

A Society Uniting All Pennsylvanians

**An Interview with LeRoy S. Zimmerman,
President, The Pennsylvania Society**

EDITORS' NOTE *LeRoy S. Zimmerman was Pennsylvania's first elected Attorney General, a position he held for eight years, beginning in 1981. Prior to that, he served as Dauphin County District Attorney for 15 years. Zimmerman is Senior Counsel for the firm of Eckert Seamans Cherin & Mellott, LLC. He is Chairman of the Milton Hershey School Board of Managers, the Hershey Trust Company Board of Directors, and Hershey Entertainment & Resorts Company. He is the recipient of many honors and awards for public service and leadership. LeRoy S. Zimmerman is a graduate of Villanova University and the Dickinson School of Law.*



LeRoy S. Zimmerman

ORGANIZATION BRIEF *Thriving and still growing in its third century of existence, The Pennsylvania Society (www.pasociety.com) is a nonprofit, charitable organization with over 2,000 members around the Commonwealth, the United States, and throughout the world. It is not affiliated with any particular political party, business, or profession. Its purpose is to honor achievement, to reward excellence, to promote good will and understanding, and to celebrate service to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and to humanity in general. The Society is the longest-lived organization of its kind in the country.*

Will you give a brief overview of the impact that The Pennsylvania Society has had and how you define its key mission?

The Pennsylvania Society is, in essence, a charitable and patriotic nonprofit organization that honors the accomplishments of citizens from all walks of life who have brought prestige to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Each year, the Society, through its board of directors – which we call the Society Council – selects the gold medal recipient of this award. The award is a prestigious one because of the nature of the history of the Society, and each year, the Society donates \$50,000 to a Pennsylvania charity or charities that the gold medalist selects in his or her honor. Some of our gold medalists have been: in 1911, industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie; in 1968, The Honorable William Scranton, Governor of Pennsylvania from 1963 to 1967; in 1981, renowned artist Andrew Wyeth; in 1987, Joe Paterno,

Penn State's football coach; in 1990, Pittsburgh native Fred Rogers, the executive producer, writer, and host of Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood; in 1992, actor Bill Cosby, an active philanthropist; in 1994, biographical author and TV host David McCullough; in 2003, former President George H.W. Bush; in 2007, U.S. Senator Arlen Specter; in 2008, Dan Rooney, owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers; and this past year, great cable television media pioneer, H.F. "Gerry" Lenfest, who discovered and developed his business in Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

The Society meets every year in New York in December at the Waldorf=Astoria for a gala black tie award event, which draws close to 2,000 people. People often wonder why a group of Pennsylvanians holds their group meeting in New York. In the late 1800s, a native Pennsylvanian named James Barr Ferree contacted some of his colleagues who had relocated to New York City. In the course of their correspondence, he received the support from 55 men who were interested in founding The Pennsylvania Society of New York, for people who worked in or relocated to New York but were originally from Pennsylvania. It was launched on April 25, 1899. The name was later shortened to The Pennsylvania Society when they incorporated in 1903. We honor the Society's origins by having the dinner at the Waldorf=Astoria in New York on the second Saturday of December each year. The goal was to establish a society uniting all Pennsylvanians at home and away from home, in bonds of friendship and devotion to their native or adopted state.

In the spring, we have an annual luncheon meeting. Every year, it's in a different Pennsylvania location such as Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Gettysburg, or Harrisburg; it was in Hershey last spring. This year, we're going to Erie, Pennsylvania. At this annual meeting, we sometimes select a Distinguished Citizen of the Commonwealth, but only when we find an appropriate person. There have only been seventeen selections since 1976 when we began this award, including Princess Grace of Monaco, a native of Philadelphia. This past year in Hershey, our recipient was a wonderful lady who has impacted the lives of a lot of young people – Marcia Dale Weary. She founded and still continues, at age 70, an internationally renowned school of ballet in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

The organization also produces an annual publication called, *The Annal*, which highlights the Society's activities each year. Our extraordinary executive director, Carol McC. Fitzgerald, keeps us moving forward and upward, and takes care of the organization and all activities of the Society. About four years ago, we initiated an annual awards program called the Benjamin Franklin Scholar Award, in honor of the 300th anniversary of the birth of Benjamin Franklin. The program is an essay contest open to all Pennsylvania public high school juniors in good standing. The essays are based upon a quote by Benjamin Franklin, and are judged independently by designated members of three highly respected organizations: the Pennsylvania School Counselors Association, The Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals, and The Pennsylvania School Board Association. There are three prizes: first prize is \$3,000, second is \$2,000, and third is \$1,000. These prizes are announced at the December dinner, and are awarded at the annual luncheon meeting.

Currently, we have about 2,000 members in the Society, representing entrepreneurs, bankers, industrialists, educators, physicians, attorneys, and politicians. As members, they're not representing their professions, businesses, or political affiliations – they are there as individuals. An active member includes anyone who is a native of Pennsylvania, the descendent of a native of Pennsylvania who is or was a Society member, a current resident of Pennsylvania, a previous resident of Pennsylvania for seven consecutive years, or a graduate of an accredited college or university in Pennsylvania with undergraduate or graduate degrees.

I'm privileged to have served for two years as President of The Pennsylvania Society, and I will leave office in April. The two years have been very interesting and instructive. You learn and meet people and hear from people all over the Commonwealth, and there is bonding we try to encourage; and camaraderie and collegiality crosses political lines. I'm not going to suggest there aren't political discussions that take place while in New York at various parties – not political parties but parties. But it's fun. We get together up there and you see people from all over the state and the Eastern region of the country. And we have tested this from time to time. The reason we get these people coming back every year is because it is in New York City, during the Christmas holiday, at the Waldorf=Astoria. ●