

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

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The Importance of Gratitude During This Season of Thanks

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.
— Marcus Tullius Cicero

As the leaves change and the air turns crisp, many of us look forward to Thanksgiving — a time to gather with family and friends, share a meal, and reflect on what we're thankful for. While the holiday often centers around food and festivities, the underlying theme of gratitude is what truly makes Thanksgiving special. Although I do not pretend to be an expert in any way, this—gratitude—is something that is close to my heart and has played a meaningful role in my own life.

Nearly everyone understands what it means to be grateful, but I think we can all agree that in the whirlwind of a busy everyday life, with its ups and downs, it is not particularly easy to keep in mind the importance of this “greatest of virtues.”

According to Psychology Today, the simple act of being grateful has many benefits, including improvement of physical and psychological health, better sleep, increase in mental strength, and improvement with satisfaction with one's life. But what exactly do we mean by “gratitude”? The best definition that I have come across is from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence:

Gratitude is a state of mind that arises when you affirm a good thing in your life that comes from outside yourself, or when you notice and relish little pleasures. Though some people and things are clear blessings, this state of mind doesn't actually depend on your life circumstances....[G]ratitude is not just a feeling outside your control that arrives willy-nilly. It's more like a radio channel: you can choose at any time to tune in.

Gratitude is a powerful emotion that fosters positive feelings. During Thanksgiving, taking time to express thankfulness can uplift spirits and create a sense of belonging. Whether it's appreciating the people in our lives, the experiences we've had, or even the challenges we've overcome, focusing on gratitude helps shift our perspective. Research shows that practicing gratitude can lead to increased levels of happiness and reduced feelings of depression. When we acknowledge what we are thankful for, we cultivate a positive mindset that enhances our overall well-being.

Thanksgiving is a perfect opportunity to strengthen relationships with loved ones, friends, and colleagues. When we express gratitude, we not only acknowledge the efforts of others but also foster deeper connections. Taking a moment to thank someone for their support, kindness, or simply being present can reinforce bonds and create an atmosphere of warmth and appreciation. This is particularly important in family gatherings, where tensions may sometimes arise (especially in these days of contentious social and political issues). A shared moment of gratitude can serve as a reminder of our collective love and support, helping to bridge any divides.

Thanksgiving is also a time to extend our gratitude beyond our immediate circle. Many communities host events that provide meals for those in need, and participating in these initiatives not only helps others but also reinforces a sense of community. Volunteering can deepen our appreciation for what we have and highlight the importance of giving back. Recognizing the struggles of others encourages empathy and understanding, reminding us that we are all interconnected.

The benefits of gratitude extend well beyond Thanksgiving. By consciously practicing gratitude, we can cultivate a mindset that enhances our resilience in everyday life. It's easy to become overwhelmed by negativity or stress, but by focusing on what we are grateful for—big or small—we can develop a more optimistic outlook. This shift in perspective can lead to improved mental health, increased motivation, and a greater capacity to handle challenges.

As John F. Kennedy said, “We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives.” Personally, I want to express my deep gratitude to our Association Board of Officers for their unstinting support and encouragement, for our incredible professional staff for their invaluable work, and the outstanding professionals that comprise the membership of the NJSACOP—the heart and soul of the organization.

As I have been for the past 25 years, I am grateful for the opportunity to be the Executive Director of this important, dynamic, and highly respected Association.

As we all gather around the table this Thanksgiving, I hope you will all take the opportunity to embrace the spirit of gratitude. By acknowledging our blessings, strengthening our relationships, and fostering a sense of community, we can make this holiday even more meaningful. Gratitude is not just a fleeting feeling; it's a powerful practice that can transform our lives. So, as you enjoy your Thanksgiving feast, take a moment to reflect on what you're thankful for—and remember that gratitude is a gift we can give to ourselves and to others, not just during the holiday season, but every day of the year.