

Acceptance of the Distinguished Public Service Award of the Mineralogical Society of America for 2024

SHARON TAHIRKHELI^{1,*}

¹American Geosciences Institute, 4220 King Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22302-1502, U.S.A. (Retired)

Mr. President, Colleagues and Friends,

I am deeply honored to receive MSA's Distinguished Public Service Medal. I was completely surprised when I received the email, and my first thought was that there must be some mistake. Being included among such an amazing group of people, including Rod Ewing, Dave Mogk, and Alex Speer, is incredible. I want to express my sincerest thanks to MSA and also to Jon Arthur, my citationist.

The reason that I was so convinced that there must be a mistake is because I am not a mineralogist. The focus of my career has been geoscience information in general. It is true that I have worked on some projects that had a focus on mineralogy — for example, with the assistance of Alex Speer, ensuring that all the valid mineral names were included in the most recent edition of the Glossary of Geology, assisting with a project to track down all of the early volumes of *American Mineralogist* and adding references to all of the articles to GeoRef and, in the early days of my career, briefly editing the weekly seldom-read Minerals Exploration Alert—but these did not seem to qualify as sufficient service to mineralogy. It turns out that for the purpose of this award, MSA wisely chose to define mineralogy very broadly and to include service to national and international geoscience societies. So my long career at the American Geosciences Institute, AGI, seems to fit.

A few years ago at a staff retreat, a facilitator asked us to choose the breakfast cereal that best described our thoughts regarding our roles at AGI. This type of exercise usually leaves me floundering for a sensible answer, but this time it was easy – LUCKY CHARMS. I have been extremely lucky and have lived a charmed life that has allowed me to combine my passion for information with the geological sciences.

My interest in improving information dissemination started when I was an undergraduate, and I began working on my first research paper. Mystified by the tools provided in the library, I sought help from the reference librarian only to be told that she did not have sufficient expertise in my subject area to provide guidance. The idea that the user needed tools directly accessible to them that they could manipulate themselves started from that moment and has guided much of my career.

As luck would have it, I wound up in the perfect place to pursue this passion. AGI was founded to engage in activities that benefit the geological discipline as a whole. The idea of digital information discovery was just beginning to be explored when I joined AGI, and I was lucky to be a part of the initial development of GeoRef.

In addition to GeoRef, I was lucky enough to participate in two other projects that stand out as examples of impactful community-based information projects: the revision of the Glossary of Geology and the establishment of the publishing aggregate,



GeoScienceWorld. The first project, the revision of the Glossary of Geology is a major undertaking. The 30,000 plus terms that are defined in the Glossary are all vetted by multiple experts within each field. And all of these experts volunteer their valuable time! A revision can require finding up to 120 individual geoscientists. But the end result is a collection of definitions that are used by professional geoscientists, students, and even the legal community. This is an amazing example of a community-based project with real impact. The second project, GeoScienceWorld, is an outstanding example of geoscience societies working together for the good of the community. Being a member of the original committee that worked toward launching GeoScienceWorld was one of the highlights of my career.

Recently, I served as AGI's Interim Executive Director during a time of financial issues and pandemic lockdowns. This gave me an even wider perspective on the contribution of geoscience to the wider scientific community and society. Like many of you, I have been testing out the new AI tools, and I recently asked ChatGPT to define the role of geoscience in society. I highly recommend that every geoscientist should give this a try. Within seconds, I was given a 10-point description that highlighted climate change, sustainability, natural resource utilization, clean water, and natural disasters as areas of expertise for the geosciences in society.

In closing, I would like to thank the many, many geoscientists that it has been my honor to work with. And I sincerely thank MSA and Jon Arthur, my citationist, for this opportunity to consider my Lucky and Charmed career.

* E-mail: snt@americangeosciences.org