



# Lessons Learned from the Giant Sequoia Trees

By E. Lander Medlin

**T**he largest living thing on earth is the Sequoia tree. There are a number of things about life, longevity, and the strength of community we can learn from these magnificent creations.

As APPA continues to build on our multifaceted community, we are learning that we must synergize our efforts in promoting leadership in educational facilities for professionals seeking to build their careers, transform their institutions, and evaluate the value and

recognition of facilities in education. With nearly a century under our belt, the APPA community can look to the Sequoia trees for the secrets to thriving amidst seasons of environmental, industrial, and social change.

From a seed the size of a piece of oatmeal and growing only six inches to one foot per year, Sequoia trees can extend to well over 300 feet tall across their lengthy lifetimes; some Sequoias are as old as the pyramids. Where does this sustained growth and longevity come from? There are a number of contributing factors.

First and foremost is the nature of the Sequoias' root system. Although each individual tree's roots are shallow, extending only two to three feet deep, they are spread out and entangled with one another giving each tree the collective strength of the entire community of trees. This provides them unmatched strength, with a synergistic effect that is evident in their incredible longevity. Only three Sequoia trees have fallen in the last 100 years, and those few had somehow spawned outside the cluster of the community.

In addition, the whole unit of trees grows straight and stands tall, contributing to the integrity of purpose and strength in and for the community.

Amazingly, Sequoias not only survive but actually thrive in the midst of a fire. Indeed, their fire-resistant bark is two feet thick and needs the fire to reduce the thickness for better growth. Further, the fire's heat releases minerals in the soil for nourishment, thins out other competition, and releases its seeds for more Sequoias to grow.

The bark's chemical makeup is also resistant to pests that would otherwise harm and/or deter its steady growth. These trees grow slowly, steadily, and diligently over time, undeterred by the external crises of fire and wind which so frequently undermine the longevity of other trees—how instructive for each of us and our own professional community. So I ask:

- Where does your strength come from?
- What actions are you taking to ensure sustained growth?
- Are you focused on just surviving amidst this firestorm of change, or are you thriving?
- How do you achieve deliberate focus on that which is most important?
- How do you create or stimulate that sense of urgency so necessary to achieve organizational excellence?
- Who can see your leadership?
- Who is benefiting from your leadership?

The life and qualities of the Sequoia trees offer these and many more questions for you to ponder during the new year as you consider your organization's professional growth and development, as well as your own.

Consider the great fire of 1918, when Thomas Edison's laboratory building burned. The battery technology he was working on caught fire, with the raging blaze engulfing much of the building before the fire could be arrested. Edison walked with his son the next day amidst the charred embers and reportedly exclaimed, "Don't worry son; there is great value in disaster! All our mistakes are burned up. We can start anew!" With this attitude his focus was not on just surviving the fire but on thriving from that fire. And, indeed he did. Three weeks later Edison invented the phonograph. He said the fire cleared away all the other distractions so he could focus on this important project. Sometimes it takes a crisis to clear away everything superfluous so we can focus on what is



most important. In our organizations, one of the great challenges is creating or stimulating that sense of urgency for ourselves and our organization to achieve the same focusing effect. And, from time to time, we should consider whether our focus should be on what we should "start" doing rather than our tendency to focus on what we should "stop" doing.

Frankly, this is all so difficult to do alone. However, you can draw upon the great strength found in the community of educational facilities professionals in APPA's membership. Ultimately, it is about the relationships we have built over time and the network we have created as a result that will expand our knowledge, sustain our growth, and stimulate new perspectives.

Like the oatmeal-sized seed of the Sequoia, big things come in small packages. Such is the case when considering APPA's array of programs, products, and services. Taken individually, education from our extensive number of educational programs (like the SFO Summit, Annual Conference, Certification, Institutes, Academy, and Toolkit); knowledge from *Facilities Manager* magazine, books, and the website; and industry standards derived from our staffing guidelines, key facilities performance indicators, and evaluation criteria could seemingly be considered little things.


Nonetheless, each represents small seedlings that sprout in support of your individual professional development. However, systematically combined, they help build a solid foundation, like the intertwined root system of the Sequoia, enhancing each facilities professional's career growth and upward mobility and helping each facilities organization achieve unparalleled excellence and reach greater heights.

And, much like the community of the giant Sequoia, you too can give back to the profession and demonstrate your leadership by contributing to this enormous root system through your active engagement and participation in

APPA. Your contributions (such as serving on a committee, running for an elected office, writing an article, or being part of an organizational evaluation team) will add immense value to this professional network, thereby strengthening the profession itself and the synergy we provide throughout the educational community.

Choose now to make APPA the

association of choice for educational facilities professionals.

Ultimately, we all gain immeasurably from and build upon the collective knowledge and expertise of others to improve ourselves, our organizations, and our profession. 

Lander Medlin is APPA's executive vice president. E-mail her at [lander@appa.org](mailto:lander@appa.org).



## Rental Solutions

What would be lost if a building's HVAC or Power system were to break down for a lengthy period? Tenants, revenue, or even life! These systems are such an integral part of our everyday life that even temporary shutdowns are unacceptable. The solution - **Carrier Rental Systems**.

### Typical Applications

- Supplemental Tower Water
- Temp. HVAC Systems
- Clean Room Humidity Control
- Construction Site Humidity and Ventilation Control
- Supplemental Heating
- Backup HVAC Systems
- Water Damage Drying
- Supplemental Steam
- Comfort Cooling
- Emergency Power

For additional information and equipment specifications, check our web site [www.hvacportablesystems.com](http://www.hvacportablesystems.com) or call 800-586-9020 today and find out why we are "The Ones to Call"!

**800-586-9020**

[www.hvacportablesystems.com](http://www.hvacportablesystems.com)



**Rental Systems**

New Name. Same Great Solutions.

A Subsidiary of Carrier Corporation. Formerly doing business as HVAC Portable Systems.