

ABOUT AGU

Christine McEntee Takes Office as AGU Executive Director

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In a historic transition event, AGU staff and volunteer leadership welcomed incoming executive director Christine W. McEntee and said farewell to outgoing interim executive director Robert Van Hook. The event, with the theme “A Bridge to the Future: From Strength to Strength,” took place at AGU headquarters in Washington, D. C., on 30 August.

McEntee comes to AGU from the American Institute of Architects, where she served as executive vice president and chief executive officer since 2006. She is the Union’s third executive director.

Van Hook, president of Transition Management Consulting, served as interim executive director since 27 January 2009. During the 19 months of his tenure, he guided the organization through governance changes and the development of a new strategic plan.

Staff members and AGU leaders presented tributes to Van Hook in appreciation of his work at AGU. Van Hook then thanked the staff, noting that members of the staff and leadership team had shaped his life. He said he was “humbled and profoundly grateful” for the opportunity to lead AGU through the transition period.

“We’ve been through a lot together,” he told staff members; “you were always good; now you’re even better.” He said that although the change of executive directors is an important change for the organization, it’s also a change for individuals. “The important transition is what goes on inside of us,” he said. “We’re building this new identity, not only for ourselves but for AGU.”

Van Hook added that during the transition time period, “We’ve built a bridge together, and we’ve built it strong.” He continued, “Today you begin the new era at AGU. This is a time to cross that bridge.”

AGU past president Tim Grove, AGU president Mike McPhaden, and AGU president-elect Carol Finn also presented their perspectives on the transition, thanked Van Hook for his work, and welcomed McEntee.

Grove told staff, “I want to thank all of you. You’ve transitioned us to a new AGU.” He also thanked Van Hook and said, “I’ve learned a lot from him.” Grove added that he was looking forward to working with McEntee and to all the changes in the new AGU. “It’s the new AGU now. We’re all really excited.”

McPhaden also said that much has changed for AGU as an organization during the transition. He said Van Hook has “positioned us as an organization to take the next leap forward.”

McPhaden noted that although much has changed, there is more to do. The science is always evolving, and the public and policy makers are looking for answers to questions about climate change, energy, sustainability, and natural disasters. “All these have roots in Earth and space science,” he said. “AGU has a special role to play.”

He pointed out that AGU has a new strategic plan, a revitalized and empowered staff, and a new executive director. “I’m really thrilled and honored to be president of AGU at this point in our history.” During his presidency, McPhaden said, AGU will build on its traditional strengths such as publishing and meetings and add new programs to enhance AGU’s impact on problems of societal relevance.

Finn said that Van Hook “provided a credible image of a new leadership style—easy-going, inclusive, tolerant, risk taking, fun, and kind.” She added, “He showed us all how to gracefully and honestly recover from mistakes and focused on increasing all of our capacity to help AGU realize its goals and to do our jobs.” Finn also welcomed McEntee, noting that she had stood out in the executive director search process for her strong association management background, creative ideas, collaborative working style, and great listening skills. “Today we have a new colleague and leader, Chris McEntee, who will help us all to enable AGU to become the organization it wishes to be.” Finn told staff at the event, “I know that I’ll be relying on her and on you to help the Council with its ambitious plans.”



New AGU executive director Christine McEntee addresses staff at the 30 August transition event at AGU headquarters.

In introducing McEntee, Van Hook added that “Chris is the leader that AGU needs right now.” He noted that McEntee is a strategic critical thinker, likes change, is thoughtful and asks questions, is willing to take risks, and makes a point to talk with staff at all levels.

Standing on a small wooden bridge to symbolize the bridge to the future, McEntee said she was excited to be at AGU. She pointed to AGU’s new strategic plan and said she plans to work in a collaborative approach with staff, volunteer leadership, and the AGU Board of Directors and Council to achieve the goals of that plan.

McEntee also noted the importance of the balance between work and family, and thanked her family for their support. Her husband and one of her two sons attended the transition event.

McEntee told the assembled staff that under her leadership “We will celebrate our successes small and large, we will provide encouragement, we will encourage all of you to exceed expectations, we will find ways to use everyone’s strengths, we will focus on issues, not personalities, and we will create a culture of trust.” In addition, she told staff, “We’re going to have a lot of fun.”

—ERNIE TRETOKOFF, Staff Writer