dues increase allow us to continue to provide the same level of programming, networking, research and leadership training as before, but it also afforded the opportunity for PRSA members, Chapters and Sections to enjoy free professional development webinars.

Like most organizations, PRSA had to contend with the rising cost of doing business, devastating and far-reaching impacts from severe weather and the threat of the fiscal cliff. In consideration of all this, PRSA is on course to meet or modestly exceed its net financial goals for 2012.

We will post our complete 2012 audit report and related financial statements on our website in the spring as soon as it is submitted, reviewed by the Finance Committee and accepted by the PRSA Board of Directors.

International Conference
The PRSA 2012 International Conference, held Oct. 13-16 in San Francisco, attracted nearly 3,000 professional and student members.

Attendance reflected not only a serious commitment to professional development and networking opportunities, but also to the value of the Conference as the must-attend industry event for sponsors, exhibitors and attendees.

The theme of the Conference was “The Future Starts Now,” and it was programmed in response to the real-time opportunities and challenges faced by PRSA members. General Sessions featured Biz Stone, co-founder, Twitter; Tim Westergren, founder and chief strategy officer, Pandora; June Cotte, Ph.D., consumer behavioral expert; and Michael Steele, political analyst, MSNBC.

Here’s a look at other key areas and events from 2012
PRSSA

The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) continued to expand its network by growing to more than 11,000 members at 330 Chapters by the end of 2012.

Members received opportunities to practice and apply real-world public relations principles through multiple campaigns for national and local clients, as well as chances to connect with other members and professionals around the globe through social media platforms such as Twitter chats and LinkedIn discussion groups.

In 2012, PRSSA awarded Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR) certifications to Eastern Kentucky University, Southeast Missouri State University, Seneca College, Union University and Seton Hall University.

Silver Anvils

In June, the stars of public relations came together to celebrate the profession’s finest work at PRSA’s 2012 Silver Anvil Awards Ceremony.

PRSA presented the 2012 Best of Silver Anvil Award to the “Centennial Celebration of Service” campaign, a year-long, professional skills-based volunteerism initiative that attracted 88 percent of IBM’s 400,000-plus workforce and supported local community organizations worldwide. Developed by Ketchum and IBM, the campaign was selected as the best of 143 public relations programs nominated for a Silver Anvil Award.

The Silver Anvil Awards program has grown in scope and stature since its inception in 1946, and awards are now given in 59 categories and subcategories.

In the 60-plus-year history of the Silver Anvils, various organizations have been recognized, including solo practitioners, agencies of all sizes, large and small businesses, top corporations, nonprofits, associations and government agencies.
The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is the nation’s largest community of public relations and communications professionals. We provide training, set standards of excellence and uphold principles of ethics for the global public relations profession. As a leading voice in the industry, we also advocate for greater understanding and adoption of public relations services.

PRSA’s more than 21,000 professional members represent nearly every practice area and professional and academic setting in public relations.

Headquartered in New York City, and chartered in 1947, PRSA is comprised of 112 local Chapters organized into 10 geographic Districts; 14 Professional Interest Sections focus on issues, trends and research relevant to specialized practice areas, such as technology, health care, financial communications, entertainment and sports, and travel and tourism.