



# Building the Infrastructure

BY WILLIAM "T" THOMPSON, '73, PRESIDENT AND CEO

IF YOU HAVE FOLLOWED MY MISSIVES IN *CHECKPOINTS* MORE RECENTLY, YOU ARE AWARE THAT I HAVE RAISED ISSUES CONCERNING A GENERAL LACK OF LOYALTY TO THE ACADEMY AND A LACK OF COHESIVENESS AMONG OUR GRADUATES, AS COMPARED TO OUR SISTER SERVICE ACADEMIES.

While there are several data points to support this assertion, one clear indication of these challenges is the number of graduate chapters we have compared to West Point and Annapolis. The Naval Academy has over 100 chapters and an additional 77 class clubs while West Point has over 120 "Societies," their name for chapters. In contrast, until recently, we had only 31 chapters.

Another indication of these tribulations is the graduate membership rate in our AOG when compared to that of West Point and the alumni association at the Naval Academy. Membership in the West Point AOG is 100% and there are no dues. This is made possible by an endowment funded by graduates which provides operating income to their AOG of \$1 million annually. At the Naval Academy Alumni Association, which has a voluntary dues paying model like ours, the overall membership rate approaches

90 percent and, in recent years, the new class membership rate has averaged 99 percent. Comparatively, at the AFA AOG, our membership rate is just over 58 percent of living grads.

There are a plethora of reasons for these great disparities and not all are under the control of the AOG. Some are structural at the institutional level and will need to be addressed by the Air Force and/or USAFA. We are having discussions on how that might be accomplished. Yet there is much that the AOG can do to have an effect on this process and we have begun an aggressive program to do so. Let me share with you a couple of new initiatives that we are undertaking to meet these challenges.

### CHAPTER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

We have initiated a new Chapter Development Program (CDP) designed to build our graduate grassroots infrastructure across the nation and overseas. The CDP is structured to give graduates a step-by-step approach to starting a chapter and to incentivize the things that chapters should be doing. One of the recurring messages that I have taken from my meetings with graduates around the country is the desire to meet and network with other grads. We have heard the call and have structured the program in response to your requests.

There are many new aspects to the program and I urge those of you with additional interests to go to our Web site, [usafa.org](http://usafa.org) and read the new Chapter Handbook. I'll share some of the highlights here because the initial feedback has been extremely positive.

We have developed a point system to reward those chapters who are involved in the many activities to keep graduates connected to the Academy and to build cohesion among the graduate community. We have also assigned points to those activities that we would like chapters to participate in like networking, Founders Day events and Academy support. Those chapters that earn a total of 2,000 points, including points in the areas of emphasis, will be designated as Distinguished Chapters, which is a good segue into the next new aspect of the program.

We have instituted a Distinguished Chapter Award. Chapters who win this award will receive several levels of recognition and rewards. They will be highlighted in our AOG publications and will receive a Distinguished Chapter banner for local use. They will also receive financial support for their Founders Day activities and gifts of AOG merchandise for chapter use. Finally, the chapter president or chapter representative will receive complimentary travel to the annual Chapter Presidents Conference to be held at the Academy each fall. This is yet another good segue.

The AOG will host a Presidents Conference each fall at the Academy. The Conference will provide a forum for the exchange of ideas among chapters and the staffs of the AOG and the Academy. Additionally, chapter presidents will have the opportunity to meet senior Academy leaders and be briefed on Academy plans, programs and challenges. We expect the conference to become a great opportunity for chapter leadership to connect with the Academy and to obtain information which helps fan the flames of enthusiasm among their chapter members.

As with any new initiative, there are always questions about the effectiveness of the effort. We rolled the new program out in

the middle of March, 2010 and have been greatly encouraged by initial results. As of the writing of this article on May 25, 2010, we have established thirteen new chapters including:

Anchorage, AK	Kansas City, MO
Albuquerque, NM	Las Vegas, NV
Altus, OK	Mildenhall/Lakenheath, England
Chantilly, VA	Oklahoma City, OK
Charleston, SC	Reno, NV
Clarke Quay, Singapore	San Diego, CA
Harrisburg, PA	

The AOG congratulates and welcomes our new chapters to the fold.

We are also actively working with 22 additional upcoming chapters and you will find them listed on the AOG Web site. Let me also emphasize that we are not in this just to increase numbers. Our program is designed to produce strong, vibrant and enduring chapters and includes both field and AOG home office support.

### MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN DRIVE

We are developing a new Membership Campaign Drive targeting non-member graduates to reconnect them to the Academy through AOG membership. The AOG has changed over the years and, more recently, is moving in a new direction. We will make the case for membership by highlighting the value proposition of membership, particularly as compared to the corresponding values received at West Point and Navy. In a survey conducted last year, we discovered that of 73 categories of services provided to the Academy and graduates, West Point provided 38, Annapolis provided 41 and the USAFA AOG provided 70. Other key components of the campaign include:

**A segmented marketing campaign by class years.** We realize that what may be of interest and value to "Baby Boomers" may not be of mutual interest to grads who are members of "Generation Y." We will tailor our messages and highlight services accordingly.

**A new "Tiered Life Membership Dues Structure."** The current assumptions associated with the Life Membership program include providing grads services for a 55 year life span after graduation. It follows then that a grad who elects to become a life member well after graduation should have some adjustment made to the life membership cost. We are in the process of creating a tiered dues schedule to address this issue.

**A new Joint Life Membership Rate for married graduates.** One graduate would be assigned as primary and a 50 percent discount would be given for the additional grad. Both would receive all privileges and the household would receive one copy of *Checkpoints*.

The dedicated staff at your AOG is working diligently to move our association and the Academy forward. While we face significant challenges, we are addressing them head-on with new and innovative solutions. Our approach is simple. We won't just "think outside of the box." We'll throw the box away and entertain inventive strategies that work. Our purpose is to serve the graduate community and to "Build a Better Academy." 