

► **DirectTalk** MUSINGS FROM THE 10TH FLOOR

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## Three Sisters

**P**lanting corn, beans, and squash together, reverently referred to as the “three sisters,” originated with the Haudenosaunee, also known as the Iroquois. The Haudenosaunee, who occupy the regions around the Great Lakes in the Northeastern United States and Canada, historically planted all three seeds together, often in an elevated mound. This approach assisted with drainage and avoided water logging of the plant roots, which was important in a region that historically received abundant rainfall.

The sisters also dish up a wholesome, nutritious meal. Corn is a source of carbohydrates. Dried beans are rich in protein and provide amino acids. Squash is an important source of vitamins and minerals absent from corn and beans. These crops are also important because they are amenable to drying and long-term storage. While these traits are perhaps less important today than in years gone by, these characteristics were critically important in the past and led to their significance as major cultivated foods.

Then, there is the benefit the plants provide to each other. Corn provides a substrate for the beans to climb on. Beans provide nitrogen to fertilize the soil while also stabilizing the corn during inclement weather. Beans are nitrogen-fixers, which means they secure nitrogen from the air and convert it into forms that can be absorbed by plant roots. The large squash leaves shade the ground, which helps retain soil moisture and prevents undesirable weeds. In short, the three sisters are the foundation of a stable and sustainable dietary community.

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The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) has its own version of the three sisters. In our case, the three are our individual members, our affiliates, and the third leg of the stool, our national association (i.e., NEHA). Our affiliates—state, uniformed, and business and industry—are vital to the profession. Frankly, all three sisters are essential to a thriving professional community.

Why? Environmental health is profoundly local by its nature. From a governmental perspective, many of our states are home rule (i.e., local jurisdictions fund, lead, and manage their affairs at the local level). For our private sector members, I have learned anecdotally that many grocery, restaurant, and healthcare chains defer to local codes and professional sensibilities in the way they conduct their affairs. This system is what our forefathers envisioned, locals managing local issues in a manner that makes sense to them. We also observe that local agencies, public and private, are hotbeds of innovation. It’s where the action is.

There are about 40 state, regional, and sector-specific affiliates associated with us and each is independently operated and man-

aged. By policy, they have no financial ties to NEHA, the mother ship. We recently surveyed the affiliates to characterize their operational state and to identify how NEHA could be most helpful to them. We had a response rate of 75% (30/40). There were some surprising findings.

First, 90% of the respondents reported their individual affiliate was either stable or growing in membership, with almost 40% suggesting they are currently in member growth mode. This discovery was delightful. Having said that, almost one third suggested that recruiting and retaining members and securing the assistance of volunteers are recalcitrant challenges.

We then inquired about the value NEHA represents to them. The top affiliate response was capacity building—face-to-face training and e-learning. We took these responses to heart and have an internal team working diligently to ensure our e-learning is valuable, easy to access, and easy to report for continuing education purposes.

We also learned that advocacy resources were important. In consideration, we are doubling our efforts to ensure we have caliber government affairs support and stories of impact that affiliates might find useful in sharing the message about the importance of the profession. This spring our government affairs activities will pivot to the local level to ensure we provide timely responses to affiliate needs. And yes, we will continue to be active in Washington, DC. We also anticipate a growing footprint in the environmental health storytelling arena. As I write this column, we

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## NEHA Staff Profile

As part of tradition, NEHA features new staff members in the *Journal* around the time of their 1-year anniversary. These profiles give you an opportunity to get to know the NEHA staff better and to learn more about the great programs and activities going on in your association. This month we are pleased to introduce you to one NEHA staff member. Contact information for all NEHA staff can be found on page 46.



### Kim Koenig

I came to NEHA in May 2019 having worked in instructional design and training delivery for 11 years. Prior to joining the Entrepreneurial Zone team at NEHA, I worked for the University of Colorado Health Authority, University of Denver, and a variety of health and professional organizations as a curriculum developer, analyst, and principal trainer.

Much of my work as an instructional designer involves working with domain experts to create curriculum for professional, technical, and academic projects or programs of study. Collaborating with subject matter experts is personally enriching because I learn so much with every project. At NEHA, I've had the privilege of

working with members who are some of the most competent subject matter experts I've ever worked with.

I love to learn and it's a wonderful byproduct of the work I do. Along the way I've been a subject matter expert myself, becoming a certified analyst for multiple clinical enterprise applications, collaborating on system development while developing training programs as well.

I enjoy coordinating stakeholder input and pulling together the narrative of a course and, ultimately, crafting tools that help people learn and understand. Instructional design is dynamic and creative, too. Keeping up with technology and creating across many different modes keeps me energized. And I need it—my husband and I are very busy keeping up with our four fantastically unique kids, three geriatric dogs, and our horse, which has me happily running at both ends.

Since joining NEHA, I've been developing training components and am currently working on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Hurricane Supplemental projects focused on the U.S. Virgin Islands. I look forward to working with the rest of the Entrepreneurial Zone team to upgrade NEHA's catalog of training products and to optimize the effectiveness of education, certificate, and credential offerings. 🐾

## DirectTalk

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anticipate the release of a funding opportunity to support us in this exciting and long overlooked component of our programmatic portfolio—telling our professional story.

We've also reengineered our annual conference to provide affiliate leadership with training on association management, which we feel is a wonderful opportunity to share stories of success and failure and to learn from each other. Our *Journal* is also planning to provide affiliates with space in this publication to directly share affiliate developments, opportunities, and challenges with the profession writ-large.

While we are sensitive to affiliate needs, we have been blessed by affiliate contributions to the overall professional enterprise. Our Business and Industry Affiliate (BIA) has sponsored and presented several national webinars over the last 18 months. These webinars have received accolades for their content and delivery, and attendance has been impressive. Recent BIA webinars have included the following titles: Power of Partnerships:



*The Texas Environmental Health Association in action. Photo courtesy of David Dyjack.*

Strengthening Agency and Industry Relationships; Boil Water What?!? When Good Water Goes Bad; and Coming Clean About Norovirus: How to Dodge the Spread. We acknowledge that industry is frequently a leader in adopting new practices and technologies and we collectively benefit when the private and governmental sectors collaborate.

The Uniformed Services Environmental Health Association (USEHA) is also an important and foundational professional constitu-

ency. They plan to host their annual USEHA Educational Program Day at the NEHA 2020 Annual Educational Conference (AEC) & Exhibition in New York City, providing a full day of environmental health presentations given by their uniformed services members. We encourage all AEC attendees to join them at the USEHA Educational Program Day. USEHA also plans to offer a scholarship to a uniformed services member to attend the NEHA 2020 AEC. I am proud of our members in uniform.

The three sisters showcase the wisdom of our Native American forefathers. This system is a classic case of how agrosystems, ecosystems, and diets are more productive and healthier when careful thought and consideration are invested into the management system that supports them. We honor the Native Americans who identified this approach. We humbly borrow from their ideas and are committed to ensuring our affiliates remain vibrant and viable as we nurture the future of the profession. 🐾

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