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## EDUCATION 'R US

A recent review of Everett Ellis's excellent history of the Society of Wood Science & Technology and a re-reading of Jim Bethel's review (*W&F* 10(4):284–290) have prompted me to review where we have been and where we are going in education. First and foremost, SWST is an educational organization having our roots in the Education Committee of the Forest Products Research Society in 1950. As spelled out in the Members' Handbook, a major purpose of the Society is to “*foster educational programs at all levels of Wood Science & Technology and further the quality of such programs.*”

It occurs to me that we have the chance as a Society intimately familiar with our greatest renewable resource to make great strides in education over the next decade. Those strides depend largely on our willingness to take innovative approaches to education. In reviewing our annual meeting programs going back to 1979, one finds only two programs reasonably devoted to education. Perhaps we should put more effort into bringing education to the front in our own house. I must confess that I have no solutions, only questions and some ideas. I put them forward for your consideration. First, what is our role as a Society in public education? A review of Daryle Layton's editorial [*W&FS* 30(4)] would indicate that we should play a positive role in reeducating the public about our favorite renewable resource and its proper utilization. If not, we risk letting Captain Planet and the radical environment lobby do that for us.

The approaches we pursue need thoughtful discussion. It is my belief that we should take

a proactive role in early environmental education. As a Society, we should be involved in, or at least learn from, programs such as Project Learning Tree, Wood Magic Science Fair<sup>SM</sup>, Woods Walk—Woods Talk, Project Wild, and Project River. How do we address the very real problem discussed by our most recent Distinguished Service Award recipient Dick Thomas [*W&FS* 31(4)] when he asked about future faculty for our educational institutions? The number of schools offering programs in Wood Science & Technology is dwindling. In a number of forestry schools, wood utilization is receiving little or no attention or resources. Is it now time to consider regional centers in which several schools could combine resources to provide the expertise needed for a dynamic teaching program? It seems as if the internet could play a vital role in such an approach. Can distance learning be used effectively as a teaching tool? What about continuing education? Offering credit for SWST programs, as was done for the 1999 Technical Session, was a small step. How do we seize upon this initiative and expand it to meet the needs of industry—or do we? How can we strengthen the partnership between universities, industry, government, trade associations, and other societies with goals and objectives similar to ours so that we can foster innovative, progressive educational programs?

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