



Hello again all, I want to thank everyone for the support I received in my election last year. Over the course of my first term, I learned a great deal about the inner workings of the NSS. From the outside, the board can appear to some as an obtuse governing body, as ineffective, or even to be hiding its goals from the membership. In reality, the Board of Governors is a dedicated group of volunteers who give their time to try to make our society better. To be an effective member of the board you have to enter into the role selflessly, with the sincere hope to steer the NSS into a better position. This is why I am involved and why I ask you for your support again this year. I also ask you to consider this component of the job as you select the candidates you support. Carol

Tiderman, who is also running this year, has spent countless hours bettering the society, and we on the board benefit greatly from her institutional knowledge.

Last year, I spoke about answering “what does the NSS do for me?” In recent months, that question has been voiced frequently by members. Fundamentally, as I’ve tried answering that to various cavers over the past year, I’ve come to realize that it is a flawed question. When I joined the NSS, I felt that my membership dues were going to improve cave conservation, education, and access. I see my volunteer hours to the organization the same way. The NSS is, and should remain, the world leader in cave and karst education, conservation, and protection. Everything I do is in support of that mission. How do we get members to see that to be a member of the NSS is to be steward of cave conservation as well as a constant advocate for cave access?

To me, that answer lies in educational outreach. In the last year, the NSS educational department has blossomed under new leadership. I have been fortunate to be involved with the inception of the Cave Preservation Network and am excited to continue to see that program grow.

In my first term as Director, I was elected by my peers to serve as Chair of the Directorate on a platform of cohesion and continuity. This places the Strategic Planning Committee under my purview. This committee is working to redefine how the NSS governance can best be structured to serve our society. As those important answers begin emerging, I will remain involved to ensure that we blend our future plans with our rich history.

My greatest impact over the last year has been as Co-chair of the Internal Organizations Committee. Our committee has worked to better serve the most important asset of our community: the grottos, surveys, sections, and regions. These local microcosms are the NSS boots on the ground, carrying out our mission nationwide. We have dedicated hundreds of hours optimizing how information gets from the NSS to every single grotto. I am most excited about our new initiative, the relaunch of “Find a Grotto”. In the coming months, there will be a seamless process for every IO to login and update their information, for every member or nonmember to find a grotto near them. To me, this is the most important thing the NSS can do for you: connecting you to a local subsidiary of the NSS to further our mission.

Ultimately, going caving should always take priority over talking about caves. While my commitment to the NSS takes up most of my above-ground time, I still find time to project cave. In the last year, I’ve worked in Great-X in Wyoming, Fort Stanton in New Mexico, Blowhole in Tennessee, and numerous South Dakota Caves. I am excited to participate in international expeditions this coming summer.

Communication continues to be important to me. I've already had the opportunity to help many cavers one-on-one and will continue to do so. I am readily available to support the most essential part of our organization: the members. I might not always know the answers, but I will work endlessly to find someone who does. I am always happy to talk caving so please feel free to reach out to me anytime at [anderson@caves.org](mailto:anderson@caves.org) or at 507-640-0073.



I have been working at Carlsbad Caverns National Park for four years now. I am currently the secretary for the Southwest Region of the NSS. Last year (2020), I was the vice president for the Pecos Valley Grotto, and the two years prior to that, I was the chairman for the PVG. I have been involved in many cave-survey trips, mock rescues, and restoration trips all over the continent, and I have had the honor of conducting some in Lechuguilla Cave. My partner, Melissa, is the Cave and Karst Environmental Protection Specialist for the Carlsbad Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, and our daughter, Rose, is a very proud Junior Ranger here at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. We are a passionate caving family. I am a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation caver, raising the 4<sup>th</sup> generation.

My degree is in Elementary Education, but I worked in caves throughout college and during the summers when I was a teacher. Prior to Carlsbad, I managed a tourist cave in Pennsylvania called Penn's Cave. My father has worked there for over forty years and my grandmother was the first female cave guide there. I started at Penn's Cave in 2004. From 2010 to 2013, I worked at Horne Lake Caves Provincial Park on Vancouver Island as the lead vertical cave guide. I was very active in British Columbia Cave Rescue and VICEG (Vancouver Island Cave Exploration Group). Later, my partner and I worked at the Caverns of Sonora in Texas.

Melissa and I have both entered cave songs for the NSS annual Cave Ballad Salon; my ballads have won a few awards at the NSS conventions. Melissa has been featured in the NSS News for her cave photography.

It would be an honor to be considered for the BOG. My primary platform would be based on increasing membership and cave and karst education. I have already contributed to the NSS Speleoguest program by presenting to school classrooms. As the Chairman for the Pecos Valley Grotto, I tripled our membership. I feel that my passion for caves and ability to reach a wide variety of people could greatly contribute to the mission of the National Speleological Society.



I got my start caving in my home state of Alabama with the Birmingham Grotto. During that time, I served as secretary and was known for greeting new members and getting them underground. I joined other TAG grottos during this time, such as Huntsville and Sewanee Mountain. I actively caved with members of Dogwood City Grotto, Clock Tower Grotto, and more. I volunteered during events such as SERA Cave Carnival, TAG Work Weekends, and Cave Fest.

Eventually I started traveling and joined grottos in Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. In the summer of 2019, I accepted a position on a cave crew with the Montana Conservation Corps. The Pryor Mountains Cave Inventory Program enlists three cavers each summer to search for caves in the Pryor Mountains of Wyoming and Montana. I was proud to serve in a capacity I quite enjoyed, looking for caves. During my summer, I learned to collaborate and communicate with public agencies, an important skill I would like to bring to this position.

More recently I moved to New Mexico for a job as a field technician with a geophysical consulting company that does mostly cave and karst surveys. Nowadays, I'm active with the Sandia Grotto and the Pecos Valley Grotto and am enjoying getting involved in caving projects in New Mexico. I have been attending BoG meetings so that I will be better informed about the position and responsibilities.

What I'd like to bring to the NSS: I often see the NSS getting pulled in different directions. I think there are plenty of good ideas being worked on already. I find our staff of volunteers is often spread thin, and we should focus on our tasks at hand. I plan to support the current BoG members in their initiatives, as opposed to adding to the workload. Some issues that are important to me are: transparent communication between the BoG and NSS members, revamping the NSS website to be more modern, and addressing our decline in membership. In the haste to modernize, I often see our older members left out. I've also had people of various backgrounds tell me they wished caving was more inclusive to them. I hope to be an open ear and a voice for members of different backgrounds, ages, races, and creeds. If you have a concern with the NSS, I hope to be your voice in the BoG.

Why me? During my time spent traveling, I have joined over a dozen caving organizations in the form of grottos, cave conservancies, and state cave surveys. I feel like I have a good eye into the caving community and hear members voice their needs and concerns from a variety of areas. I have the passion, energy, and time to dedicate myself to the position. I have experience serving on a grotto executive committee. I'm very accessible and able to communicate through email, the NSS Slack, phone, social media, and other platforms. I'm willing to listen and represent cavers from multiple regions.

I have what I consider to be a healthy obsession with caving. When I found caving it totally changed the path my life was on. Nowadays most people I know are cavers. Cavers are my family. A day doesn't go by that I don't think of caves. I was able to get a caving job, and still cave in my free time. I dream about caves. When I was nominated to be an NSS Director, it was easy for me to say yes. It makes sense to give back to the community and hobby that has given so much to me.

Thank you for your consideration.



I am running for the 2021 NSS Board of Governors, and I ask for your vote. As a board member, I want to get our IOs more involved with increasing our membership. Our grottos are the first contact with new and younger members. They are the ones that schedule beginner/kid-friendly trips, vertical workshops, surveying workshops, and trips to map caves. It should be every grotto's goal to be more active and visible in local community events such as outdoor expos and introducing caving to potential members. They are the ones to teach these folks about the NSS and its goals. We have a wealth of knowledge from our older cavers, who are quite willing to share that knowledge with younger cavers. As a board member, I will be easily accessible to our IOs and all members.

My first visit to a cave came when I was four years old. My parents knew the owner of a cave in south Mississippi, one of three caves south of Jackson. The owner invited us to see and hear the bats inside the cave. That experience was my first with a maternity bat cave and one that I won't forget. It taught me to respect bat habitats and to champion for bats. Years later, after moving to Tennessee, I was introduced to TAG and TAG's wild caves. I became a member of the Nashville Grotto and helped survey a few caves leading to membership in the Tennessee Cave Survey. I helped to organize the Nashville Grotto's 65th "Birthday Bash" in the Fall of 2018. In the Spring of 2020, I was approached to help coordinate a conservation clean-up effort in Savage Cove. With the help of the NSS Conservation Expo, the SERA Task Force, the Nashville Grotto, and many members of other TAG grottoes, a mountain of trash was cleaned from one of the area's resurgence streams. During the 2019 NSS Convention in Cookeville, TN, I co-chaired the Transportation Committee and volunteered at the Cave Trip Information Booth and the Registration Table.

I served the Nashville Grotto as Cave Trip Coordinator in 2019-2020. We found that many of our members wanted to pass their love of caving on to their children. However, at the time, our grotto did not schedule easier trips. So, once we began organizing beginner and kid-friendly trips, word got out that we were caving and offered easier trips. Within a short time, our grotto membership doubled with younger cavers. As these newer members became more experienced, it led to more surveying and vertical workshops and more experienced cave trips. Several of these members have become members of the NSS and are now leading cave trips of their own and hosting vertical training, learning how to approach the landowner community and recruiting new, younger cavers.

From 2016 to the present, I have made trips to Hawaii and fell in love with the islands' lava caves. I became active in the Hawaii Grotto as well as the Cave Conservancy of Hawaii. I was elected to the Hawaii Grotto Board in 2018 and was elected Secretary of the Hawaii Grotto in 2020. I was asked to serve the NSS as interim Membership Chair, and then the Board elected me as Membership Chair. Since becoming Membership Chair, I have helped write some "how-to's" for the NSS members website. This is an ongoing process, and other people have stepped up to support and improve this process. I am working on a project to reach out to former NSS members to invite those members back, and I have begun to work on outreach to youth groups. I will be excited to serve the NSS membership as a member of the Board of Governors.



My NSS experience began in 1993, while at Western Kentucky University, happening upon organized caving while growing up four miles from what is now the Wells Cave Preserve; karst landscapes are foundational to my identity. Learning to survey in Mammoth Cave with the Cave Research Foundation and trailing Art Palmer in his Cave Geology course merged my caving passion and professional life, nucleating a career in karst studies.

My arc in caving is not unique—I grew up in rural Kentucky, broadened my horizons in college and among cavers, and adopted them as my extended family. My caving passion leveraged world travels and personal growth, and through that experience I expanded my perspectives on culture and tolerance into progressive social ideals. More recently, I have come to realize that those experiences were a product of my privilege and that my ideas were only progressive with respect to my childhood standards. My social sphere was not as diverse physically or intellectually as I once thought.

This personal growth parallels that of the NSS. The past few years has widened rifts in my caving family. Discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI) have fueled disputes among an aging and declining membership. Young cave-curious people are not interested in our internal politics that create structural biases and exclude. Our lack of targeted outreach perpetuates a virtually white demographic—the NSS is not racially diverse. What is needed is a complete rethink of what we are, what we stand for, and how the NSS leadership can best advocate for the exploration, study, and conservation of cave and karst resources.

I can help bring that leadership to the NSS Board through a translational vision for the future structure of the NSS in support of the NSS Diversity Committee. Currently, I am helping to develop DEI plans for my workplace and the Association of State Boards of Geology. The former is part of a five-year strategic plan that engages staff with underserved communities, the development of an anti-racism statement, and the recruitment of summer internships for minorities, with the agenda of expanding pipelines for opportunity in the geosciences.

A second leadership role that I can bring is advocacy and communication. In addition to my public speaking, teaching, and media appearance record, I am a strong supporter for scholarly communication. The *NSS News* and *Journal of Caves and Karst Studies* have international reputations for expertise and professionalism that must be maintained, and I would diligently campaign for budgetary support.

A third leadership role is organizational and project management. Being all things to everyone can be taxing to a society with a scope that includes sale proceeds, membership administration, event hosting, land management, and advocacy. The Executive Committee, Board, and various committees are often beyond their financial and personal means. With the parallel growth of related professional societies and conservancies, I can help the NSS rethink what it can and cannot effectively manage and what is best served by strategic partnerships, an executive director, and professional event management.

Selected professional vita:

- Graduate degrees from the University of Missouri and the University of South Florida
- Mendenhall Postdoc at the U.S. Geological Survey
- Fulbright Fellow at the Universitatea Cluj-Napoca in Romania
- Tenured geoscience faculty (55 peer-reviewed papers, 10 monographs, 14 book chapters, 172 conference abstracts)
- Chief Editor, *Indiana Journal of Earth Sciences*
- Senior Research Faculty, Licensed Professional Geologist, and Assistant Director at the Indiana Geological and Water Survey
- Manage 22 scientists, advise graduate students, oversee a \$2.7M state appropriation, and procure annually a \$1.5M portfolio of state and federal grants
- Interface with university, industry, and government leadership, and legislators in Indiana and in Washington DC

Selected caving vita:

- NSS Board Member from 2006-2009 and Executive Vice President from 2009-2010
- Founder of the Kentucky Speleological Survey in 2001 and served as its President
- Chaired the Wells Cave Preserve Committee at foundation
- Served on the Kentucky (2001) and Florida (2008) NSS Convention Committees, leading efforts on guidebooks, sessions, and trips
- Leader for cave survey projects in Kentucky, Florida, and international locations with awards in the NSS Cartography Salon
- Manage monitoring and sampling programs in caves and karst aquifers



A Huckleberry Finn-style interest in adventure is what led me to start caving. In 30+ years as an NSS member, the adventure continues to capture my full attention. My exploration has led me to the discovery of dozens of new cave species, participating and leading expeditions which are generally entirely volunteer-led, and friendships with cavers both near and far from my home in Austin, Texas.

Cave exploration is one of the greatest adventures of the modern era. We can discover a new cave, a new connection, a new bug, map a known cave, archive data for future cavers and so on. As NSS members, we are all fortunate to be a part of caving and contribute one way or another. This is what drives our volunteers to do the work that we do for the caving community and through the NSS.

At our core, the NSS is a community of persons who care for caves and each other. We cannot forget that caving is about having fun with our friends. Sometimes fun means regular fun, but often it means working to do something seemingly impossible, and frustrating, but when successful, brings an immense feeling of joy and discovery.

I am a professionally trained biologist with a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin specializing in cave invertebrates of Texas and Mexico. I've received numerous grants for my research and published in peer-reviewed journals in the field. Through my work, I hold a USFWS endangered species permit. If elected, I will support the society in expanding our impact in the scientific community by supporting scientific grants, broadcasting research findings, and engaging more of our members in doing cave science.

Today I serve as Partner and President at an environmental consulting firm working closely with clients to ensure adherence to regulations and protect natural resources. I manage a staff of 12, and we've grown the organization while remaining true to fulfilling our conservation-oriented goals. My experience as a business owner equips me with the foundation and experience needed to transition the NSS towards a future with a focus on sustainable and long-term growth. I support thoughtful changes to the society to meet the growing needs of our organization.

Of course, going caving tops everything. I am a dedicated project caver and cave diver. As a diver and expedition leader, I pushed exploration in Main Drain Cave (UT) and Honey Creek Cave (TX). Internationally, I collaborated on projects in Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, Borneo and China. In America, I've done extensive surveys in Lechuguilla and The Grand Canyon. I've caved in too many states to keep track of. Having caved all across the country, I intend to serve cavers across America and not be myopically focused on one specific region.

I understand the trials and tribulations required to uncover new cave passages: blood, sweat, tears, bruises, and sometimes even broken bones. I have seen that dedication through the enthusiasm for recreational caving, tank hauls to support cave dives, etc. Strengthening fellowship across our nation and internationally is one thing that the NSS is uniquely positioned to contribute to.

The NSS is the most meaningful organization for cavers and caves in America. However, the NSS is at a crossroads today. We have an opportunity to become the global authoritative voice on caves, cave science, exploration, safety and more. In highlighting and treasuring the fun of caving, we can

engage more and more young cavers in preparation to carry the torch as responsible stewards looking out for caves.

If elected, I will fight for growing membership by getting more people underground, investing in cave science and the broadcast of scientific discoveries, and contributing to thoughtfully restructuring the NSS to build the foundation necessary to support healthy growth into the next 80 years. It would be an honor to serve.



My name is Sylvester J. Muller, but most people are familiar with my nickname, "TJ." In 2009, I began cave diving after delving further into more technical open water diving; a deep-water diving class specifically piqued my interest, and so I then took a cavern class. It was a natural extension for me, and my first "real" cave dive was at Ginnie Springs. Years later, I've dived a number of other cave systems, both fresh and saltwater. I have been in underwater cave systems that only a handful of people have been in - with my favorite being the "Mt. Everest" of Florida cave diving, Eagles Nest.

I was previously the chairman of the NSS's largest section: the Cave Diving Section (NSS-CDS). It has been my pleasure to serve the cave-diving community on the board of this organization for over six years. During this time, I have helped elevate the organization in both members and solvency; I've accomplished this by revamping our social media presence to be relevant to new prospective members, and by spending a significant amount of time raising funds and acquiring sponsors. My role was pivotal in keeping Eagles Nest open to cave divers after several fatalities, and I helped structure the management plan that allows us to keep it this way — twice. I was also honored to be asked to assemble a team of the best American cave divers to assist with the Thai cave rescue. Prior to holding the chairman position, I was the secretary, properties chair, and vice chair of the NSS-CDS as well. I am currently the social media chair.

In addition, I undertook the only successful litigation against a municipality on behalf of the NSS when I sued the city of Alachua after Walmart attempted to build a super center (with gas station) on top of a sensitive aquifer and a cave that feeds directly to the NSS Mill Creek Preserve. Although the city was backed by a large, multinational corporation and developers with deep pockets, I helped organize community groups, the Sierra Club, the NSS-CDS, and the NSS in order to fight the potential environmental disaster. Even after being completely closed out of negotiations, we managed to mount a serious case that forced major, permanent covenants on the land; as a result of this hard work, there will be no gas station over the aquifer. After the ruling set the precedent, the adjacent land holdings around the preserve are being set aside as well. The Audubon Society, Suwannee River Water Management District, and the State of Florida Trust for public lands have also stepped up with grants and conservation easements to preserve a place we always knew was worth protecting. It is efforts like this that show the importance of the NSS and its mission.

One of my goals is to help improve the relationship between the NSS and the CDS by involving CDS members in NSS events and encouraging NSS members to attend CDS events. Additionally, due to my first-hand experience on a wrongful death case, I plan to protect the organization by structuring our preserves in a way that prevents similar lawsuits in the future — all while retaining the access of our members to the caves these preserves contain. I also want to expand our social media presence across several platforms in order to maintain and grow our membership base.

Thanks for your consideration.



Many, if not most, caves are formed by water, yet there seems to be a division between those cavers for whom the cave ends at the water and those for whom it starts. Cave divers in the NSS Cave Diving Section (CDS) form a large proportion (around 10%) of the NSS membership, but there appears to be a disconnect between them and the rest of the NSS. Many cave divers have little or no interest or knowledge of regular caving. Some CDS members do not even want to be members of the NSS.

Professionally I am a physician, an anesthesiologist, and an associate professor at the University of Florida in Gainesville. I serve as the Director of Congenital Cardiac Anesthesia in the Congenital Heart Center at University of Florida Health, which involves managing a team of highly skilled doctors caring for some of the most complex and challenging patients in a referral area that covers much of the southeastern USA.

I have been caving and cave diving for nearly three decades and have contributed to the exploration of many underwater caves domestically and abroad, including the two deepest water-filled caves in the USA: Phantom Spring in Texas and Weeki Wachee Spring in Florida. I am a director of Karst Underwater Research, a non-profit that has conducted underwater cave exploration, mapping, sampling, and other science for nearly 25 years. With over 50 individuals directly involved, we resemble a grotto of cave divers of all levels of ability, and we are the most active underwater cave exploration group in the country. We have been granted permits to dive in caves on properties owned or managed by the Florida State Parks Service, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida State Forests and many private landowners. Our belief is that documentation and raising public awareness of underwater caves is the best way to preserve them and the groundwater that flows through them.

I am running for the NSS Board of Governors, and the Cave Diving Section Board of Directors, to fulfil one primary function: to bridge the divide between 'dry' cavers and cave divers. Each group has so much that they can offer the other. Better collaboration in exploration, conservation and access to caves, above and below the water surface, can be nothing but beneficial to all NSS members. The fundamental purpose of the NSS is to connect cavers together, and my goal is to bring greater cohesion and understanding between all cavers, whether they are caving while submerged or not, and if elected I promise to do so with integrity and humility.

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I began studying caves and archeology in California in 1963 and worked extensively throughout the southwestern United States and Mexico before joining the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department where I worked for 21 years. I am the Immediate Past President of the Texas Speleological Survey and I am now serving on the board of the Texas Cave Management Association. I am currently the Fundraising Chair for the National Caves and Karst Management Symposium to be held in Texas in late 2021. My last caving trip was in March prior to the COVID quarantine.

I previously served as the President of the Texas Archeological Society, a statewide organization, and am serving on several archeological boards. I am a registered professional archeologist working throughout Texas and New Mexico. I am able to solve problems, listen to other opinions and offer mine to enhance the goals of the NSS.

I support the goals of the NSS and believe I can help lead the organization in COVID times to reach out to a diverse community of cavers for support of cave conservation, research, education, and recreation. I believe in a strong fiscal policy and extreme liberal fellowship.



Cavers found me four years ago, with my college friends at an event in the desert for exploring abandoned mines. These SoCal Grotto folks asked if we'd heard of caving and patiently explained the spelunking vs. caving nuances. They spent evenings teaching us vertical skills and kept inviting us on caving trips until we felt confident enough to actually take them up on it. My personal background informs my thoughts here, but above all I want to represent YOU at the national level. My experiences being a member of multiple grottos and caving in multiple states, and my leadership as the Chair of the San Francisco Bay Chapter (SFBC), have shown me that there is no one right way to cave, but that we all care about caving and, most of all, each other. The challenges of caving in California are not the same as elsewhere -- heck, they're not even the same in different parts of the state -- and, as national directors, we must listen to and learn from members from all over.

I am running to help make the NSS a truly 21st-century organization. What does that mean? First, we must embrace technology that allows us to spread our appreciation for caves and karst, and that allows us to further cave science and conservation. Second, we must strive to serve 21st century Americans, and make sure all people have excellent experiences caving. Doing both allows us to meet cavers where they are along their caving journey and support their growth in a sustainable way.

We are already along the right path in terms of leveraging technology with the website redesign. Attendance at the Topics in Cave Rescue series and NCRC waitlist lengths make it clear that cavers are eager to learn, and the NSS's online archives, ACA reports, and committed community are eager to teach. Cavers can't cave without access to caves, so the NSS should maintain a registry of caves with steward contact info, trip reports, maps, survey data, etc. Centralizing this information will aid in research, conservation, and safety efforts. As a director, I will use my software engineering skills to support the NSS's digital presence through the pandemic and beyond.

To attract and retain cavers, the NSS must reflect the needs of a changing society, and diversity, equity, and inclusion must be central to our approaches to doing so. As a director, I intend to provide more opportunities to learn and share best practices, especially for allies and grotto leaders wishing to design for inclusivity. We need to listen to our existing minority cavers about what most impacts their caving experiences, and effect change to provide a great experience for all. This is how we have always shown respect for our fellow cavers, and it is how the NSS will sustain itself long into the 22nd century.

We need to meet potential new cavers where they are. I know cavers who got started in urban exploration, climbing, and hiking. There are many canyoneer-cavers in Southern California precisely because cavers there have reached out to that adjacent community. The NSS has experienced a decline in membership, but there isn't a dearth of aspiring cavers -- in fact, most spelunkers are just cavers who haven't found organized caving -- and, as a director, I will work with adjacent organizations to provide more first-caving experiences and find such cavers.

It is so crucial that we also provide avenues for growth within the NSS; if we don't, interested cavers will still cave without access to best practices and crucial safety, and others may become disillusioned and degrade the important partnerships the NSS has as a cave advocacy group. Navigating the expectations of the caving world is also daunting, so as a director, I plan to create a mentorship program. Every new caver should have access to someone who can interpret caving etiquette and politics, so that they can focus on building their skills. As they become an experienced caver in their

own right, they can share their knowledge with the next cohort of cavers. And, they can give back by leading the NSS.

Reach out anytime -- I would love to hear your thoughts.



Compared to many, I'm relatively new to caving, having started only in late 2014. Since then, caving has become my greatest passion in life. Having such a late start at age 32, I trained relentlessly in SRT and rigging, both with the help of grotto members and on my own in every free moment I had; and I was able to join expedition caving trips with CRF-West by early 2015.

While I was researching how to become involved with caving, I came across an article published in *The Atlantic* ("Dark Passage," July 1998). In that article, there was a quote by Carol Vesely: "...I was a social outsider. I don't think I know any cavers who were ever in the in-crowd. A lot of cavers, when they finally find caving, feel that they finally fit in." It struck a deep chord with me, and still does. It's hard to describe the experience of having finally found something you'd been looking for all your life without even knowing it; but that quote summed it up better than anything I'd ever seen, and it mirrored my own experience.

Since then, I've become a trustee and trip leader for several caves in Sequoia National Park, become an expedition leader for CRF-West, and joined expeditions to the Yucatan and the 2019 PESH expedition to Sistema Huautla.

I've continued to be one of the most active trip and expedition leaders in the region, recruiting and training new cavers wherever possible, and I think of myself less than half-jokingly as a 'speleo-evangelist.'

For me, this has all been nothing short of a lifelong dream come true. Of all these things I've had the opportunity to do, not a *single one* of them would have been possible without the NSS existing to maintain and organize grottos to be available train new people. For that, the organization and its membership has my undying gratitude. Finding caving was nothing short of life-changing for me, as I'm sure it is for many members, and it will be for many more who are yet to join.

As important as caving and the caving community are to me, it is even *more* important that the NSS *continue* to exist and to thrive. Maintaining grottos that actively work with and train new members and are accessible to *all* is key. It is of paramount importance that they exist to serve in training the next generation of cavers not only in safety and technical skills, but also in terms of the importance of conservation. Without both of those pieces, future generations will not have the same opportunity we enjoy today. To me, that isn't an acceptable outcome.

Additionally, something I've found to be fairly widespread outside of the caving community is that cave conservation is often poorly understood or ignored entirely. In my experience, it's all too often that people do not *know*. People simply cannot care about what they do not know about; and as people who care enough about caves to dedicate the time and energy that we do, it's up to us to understand how to make that happen.

My priorities will be sustaining and maintaining this organization so that others can have the opportunity that I've had. People who are fascinated by caves but don't know where to start, who have never heard of the NSS, as I hadn't till age 32. My focus would be on membership, grottos, conservation, and outreach that can serve to point people toward the NSS.

Beyond my passion for caving, I bring nearly two decades of project management and professional organizational skills to assist in the endeavor. Outside of work, I've put these skills to use in organizing and leading expeditions; and I will bring the same skills and enthusiasm to working toward my stated goals.

In summary, I hope to serve a role in the NSS that will assist in making the organization, and by extension caving, as sustainable, accessible, and inclusive as it can possibly be.



Hello NSS members! My friends call me Philip and I've been caving since I was 14 years old. After finding and exploring a cave behind my neighborhood, a family friend gifted me an NSS membership. When I gave my first talk to the Nashville Grotto at age 18 on my dye tracing project for school, I realized the caving community is something I wanted to be a part of for the rest of my life. Since then, I've been awarded the James A. Mitchell Award for a scientific paper and am a Fellow of the Society.

As I got increasingly involved, I started an NSS News Column called Cave Chronicles, wrote numerous articles for the NSS News, Association of Mexican Cave Studies (AMCS), and grotto newsletters. I have been a member of five different grottos, an active expedition caver, and passionate about our sport for 28 years. During this time span, my commitment to our community has also grown. Most recently, I served as the Chair of the ad hoc committee guiding the NSS to determine what to do with our old Cave Avenue property in Huntsville, Alabama. All this and lots of caving prepared me for the next phase of my underground career.

When not underground, I serve as the owner and leader of multiple successful real-estate-related businesses. Recent challenges involve hiring new staff members, letting staff go who are no longer a fit for my evolving organizations, and growing assets under management from \$18m to \$32m by year's end. My experience with financial statements, setting and meeting short- and long-term goals, and managing teams are skills that I bring to the table. Making the NSS's finances transparent to the membership and communicating what we are spending, why we are spending, and how we are spending is important to enabling members to understand how we as a society are serving our purpose. Building this foundation will set the Society up to grow our membership and impact on caves nationally and globally. I am a patient listener and aspire to remove my emotions from tough decisions that have to be made.

At the core of my being, serving the NSS and ensuring the current and future success is something I am extremely passionate about as a dedicated caver. I bring a mature yet young-at-heart ethos to the NSS BOG. I naturally come in with strong informed opinions. I understand that what is involved in collaborative work is the flexibility to use without hesitation a better plan than one's own and the determination to convince others through discussion to adopt the ideas that I believe in.

The issues I believe are critical to our society here and now are the following:

- Membership growth
- Investing locally in grottos
- Modernizing our national organizational structure to introduce an executive director
- Balancing our need to serve the younger generation of digitally-native cavers without compromising our commitment to our forefathers.

I humbly present my platform to our members in hopes that you will vote for me to represent you at this important moment in NSS history.



You honored me by electing me to the board 3 years ago. I hope I have served you well in that time and you will consider electing me for another term.

I am an active participant in the Virginia Region's activities. I also am the NSS Convention Development Chair and the Awards Committee Sub-Committee Chair for Fellowships.

I started, like many, sport caving. Over the years I have focused on project caving, primarily digging, survey, and conservation efforts. Also, I have participated in cave-gating projects, especially when that is what the owner wanted to be done.

The NSS was already searching for ways to stretch its funds when the COVID-19 situation hit us all. It's going to take a lot of creativity and thinking outside the box to maintain member services and support expeditions, projects, and scientific research. The need exists to pursue grants and other funding outside of our membership base.

I believe we need to reach outside of our membership for donations. We should have a Conservation Membership for non-cavers - like the CEOs' wives who financially support the Nature Conservancy. Show them examples of before and after our conservation efforts and how their support will continue our efforts to preserve the environment. If the price is variable, like other organizations, we will not price out the smaller donors, and those who can provide more support will.

There is a renewed interest in hiring an Executive Director and restructuring the governance of the NSS. However, we are facing the same obstacles we have encountered in the past, how do we pay for it without cutting essential services or raising dues.

The Society needs to develop more public outreach programs. We need to educate the public about caves, cave sciences, conservation, and the impact we all have on not only what we see on the surface, but what is going on below and how that can return to them via their water system. The 'Learnmore' initiative has been a great start. In order to grow and improve, we need more educators and scientists collaborating with the project.

I have been championing a cooperative effort with those conservation groups that can identify biological assets on the surface of our preserves and can help us control invasive species. In turn, we can help them with biological surveys and the management of their caves. In the last president's report, there is a mention of making such an effort with the Nature Conservancy.

I would like to see the NSS work closer with government agencies that own caves. We have memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with agencies that allow the caves to be inventoried for threatened biological content. With this information, the agencies could control access to those caves and open the others, rather than continue blanket closures. We need to actively petition them to comply with these MOUs. Even if a permit is required to access the caves deemed to be non-critical habitat, it would be better than no access at all.

I will continue working on long-term and strategic planning for the organization.

I am a strong believer in the Closed Loop Process. If we pass an act, it should be seen to completion, not just languish and take up space in the BOG Manual.

If I am privileged to be re-elected to the board, I plan to continue looking for ways to grow the membership from non-affiliated cavers, cut costs, do what we say we are going to do, improve member benefits, find alternate funding to reduce the financial burden on the membership and endeavor to provide more education and information to the non-caving public.



I have been caving all my life, have started one of the fastest growing grottos in the country, and have held leadership positions in multiple businesses, grottos, and the NSS. I love to share my passion for caving and bring cavers together.

While president of the Northern Rocky Mountain Grotto (NRMG), the USFS threatened to close all caves due to WNS. I persuaded Region 1 to collaborate with us, resulting in unrestricted access to all ungated caves in the state. This has grown into strong working relationships with the other state and federal agencies in Montana. Our collaboration resulted in the USFS advocating for more cooperative agreements with cavers, and they commonly refer to this reverently in cross-region meetings as the "Montana way". I chaired the financially successful 2018 Montana caving convention. In 2020, I chaired the Executive Director Exploratory Committee, resulting in work the BoG is currently addressing.

My heart resonates with expedition caving. My first expedition was in Lechuguilla, where I have now led more than 20 expeditions. I've led survey trips as a sketcher in Wind, Jewel, and Carlsbad Caverns. I have participated in six international expeditions in three countries (see 'Drama in Lukina Jama', NSS News, February 2012). In the US I have caved, mostly on projects, in more than 14 states including most of the Western states, Missouri, and TAG.

My teenage daughter was raised as an expedition caver; she has surveyed multiple caves in Mexico, in Wind Cave, and in multiple caves in Montana. She plans on doing a high school senior project on cave mapping. I want the caving community to be as welcoming to her as it was to me, so I have focused on improving things which might make her feel uncomfortable, such as including an anti-harassment policy at the 2018 NSS Convention.

I've run multiple businesses and managed scores of people; I can read financial statements and I understand how to build and create thriving organizations. I've served on multiple corporate and advisory boards and am the investor-representative on the board of the company Laser Lab Source. I work in technology, meaning I have a strong future-focus and understand how modern businesses operate. Combining my business and board experience with a deep love of caves will result in great outcomes for the NSS.

The NSS has many opportunities as we modernize the society for the next generation. I'm particularly passionate about a number of ongoing activities the BoG is addressing, from the amazing and ongoing website updates to following up on my committee's Executive Director findings. The Executive Director work caused me to spend much time thinking about the NSS organization and our future -- I spoke with Executive Directors from the American Alpine Club, Adventure Cycling, and many others about what it takes to make an organization thrive. Internally, six decades of NSS leadership showed us the best ways to move forward. The steps are concrete and achievable, but require fortitude to manage organizational change.

I see big opportunities and a bright future for the NSS. Our strength is in honoring the past, not clinging to it. We are the largest caving-focused organization in the world and the definitive source for everything cave and karst in the USA. We need to use this position to educate the public and expand our membership base. We have seen membership decline, but I have learned from other organizations how we can grow.

I will work to address the core issues related to membership and solvency so we can maintain our leadership as the premier global caving organization. As a business leader and technologist who is dedicated to caving, I have a clear vision of our next steps:

1. Modernize our bylaws and structure allowing us to grow and eventually hire an executive director so we can better fulfill our mission of science, conservation, and fellowship.
2. Expand our offerings to embrace beginners, and teach those who don't yet know about caves and karst.
3. Remain focused on our membership, to offer additional benefits and programs and clearly answer the perennial question, "Why should I be a member of the NSS?"



If elected as a member of the NSS Board of Governors, I will bring a unique perspective to the organization. I have a master's degree in Geosciences and Ph.D. in Biology with a focus in paleontology. I began caving in 2010, almost exclusively for research purposes, studying giant ground sloth fossils in Tennessee. Throughout my 13 years in academia, most of my research revolved around caves and karst natural traps, but it was not until starting my career at The Mammoth Site that I heard mention of the NSS. Since joining the NSS, I've used my experience as a researcher and educator to make a difference. I took up the Environmental Education Committee Chair position and have worked to create new materials to help the NSS educate the public about caves and karst.

Since my first paleontological excavation, I have found my life surrounded by karst. The intermixing of caves/karst, paleontology, and educating the public have become my career's focus and have spilled over into my hobbies. Professionally, I am the Curator of The Mammoth Site, an Ice Age sinkhole where 60 mammoths and numerous other species became trapped over 140,000 years ago. My Ph.D. research combined education and 3D scanning of specimens from another sinkhole, Thomas Farm. Obtaining and participating in multiple National Science Foundation grants allowed me to bring teachers and students to this site to educate them about karst geology and paleontology. This sparked interest in science in my students and further ingrained my passion for education. Today, my work allows me to bring the conclusions drawn from our research to more than 100,000 visitors annually at The Mammoth Site. The NSS has the potential to reach even more people with its message. The NSS could be and should be an integral player in the world of cave paleontology, as well as the many other fields where scientists are entering caves to study the wonders found underground. Under my help with leadership, we would continue to look for ways to enter the realms of study, show them value of the NSS, and make our organization relevant to them.

Each year, the platform statements are full of platitudes about membership decline. The best way to help the NSS grow and evolve is to find new and innovative ways of bringing in quality new members. I believe that strengthening our impact in K-12 education as well as education to the general public are both keys to the longevity of the NSS. When a child learns about caves in school, we want them to gain their knowledge through the lens of the NSS. When a person picks up a pamphlet about fragile underground environments at a visitor's center, we want that to be NSS branded material. When most of us think of space exploration, we think about NASA; our goal should be to have that same brand recognition for caves and the NSS.

I have worked in paleontology for nearly 20 years, with numerous karst and cave excavations. During that time, no colleague mentioned the NSS; this should not be the case. Cave paleontology is essential for understanding ecological and climatic changes throughout time. Caves provide a fundamental environment needed for undisturbed sediments and, in many instances, proper fossil preservation. There are caves in the Southwest that have fossil mammoth dung that still smells fresh. There are caves in Tennessee that have giant ground sloth remains that even have mummified tissue on them. The remains of preserved small animals can help us date the layers of sediments in the cave and give a clear picture of environmental changes. Currently, I am helping move The Mammoth Site research and education into the exciting world of caves/karst. By bridging sciences like this, the NSS will be able to bring in more members.

Our future lies in being more available to researchers of all fields and making our presence known. Let us be the group that helps support all cave and karst research. Let us be educational trailblazers and bring the passion we have for caves to all. As an NSS Director, I can be a leader to bring this vision to life through the NSS.



Caving is a unique and beautiful undertaking. Caves are part of the ever-dwindling quantity of unexplored Earth and worth protecting. While the NSS is not without issue, a robust functional national organization is necessary and worthwhile.

In 2014, I attended a grotto meeting and signed up for a trip. Caving immediately consumed my life. In short order, I started project caving and met incredibly talented people I'm proud to have as friends. Caving provides never-ending opportunities to better myself and encourage others to do the same.

I'm primarily a TAG caver. I've also participated in expeditions at Main Drain and Tears of the Turtle as well as the Bridger-Teton cave project. I'm active in aid-climbing projects at Southeastern Cave Conservancy (SCCi) preserves including managing liability, conservation concerns, and developing permanent rigging management plans. I believe exploration is the heart-and-soul of caving and will carry that mindset to the Board.

Professionally, I'm an engineer working in renewable energy. I'm responsible for optimizing multi-million-dollar critical infrastructure assets. I solve complex problems that have significant financial, safety, and conservation impacts. I manage business contracts, regulatory compliance, and approach decisions in cost/benefit terms. Issues are often more nuanced than they appear, and I have a knack for peeling back the layers and getting to the root of the problem. The board needs transparency and sound financial governance which I have the skills and experience to support. I aim to be a consensus builder and practical problem solver. I have benefited tremendously from the effort of others in the caving world and want to give back.

There has been much concern about decline in membership. Numbers aren't everything. We need to address lack of engagement and provide real value to existing members. There is not a cohesive vision among the rank-and-file of what the organization is or the benefits it provides. Many don't feel there's much use beyond a credential for state survey data, etc. We have to make members feel like they're contributing to something larger and relevant. The NSS should be a point of entry to responsible caving, an advocate for access and conservation, and a voice for sound science. Caving with people from across the country has opened my eyes to the different regional challenges cavers face. Whether we cave on private or public land, with or without grottos, for original exploration, scientific research, or responsible recreation, we can have the strength of a national organization while celebrating regional identities.

New caver support is a patchwork effort. There's plenty of good outreach that goes on, but too many fall through the cracks. The NSS needs to support grottos in providing a better experience and provide alternative avenues when local grottoes are inactive or unhelpful.

Members often feel uninformed about the Board's work and decisions. There's been some great progress in this area with work toward a new website. As a board member, I'll continue to drive transparency and accountability.

I want the Society and caving as a whole to be sustainable into the future. If elected, I will work diligently on behalf the entire membership and our volunteers to support a vision of engagement, outreach, and exploration. It would be an honor to serve.