



SUMMER 2026 NEWSLETTER

American Association of Petroleum Geologists Foundation

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Tulsa, Oklahoma
Permit No. 979

AAPG
125 W. 15th St.
Tulsa, OK 74119

AAPG Foundation Capital Campaign
Invest in the Future of Geoscience.
For information on the campaign, go to campaign.aapgfoundation.org.



Hello, friends –

I hope that you, like CJ and I, are enjoying a wonderful summer experience. Busy, I'm sure, but in a good way. Spending our vacation time with family, friends, travel and memorable times is what we do, right?

But even in the midst of summertime fun, your AAPG Foundation is engaged in one of the [most dynamic and historic chapters in our illustrious history](#). A story that is not only significant, but necessary.

And that story is still being written – by the Foundation leadership, the Foundation team, and most importantly, by you.

I'm talking, of course, about the [AAPG Foundation's historic \\$25 million capital campaign](#), now under way, created and launched as an ambitious, purposeful response to the crisis facing the geosciences.

The past few months have been a whirlwind of activity for us, made possible because of [scores of Trustee Associates](#) who already have given their time, expertise and gifts to start “the quiet phase” of our campaign, which generated more than \$5.1 million in support.

Of course, all of what we've done and are about to do is possible only because of your ongoing, dedicated support of the Foundation.

And friends, those efforts are needed now more than ever.

Getting Personal

By now, I'm sure you're at least somewhat familiar with this capital campaign, perhaps having read about it in the AAPG EXPLORER, or via some letters that I wrote earlier this year.

As a reminder: This campaign is designed to [help secure the future of geoscience research, education and talent development for decades to come](#).

This is one of the most important periods in the AAPG Foundation's history – our energies, our strategies and our determination are focused on a crisis that we are compelled to face.

This is our first capital campaign in more than 15 years, and it was years in the making. As Rick Fritz, our Foundation executive director, told us earlier this year, “It was carefully considered by financial experts and geoscience veterans, and designed specifically for this critical and defining moment for the profession, the industry and the science.”



Rick Fritz

Rick would know – he personally played a major role in the campaign's planning and development, helping to create a campaign around [a basic idea](#):

[Supporting this mission is an opportunity for current professionals – especially TAs – to help future geoscientists experience their own chance at a professional career.](#)

We all know that the geosciences – and even our profession itself – is facing serious challenges. Jobs are changing, the industry is shifting, public expectations remain, paradoxically, deeply cynical of yet desperately dependent on energy, and geoscience education at all levels is not only slipping, but in some cases, completely slipping away.

Every single penny raised in this capital campaign is being used to address those challenges. In ways that are immediate, effective and innovative.

[Simply put, this capital campaign is designed to make a difference right now.](#)

[This is our Era of Impact.](#)

Your Own Website!

Perhaps you're thinking, well, I'd like to get involved, but ... how? What can I do? And how can I do it?

Here's good news – New websites have been designed specifically for the campaign as well as the TAs:

- ▶ For information on the campaign, go to **Campaign.AAPGFoundation.org**.
- ▶ For the TAs own personal dashboard site, which includes a brief video message from Rick as well as tons of practical information, go to **ta.aapgfoundation.org**.

That's where you can easily and quickly learn information about and engagement in the campaign – it's just a quick click away.

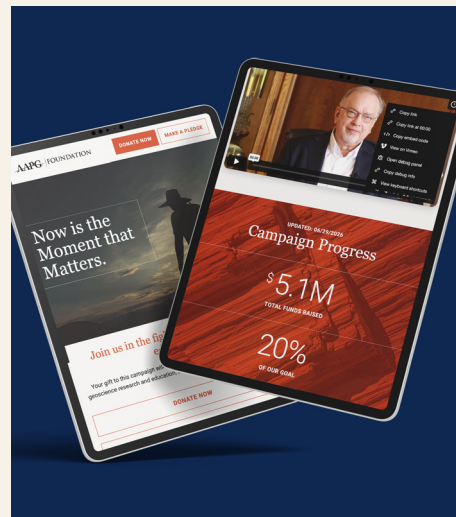
On your website, you'll have easy access to:

- ▶ Detailed information on goals and the specific projects that will benefit from the capital campaign.
- ▶ Interviews with people who donate to and also receive benefits from the fund.
- ▶ Testimonials from those who have felt the impact of the AAPG Foundation.
- ▶ Answers to frequently asked questions.
- ▶ Tools that make it easy to support the campaign.
- ▶ A compelling picture of the Foundation's importance to the past, present and future of geosciences.

Please, visit the dedicated TA site as soon as you can – you won't be disappointed, I'm sure.

That's **<https://ta.aapgfoundation.org>**.

*And remember, everyone can participate with their gifts and support, whether new or ongoing – **participating is easy, rewarding and impactful.***



New Faces for the Trustees

This may be news to some of you: Longtime Foundation supporters **Martin D. “Marty” Hewitt**, of Calgary, Canada, and **James M. “Jim” Funk**, of Houston, were recently elected to the AAPG Foundation's Board of Trustees by our Members of the Corporation (MoC).

Marty fills the vacancy created earlier this year when our friend Mike Party, of Midland, Texas, stepped down from his role, and Jim joins the board as the Foundation's seventh trustee following the MoC's approval of the 2026 Bylaws amendment expanding the board.

Of course, we're delighted to welcome Marty and Jim to the board – Marty, who earlier this year provided the TAs with a memorable annual meeting experience in Banff (more on that in a bit), brings exceptional global exploration and leadership experience, and Jim, as many of you know, has demonstrated decades of dedicated service to both AAPG and the Foundation.

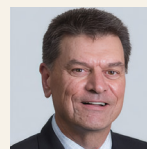
(In fact, Jim and his wife, Sherree, currently serve as co-chairs of the AAPG Foundation's Capital Campaign.)

Together, Marty and Jim will strengthen our board and help advance our goal of advancing the geosciences.

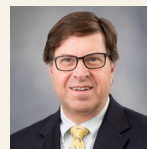
As Marty and Jim join us, the Trustees and I want to thank Mike Party for his distinguished service and leadership to the Foundation. He was a valuable part of our efforts, and we are grateful for his many contributions.

Mike is now a trustee emeritus, elected to that role with our gratitude.

You can read more about Marty and Jim in the **August EXPLORER**.



Marty Hewitt



Jim Funk

The Best of the Best

Here's more exciting news – five longtime innovative champions of the Foundation who have provided years of service, support and dedicated leadership have been chosen to receive [our top honors for 2026](#).

The honorees – all of whom have played vital roles creating the Foundation's increasingly ambitious approach to impact the world of geosciences – will be recognized and celebrated in August during the Chairman's Reception at this year's IMAGE event, set Aug. 17-20 in Houston.

The awardees are:

► **Mike Party** (there's that name again!), owner and president of Beryl Oil and Gas, Midland, Texas, this year's recipient of the **L. Austin Weeks Memorial Medal**, the Foundation's highest honor, given in recognition of extraordinary service and philanthropy to advance the Foundation's mission.



Mike Party

► In an unprecedented move, three people will receive this year's Chairman's Award, given in recognition of extraordinary contributions and service to the Foundation: **Jim Funk**, head of JHF Consulting Services in Plano, Texas; **Steve Sonnenberg**, professor and the Charles Boettcher Distinguished Chair in Petroleum Geology at Colorado School of Mines, Golden, Colo.; and **Lee Billingsley**, president/partner of Windridge Oil & Gas, San Antonio.

► **Kim Parsons**, Lakewood, Colo., is this year's recipient of the Foundation **Trustee Associates' Service Award**, given for distinguished, long-term service to the Foundation through Trustee Associates participation.



Kim Parsons

As you know, recognizing excellence in service and achievement is an important part of who we are, and this year's class of honorees all have demonstrated excellence and meaningful impacts – not just for the Foundation, but for the entire geoscience community.

It gives us great pleasure to recognize and applaud their contributions and achievements. You can read more about them, too, in the **August EXPLORER**. But briefly:

► **Mike Party**, an AAPG Honorary Member, joined the Foundation Trustee Associates in 2001, and became a Member of the Corporation in 2021. As mentioned above, he is now a Trustee Emeritus.

Mike has maintained passionate support of the AAPG Foundation throughout his career, and also served on numerous committees for AAPG, including three stints on the Executive Committee – as secretary, president-elect and, in 2019-20, president.

► Fun fact: The Foundation's Chairman's Award was first presented in 1999, but this marks the first time that we have honored more than one person – but then, what these three contributed to the Foundation's mission over the past few years was three equal contributions of excellence.

Specifically, **Lee Billingsley**, **Jim Funk** and **Steve Sonnenberg** were important participants and leaders in creation and development of the Foundation's new innovative Advanced Energy Geoscience Innovation & Support program, or AEGIS, which was launched in March.

All three are members of the Foundation's Members of the Corporation. Lee and Steve are Honorary Members and past presidents of AAPG.

► Throughout her career, **Kim Parsons** has been not only active but integral in her participation on numerous committees that support Foundation programs and AAPG – and most recently, provided the leadership and creative inputs that helped improve and transform processes that provide grants to geoscience students who are training to become tomorrow's leaders.

Kim became a Foundation Trustee Associate in 2022, and immediately became an important presence on several Foundation committees, including currently serving as chair of the L. Austin Weeks Undergraduate Grant Program and the Foundation Field Camp Scholarship Program.

Her leadership has been specifically noted for bringing improvements to the committees' organizational structures, and making them more effective in connecting with and helping students.



Lee Billingsley



Jim Funk



Steve Sonnenberg

An Iconic Inspiration

During the Chairman's Reception we'll also recognize and celebrate this year's AAPG Foundation Inspirational Geoscience Educator Award recipient – **Dr. Matthew Malkowski**, assistant professor in the Department of Geological Sciences at the University of Texas at Austin.

And folks, you're going to enjoy meeting Matt, because he is the embodiment of this annual award: He has creatively, and with excellence, inspired scores of geoscience students, often in ways that change their lives as well as the profession's future for the good.

And as you'll see, he may already have inspired YOU, thanks to his connection to an iconic **AAPG cover photograph ("Rock Steady")** that captured the spirit and passion of geologists everywhere.

Matt is the 15th recipient of our IGEA honor – and he's a longtime AAPG member, who in 2009 received the Foundation's Merrill W. Haas Memorial Student Research Grant-in-Aid while pursuing his master's degree at Michigan State University.

You can read more about him in the **August AAPG EXPLORER**.



Matthew Malkowski



More to Celebrate

Before leaving our "Spotlight on Great People" section, there are yet a few more people to recognize: This year's eight recipients of this year's **Deana and Paul Strunk Military Veterans Geoscience Scholarship Program**.

This year's class includes veterans with long careers in combat zones, dependents with a thirst for a career in petroleum geology, and one recipient already active in AAPG activities.

Each will receive a \$10,000 scholarship from the Foundation to support their geoscience studies this year. As a group, they become the 62nd-69th recipients of the Foundation MVGSP awards, and their selections mark the most awards presented in a given year by the Foundation in a decade. The first awards were presented in 2015.

As always, we're honored to thank the people and families who have served the country, and we're particularly happy to help them in their pursuit of careers in the geosciences.

This year's MVGSP recipients are:

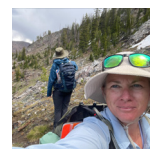
- **Eric Aime**, geology major at Oregon State University, Corvallis, Ore.

(Aime is a 20-year U.S. Army veteran, including service in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and continues as a master sergeant in the U.S. Air Force Reserves. With the Air Force he flew in 15 combat missions in the Middle East, Africa and Europe, and was active in providing in-flight medical care to wounded, injured and ill personnel during aeromedical evacuation missions. He has received more than 10 medals and citations, including for Meritorious Service and the Army Commendation medal with 4 Oak Leaf Clusters, and is this year's Jack C. and Catherine I. Threet Named Grant recipient, awarded for having the top application score.)



Eric Aime

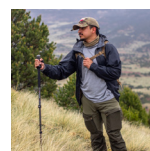
- **Nichole Cornell**, pursuing double majors in geology and anthropology, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho. She is an honorably discharged U.S. Air Force senior airman, with deployments that included Turkey and Saudi Arabia.



Nichole Cornell

- **Eric Estrada**, a geology major at the University of Texas at Austin.

He is an honorably discharged U.S. Air Force senior airman.



Eric Estrada

- **Kaileigh Gonzales**, a geology major with an emphasis in petroleum geology, at Western Colorado University, Gunnison, Colo. She is the daughter of Michael J. Gonzales, honorably discharged staff sergeant with the U.S. Army.

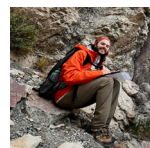


Kaileigh Gonzales

(In addition to being a teaching assistant at WCU, Gonzales is president of the school's AAPG Student Chapter, and Geology Club. Her goal is to be a petroleum geologist, "hoping to specialize in subsurface analysis and energy resource development.")

- **Tristan Ilgenfritz**, a geology major at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, La.

He is the son of Thomas C. Ilgenfritz, who served in the U.S. Army and U.S. Army Reserves, with deployments to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.



Tristan Ilgenfritz

- **Yakira Johnson**, a geosciences major at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She is the daughter of Curtis L. Johnson III, a retired master sergeant with the U.S. Air Force after 20-years of service. Her goal is to be a geoscientist in the oil and gas industry.



Yakira Johnson

MVGSP recipients (continued)

- **Drake Love**, in the Department of Geography and Geographic Information Sciences at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, Ill. He is the son of Ernest M. Love, an honorably discharged sergeant with the U.S. Air Force.



Drake Love

- **Tinius Manu**, a double major – planetary geoscience and astronomy – at the University of Arizona, Tucson. He is the son of the late Moefili Manu Jr., an Operation Iraqi Freedom campaign veteran who was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army.



Tinius Manu

You can read more about all of them in the **August AAPG EXPLORER**.



Banff was a Blast!

For those who missed this year's **TA annual meeting**, I'm sorry to tell you this, but it was a tremendously wonderful experience.

For the record, 34 TAs met in **Banff, Canada**, this past June, at the renowned **Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel** – right in the heart of the Canadian Rockies, surrounded by both magnificent geology and some of the earth's most breathtaking views.

Of special note, in addition to the business updates and Foundation discussions that are usual for the TA annual meeting, TA chair and newly elected Trustee **Marty Hewitt** led us on an **amazing field trip** that included stops at Canmore, Mount Norquay, Castle Mountain, Moraine Lake and the area's centerpiece, Lake Louise.



Marty Hewitt

The meetings were good, the fellowship was memorable and the setting was a geological paradise. Sorry you weren't there with us – TA annual meetings are something not to be missed!

Speaking of TAs ...

We want to extend a warm welcome to four more wonderful people who have become Trustee Associates since we last talked

They are:

- **John Casiano**, San Antonio. (And, as of July, AAPG's new president for 2026-27.)
- **Howard Kiatta**, Houston.
- **Tim Schowalter**, Granby, Colo.
- **Doug Valleau**, Spring, Texas.

Others are in the process of joining the TAs; stay tuned for the updates in our next newsletter.

Tribute to Trustee Associates

Finally, we received some sad news earlier this year that we want to share:

[Patrick J.F. Gratton](#), a past president of AAPG, award-winning geologist and longtime supporter of the AAPG Foundation, died Feb. 12 in Dallas. He was 92.

An AAPG member since 1960 – and an Honorary Member since 2002 – Gratton was elected AAPG president-elect in 2003 and served as president in 2004-05. That was his second stint sitting on the Executive Committee, having served as chair of the House of Delegates in 1996-97.

He had been an AAPG Foundation Trustee Associate since 1996.

Gratton, an Honorary Member who played an active role in AAPG's governance throughout his career, also served as president of AAPG's Division of Professional Affairs; was a member of the Energy Minerals Division; was a charter member of the Division of Environmental Geosciences; and was a Certified Petroleum Geologist. In all, he served on nearly 40 committees for AAPG, the HoD and various divisions, often in leadership roles.

Capping his career, in 2010 he received the AAPG Michel T. Halbouty Outstanding Leadership Award.



Patrick J.F. Gratton

Another AAPG past president, [Harrison L. Townes](#), remembered for promoting governmental support for independent petroleum geologists, and instrumental in raising the Association's international profile in the 1990s, died March 7 in Tulsa. He was 96.

An AAPG member since 1952 – and an Honorary member since 1997 – Townes served as AAPG president-elect in 1991-92 and then as president in 1992-93.

He became a member of the AAPG Foundation Trustee Associates in 1991.

His role on the Executive Committee followed years of leadership and service with AAPG's Division of Professional Affairs (DPA), which he led as president in 1988-89. He also was a founding member of the Division of Environmental Geosciences, served in the House of Delegates and was an active member of the Governmental Affairs Committee.

While AAPG president, the first AAPG-sponsored meeting outside of the United States was held in Caracas, Venezuela. Also during his presidency, he traveled on AAPG's behalf to Norway, England, Egypt, Australia and Canada to help establish AAPG's international presence.



Harrison L. Townes

And lastly, we also learned of the passing of [George R. Bole](#), a past chairman of the House of Delegates and a longtime part of the TA family, who died April 9 in Houston. He was 90.

Like many TAs, George was also very active for AAPG, both as a member and in several leadership roles.

A native of Los Angeles, he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in geology from Occidental College and the University of California, Berkeley, respectively. His career was spent mainly with Amoco, and he later taught continuing education courses on well logging for the University of Tulsa.

For AAPG, he served several terms in the House of Delegates, and was elected HoD chair for 2008-09. As such, he held a position on the AAPG Executive Committee.

He also was active in leadership of the DPA, serving as its president in 1985-86.

Among his many honors was an AAPG Certificate of Merit, DPA Life Membership and HoD Honorary Membership. He joined the TAs in 2005.



George R. Bole



As you can see, we HAVE been busy this summer.

I have three final thoughts before signing off for now.

First, your Foundation will have a very large presence in August at this year's IMAGE event. I've mentioned the many people who will be recognized and celebrated at the **Chairman's Reception**, but we'll also be holding our annual **Foundation Forum**; supporting the **Michel T. Halbouty Distinguished Lecture**, featuring the talk "Exploring Sedimentary Basins on Mars with Curiosity and Perseverance, by award-winning geologist Dr. Kirsten Siebach; and greeting all of our friends at the **AAPG Foundation booth** in the exhibit hall.

Please, if you're attending IMAGE, stop by and say hi. We're there not only to answer questions, but to hear your ideas on how we can be an even better Foundation. We need and value your input.

Second, please do all you can to be part of our **capital campaign**.

Visit the special TA website, and you'll immediately be informed, inspired and aware of the challenge before us, our profession and the future of geosciences.

This may be the most important support you ever provide to the Foundation. It certainly is being sought at the most crucial time of our era, and the time for action is now.

Remember, you can contact the Foundation team members by email at any time, at **info@aapgfoundation.org**, to ask questions, offer advice and provide support.

And finally, my thanks once again to all of you, our loyal TAs and friends of the Foundation, for your continued support, encouragement and ideas. We are "Building a Better Foundation for the Geosciences," and we can do them only through your generosity.

We are making a difference in the world – and we're honored to be doing it with you.

Until next time ...

Jim



Jim McGray