

---

# NEW PRESIDENT SEES “Bigger” things ahead for APPA

---

**Alan S. Bigger** Helps to Position APPA for its Second Successful Century  
as the Association of Choice for Facilities Professionals Worldwide

By Ruth E. Thaler-Carter

Anyone who witnessed his Maryland blue crab speech during the award's banquet at the July APPA 2007 conference in Baltimore, Maryland, knows that new APPA President Alan S. Bigger lives up to his name—he thinks bigger, broader, and bolder.

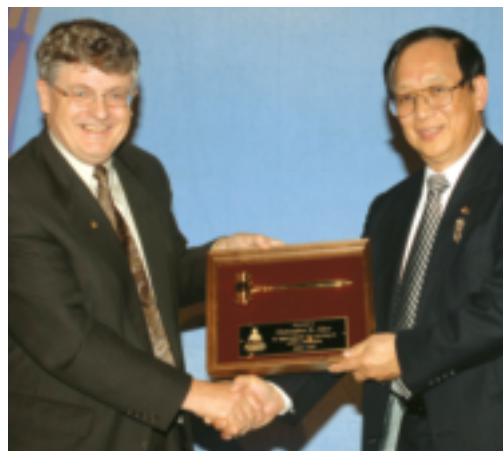
The presidential gavel has been passed from Immediate Past President Christopher K. Ahoy to Bigger, and APPA members can expect a smooth transition of leadership. Bigger's goal is to build on APPA's 7 Key Strategies and new brand identity. He offers a three-fold theme for his presidential year, which will help with the implementation efforts:

- **Carpe diem:** Seize the day
- **Renovare:** To make new
- **Kaizen:** Continuous and orderly improvement

“These three terms summarize my vision for APPA's continuous growth, as I am committed to building on the stellar achievements of my predecessors,” says Bigger. “We have a focused strategy, new brand identity, and committed membership and staff—if we don't aggressively move forward now, we'll miss valuable opportunities to effectively serve and lead the profession.”

---

*Ruth E. Thaler-Carter is a freelance writer, editor, desktop publisher, and frequent contributor to Facilities Manager. E-mail her at [ruth@writerruth.com](mailto:ruth@writerruth.com).*



*2007-08 APPA President Alan Bigger received the ceremonial gavel from outgoing president Chris Ahoy during the closing awards banquet at APPA 2007 in Baltimore, MD.*

## New Horizons Abound

Being APPA president is one of two new positions Bigger is settling into—after more than 16 years as director of building services at the University of Notre Dame in Notre Dame, Indiana, Bigger is now the director of facilities at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. He started his new job on September 17.

“I would have been perfectly happy to stay at Notre Dame indefinitely,” Bigger says. “All universities have buildings, but they would be nothing without the people, and I was in a community of great people at Notre Dame.”

At Notre Dame, Bigger managed services for a campus with more than 6 million square feet of buildings, more than 100 buildings, 400 apartments, and 6,300 beds; a custodial



*Bigger's jovial personality and passion for the advancement in the facilities management field, and commitment to share knowledge and resources internationally is a great asset for APPA.*

“We have a focused strategy, new brand identity, and committed membership and staff—if we don’t aggressively move forward now, we’ll miss valuable opportunities to effectively serve and lead the profession.”

operation with 250 full-time employees; pest-control management; a warehouse operation; and campus recycling and solid-waste programs that handled more than 14 million pounds of products in a recent fiscal year. He was responsible for more than \$350,000 in diversion savings in a fiscal year from recycling operations. During the summer, Bigger also coordinated the use of residence halls by more than 20,000 guests a year.

Bigger says that Notre Dame’s administration paved the way for him to participate in APPA at the regional level and move up the chain of command.

“I couldn’t have become APPA president without Notre Dame’s support,” says Bigger. “They understood that APPA’s resources and membership base benefits the school and facilities staff by providing tools to enhance our campus offerings and solutions to facilities challenges.”

He is now taking the experiences he gained at Notre Dame and applying them at Earlham College. Located on an 800-acre, tree-shaded campus, Earlham is 65 miles from Indianapolis, Indiana and Cincinnati, Ohio.

“We chose Alan because of his enthusiasm for facilities management and the thoroughness of his approach to facilities issues,” says Richard Smith, vice president of business and finance at Earlham, which is one of the country’s leading Quaker (Religious Society of Friends) colleges.

Smith says this is an important quality since Bigger will have a closer relationship with the nearly 1,300 students enrolled because of the smaller community and Quaker philosophy of consensus-building and interaction between faculty, staff, and students. Bigger is up to the task.

“Earlham is a unique college and the director of facilities is involved in all aspects of the facilities portfolio, which will be a new opportunity for me,” says Bigger. “Also, like Notre Dame, Earlham is a values-based religious institution that is very supportive of APPA.”

At Earlham, Bigger will oversee an operational budget of about \$3.5 million, along with 20 direct employees and 30 outsourced custodial and housekeeping staff. Bigger will also be involved with new construction, which includes the completion a cycle of residence hall renovations by 2010.

Smith adds that Earlham has completed conceptual design of a new fine arts facility and a natural science complex. He believes Bigger’s connections with APPA, its partners, and other related organizations is key as he appreciates the work and stresses facilities managers deal with.



**The University of Notre Dame's landmark Golden Dome at dusk. At Notre Dame, Bigger managed various services for a campus with more than 6 million square feet of buildings, 100 buildings, 400 apartments, and 6,300 beds.**

"Through APPA, Alan will come in contact with facilities managers who have creative solutions to the various facilities challenges facing higher education in the next decade," says Smith. "Some of those solutions will be applicable immediately to the challenges that we face at Earlham; other solutions may help us with future problems of which we are not yet aware. And, as for every facilities manager, the contacts and networking will be a tremendous resource."

### **The Road Less Traveled**

Bigger did not take the traditional path to the educational facilities management field. He initially came to the United States from his native Dublin, Ireland to go to college in the 1970s. He received a bachelor's of science degree in liberal arts from the State University of New York and master's of arts degree in communications and human relations from the University of Northern Colorado. He did post-graduate work in organizational communications at The Ohio State University. Bigger also honorably served in the U.S. Air Force for 10 years where his positions included inventory management specialist, human relations instructor, drug and alcohol counselor, and management instructor.

From 1983-87 he was an administrative technician at the South Texas Hospital, Harlingen, Texas. He also worked as a sales representative for Sears, Roebuck Company and a teaching assistant at Ohio State.

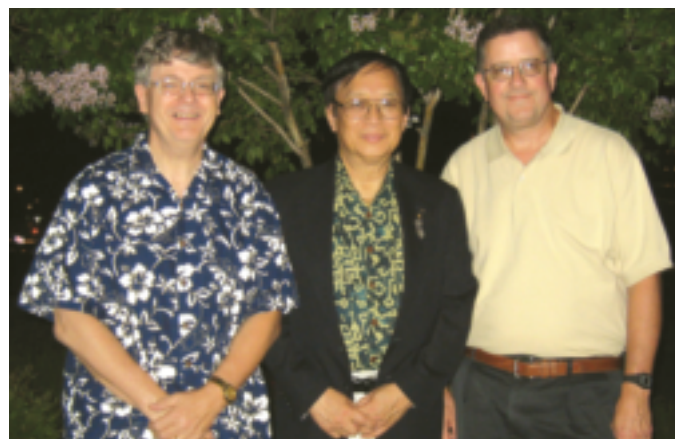
He first joined APPA when he was on staff at the University of Missouri, Columbia, from 1987-90. He began as the training and development coordinator for a large facilities management group and then became the assistant superintendent of building services.

"Over time, I found my strength was more in dealing with people and maximizing the efforts of others," says Bigger. "It was in Missouri where I gradually moved into building and facilities management. The key thing that tied it all together, though, was the idea of relationships—building relations with people. This is a philosophy I learned from Past APPA President Gary Reynolds—leadership is personal. No matter how technological we become, it's still always about people."

"I couldn't have become APPA president without Notre Dame's support," says Bigger. "They understood that APPA's resources and membership base benefits the school and facilities staff by providing tools to enhance our campus offerings and solutions to facilities challenges."

### **Sharing Knowledge, Serving APPA, and the International Frontier**

Because sharing knowledge with his colleagues is important to Bigger, he has deposited his expertise into many APPA and industry projects. He contributed to the *Hazardous Materials and Solid Waste Management and Custodial Staffing Guidelines* books and various other APPA publications. Bigger counts his involvement in producing the *Custodial Staffing Guidelines* book as an opportunity to learn and found the experience to be equally humbling when the book became a bestseller for APPA. He says the book's popularity reinforced a sense of being valued and respected by his peers.



**APPA's triple threat: *carpe diem, renovare, and kaizen*, aka, Alan Bigger, Chris Ahoy, and President-elect Bill Elvey pose for a photo during the APPA 2007 conference in July.**

A registered executive housekeeper, Bigger was also involved in compiling the Frontline Training Program for the International Executive Housekeepers Association (IEHA) and writing more than 325 articles for trade journals in the facilities and housekeeping arenas. He has shared his knowledge in more than 100 Frugal Housekeeper columns for *Executive Housekeeping Today*. An anthology of all of his columns will be published by IEHA in October.

One practice Bigger wants to expand on is engaging the international facilities management community, which was something Chris Ahoy brought to his presidency. Through APPA, Bigger has traveled throughout the United States and to Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand. He hopes to use the international relationships to bridge the knowledge gap

*Continued on page 22*





**A view of the lobby of the Athletics and Wellness Center at Earlham College.**

*Continued from page 20*

by encouraging more involvement and making APPA's key performance indicators more international in scope.

"For APPA to be the association of choice for all its members—which includes our international members and partners—it is our responsibility to research and disseminate meaningful benchmark data that transcends international boundaries, such as energy use, technology, and other aspects of today's facilities management challenges," says Bigger. "Once we get to that point, that's where the strength of these

indicators will be because it's not going to come from any other organization on this broad level."

Bigger's involvement with APPA has included serving on two APPA Facilities Management Evaluation Program (FMEP) teams, speaking at the Midwest APPA (MAPPA) regional meetings, and at international conferences; as president of MAPPA and in two terms as APPA's Vice President for Professional Affairs. He has completed APPA's Leadership Academy and the Facilities Management Institute, as well as completing the Leadership South Bend-Mishawaka training program sponsored by the St. Joseph County, Indiana, Chamber of Commerce. Bigger has also been active with the Association of College and University Building Service Supervisors (ACUBSS) and the International Executive Housekeepers' Association (IEHA) and has served two terms on the technical Advisory Committee of IEHA. He is currently conducting a joint research project with Dr. Jeff Campbell at Brigham Young University that is co-sponsored by APPA's Center for Facilities Research (CFaR) and the International Sanitary Supply Association (ISSA).

### **Addressing Industry Trends and Challenges**

Bigger believes competition for scarce resources is the biggest issue for the facilities management industry.

"One area of a university can generate the revenues for a new building, but maintenance costs may not be able to keep up with capital investments," he said. "Public institutions face the same challenges—there isn't as much glory in a donated roof as a donated building. There are only X number of dollars to go so far."

He also notes the landscape of an institution also changes, both literally and figuratively, based on the nature of students, which evolves over time and creates yet more challenges for facilities management.

"As student values change, it leads to unique challenges for the university. The ability to respond to these changes can be very expensive," says Bigger.

In his years with Notre Dame, Bigger saw these demands and their effects on facilities management efforts. The increased desire for cutting-edge services and the latest technology requires facilities managers to be innovative and flexible. During the last 10 years, service technologies moved from cable television, to fiber optics and a computer for each student, to wireless technologies with greater demand for more bandwidth and higher speed.

**Providing Solutions That Diagnose, Upgrade & Restore Thermally Degraded Underground Heat Distribution Systems**

**ConduFill®**

**Removable Insulation Covers**

**We provide reliable solutions that will:**

- Restore thermal efficiency
- Prolong the life of piping systems
- Minimize heat losses and reduce heat costs
- Eliminate manhole vapor
- Prevent damage to grounds
- Detect hidden problems within piping systems

**Thermal Science Technologies**

To learn more about our products & services, call us at  
**Phone: 1-877-CONDUFILL**  
 or visit our website at  
[www.thermalsciencetech.com](http://www.thermalsciencetech.com)

 ENERGY STAR PARTNER

“Notre Dame has been in existence since 1842,” Bigger says. “Changes in building design and services are happening more rapidly each year, and to remain competitive universities need to provide the services and deliverables that the increasingly savvy student-consumer is expecting of the education market. Timeframes for upgrades and responses are getting tighter and tighter. Systems that were designed correctly at the time they were created are now too slow. There’s a constant churn and change in the educational process, and the evolution of technologies becomes very expensive in our own time.”

Libraries, Bigger adds, are an excellent example of the changing demands on facilities.

“Students want access to information online, so they use libraries less,” he explains. “Libraries are evolving into open-source environments. Soon, we may not have or need large buildings for libraries.”

Bigger warns his colleagues to prepare for challenges created by the sustainability movement.

“We have to fund and adapt now even though change can come again in another five years,” he said. “It’s similar to the asbestos issue—in the future, we could find out that some common item today is equally dangerous.”

APPA’s part in this evolution-and-response pattern will continue to be providing information, research, educational programs, and resources that are cutting-edge, Bigger says.

“APPA needs to be the go-to resource. We are aware of the need for robust interface with the Web—if people don’t find the information they need from us, they’ll go elsewhere,” he says. “Our training programs and resources, such as the Supervisor’s Toolkit, are already one response to such needs, but we must remain vibrant—we can’t rest on the teachings of yesterday. We have to be responsive to new stakeholders’ needs and drivers. We have to listen so we become what our members want us to become. We have to benefit the member, not the organizational structure.”

Like many members and eventual leaders, Bigger is an example of the value of APPA’s personal connection. He became involved with APPA because people in the organization extended an



*This aerial view of The Heart—Earlham’s symbolic center of the 800-acre tree-shaded campus—shows five of the seven residence halls available to students. There are an additional 30 theme houses for students to live in as well.*







*Founded in 1847 by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Earham College is an independent, four-year, coeducational, residential institution of higher learning. Earham develops in its students broad and deep competencies in both traditional and emerging disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields.*

invitation and advised that an APPA membership would lead to professional growth.

“(Past President) Ron Flinn talked to me and explained some of the benefits,” he says. “APPA helped me grow. I learned about APPA’s education and leadership programs, and I became in various offices at the regional level and eventually president of the MAPPA region. APPA has helped me mature

and network, and put me in a position to give back to the organization.”

Bigger believes APPA must also consider its changing membership. He recalls a presentation by Past President Jack Colby, and says Generation X, Y, or Millennial workers may have more interest in a shorter-term commitment to their jobs. Because of that, he advises APPA to be more sensitive to an ongoing cadre of members who may need more varied programs and services.

“Generational issues are critical; we have to meet their needs or they will not participate,” Bigger says. “We’ve noticed a decline in voting, for instance, which I think also ties into values that we have to assess as well.”

“Many of our long-time members are starting to retire—about 30 percent over the next five to seven years—



*This Earham student represents the modern-day campus life—relaxed study environment with music and a computer. At Earham, Bigger will oversee an operational budget of about \$3.5 million, along with 20 direct employees and 30 outsourced custodial and housekeeping staff.*

so we have to be proactive in reaching out to identify and respond to drivers that are very different from when APPA was founded,” he adds. “For instance, certification is important to today’s members because it enables them to be more mobile, and today’s young professionals want that flexibility. It’s not just about getting members, but being committed and involved.”

In short, Bigger simply wants to spread his passion for APPA and facilities issues to the entire membership and surrounding industry community. He likes to see people advance and believes APPA involvement is the best way to do just that.

People may wonder what keeps Bigger so jovial and centered. He would tell you his focus on this family and community. He calls his wife Linda the brains of the operation. “I’m the brawn,” he quips. He has five children—three who are over 26 years old (a son in Iraq, a daughter who is a social worker, and another daughter who is an Emergency Medical Technician)—and twin 10-year-old boys, who are ever-present at APPA events.

**innovative  
creative  
ENGINEERING**



*Thermal Energy Storage Tank  
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Illinois*

**BRiC**  
PARTNERSHIP, LLC  
CONSULTING ENGINEERS

100 E. Washington Street  
Suite 220  
Belleville, Illinois 62220  
T: 618.277.5200  
F: 618.277.5227  
tbuchheit@bricpartnership.com



Alan, his wife Linda, and the twins, Stephen (l) and Phillip (r) enjoy a family moment after Bigger's rousing Maryland blue crab speech at APPA 2007.

Outside the profession, Bigger also leads in various community organizations. He has been a deacon at several churches, served on the board of leadership for South Bend/Mishawaka, and as president of the Shamrock Club. Bigger has also served on a funding-allocation panel for the St. Joseph County United Way and as coordinator of From Old2Gold, which raised more than \$43,000 for 39 charities in 2007 while diverting over 80 tons of usable items from the landfill.

## Professional Milestones

- 2004** Cleaning Maintenance & Management Person of the Year
- 2004** William D. Joyner Achievement Award  
(International Executive Housekeepers' Association)
- 2004** MAPPA President's Award
- 2003** APPA Meritorious Service Award
- 2002** President's Award (University of Notre Dame)

*"Being recognized by my peers with these awards was an honor, but it was also humbling," says Alan Bigger, APPA president. "If your peers recognize you in such a way, it's especially meaningful because they're also your greatest coaches. Such an award also illustrates one's value to an organization."*

Bigger anticipates Earlham's rural setting will be good for his family. He found it amusing that his twins approved of his new job, and move to a new town and school, but they had one mandate: No matter what Bigger did professionally, he must stay involved with APPA. ☛



## School of Grounds Management & GIE+EXPO

- **Courses Tailored to Grounds Professionals**
- **Nationally Recognized Faculty and Curriculum**
- **Networking with Fellow Professionals**
- **Budget Saving Techniques**
- **Hands-On Experience**
- **Equipment Demonstrations**
- **Over 550 Green Industry Exhibitors**
- **Behind-the-Scenes Tours of Local Grounds Programs**

PGMS will be honoring its 2007 Green Star recipients at this event.  
Enter YOUR facility NOW!

**Discounts available to APPA members.**  
Additional information available at [www.PGMS.org](http://www.PGMS.org).

**October 24-27, 2007**

**Kentucky Expo Center**

**Louisville, KY**