



Disaster, Tragedy, the AIACV: Tying it Together.

On August 28th, our chapter had an event that brought together two themes that at first glance might seem disparate: a reception for new AIACV members, and a presentation by Kit Miyamoto on the May 12th China earthquake.

Starting the meeting, I had the pleasure of welcoming our sixty four (64!) new members for this year. Wow! Given the fragile state of our industry and economy, I couldn't be more thrilled with the unprecedented success we continue to have as a professional organization – which I am convinced is in some considerable measure due to our chapter's increasing **visibility** and **relevance** to community and to the quality of the built environment we all share.

Theme One: Being professional

Well - you probably already know it's not about money or power. In my view, one key aspect of being a professional is to use training, experience, and judgment to ***predict the future***. All in all, studies show people are in general *very poor* at predicting the future consequences of their actions. Professionals though, in their narrow area of expertise, beat the odds and are able to tie together *action*, and *result*. How will a set of imagined spaces perform functionally or in a fire? That kind of prediction is in the realm of the architect. How will a structure perform in an earthquake? A good engineer can, with a high degree of clarity, predict that. While a professional's vision of an imagined future will not be perfect – it will be MUCH better than the prognostications you'd get if you took a survey of passerby on the street.

Clearly there are *great benefits* that come from being able to *predict the future*, and thus for a strong and stable society, **we need strong professions. For professions to thrive, we need organizations like the AIA.** While people who join the AIACV likely do so out of self interest, there are powerful things that begin to happen when those self interests coalesce into a “**community of interest**”. That's when we can influence aspects of our environment that seem beyond the reach of most of us as individuals. When 850 people move together in the same direction – some surprising things can happen.

Theme Two: Disaster and Tragedy

The main part of the meeting unfolded next. Kit Miyamoto's presentation on the disaster that struck deep inside China on May 12th at 2:28 pm was really about *both* a **disaster**, and a **tragedy**.

These two words are really not interchangeable, although they often

apply to the same set of circumstances. A **disaster** is something that takes everyone by surprise – usually in a bad way. It hits like a smack on the side of the head ... and hurts badly. Disasters by their nature usually have a simple story line. A **tragedy** on the other hand is more complex and always involves *drama in the unfolding*. That's why Shakespeare could write such enduring plays about tragedies - stories about something bad that happens which can be foreseen, and how (for often complex reasons) the people in the story seem helpless to change the course of events.

The magnitude of the disaster that Kit saw was unbelievable – 70,000 people killed, 10,000 of them children lost when their schools collapsed. The images, video clips, and Kit's comments were heart wrenching.

Professionals, even working together, cannot do anything to prevent disasters. There will always be events like earthquakes, eruptions, and hurricanes that will have dire consequences for people in their path. *Professionals CAN however, help to reduce the extent of tragedies.* I already noted that one of the defining characteristics of professionals is that we are empowered by training and experience to be able to 'predict the future' – and with that comes some ability to change the impact of a disaster so it will not hurt so much. The **tragedy of the China Earthquake** became painfully clear when Kit shared his observations that *there was really NOTHING new to be learned about how buildings perform in earthquakes* from what he saw in China. All the failures he saw were predictable based on known engineering issues that have been garnered from

previous disasters and are well known.

As professional, I believe one of our important roles is to *help prevent tragedy* – whether connected to earthquakes; global warming and the destruction of species and environment that results; proliferation of urban wastelands each of which has the potential to be transformed into a livable community; or the depletion of the increasingly shallow pool of natural beauty that exists in our region and our country. Being a part of an active professional organization is, in itself, *a movement in the right direction.*

Thank you all for being a part of the AIACV – that is what makes us *THE* voice of the architectural profession in our region, and *THE* resource to our members in their service to society.

Michael F. Malinowski AIA
2008 President
American Institute of Architects Central Valley Chapter
Drop me a line with your thoughts: mfm@appliedarts.net

Postscript:

Shared here, by way of example, the Board of the AIACV took the following actions at their last meeting:

We **ESTABLISHED** the beginnings of an AIACV **scholarship** to encourage and (albeit modestly) help support the new generation of architectural practitioners in our region.

We **ADOPTED** the **2030 initiative** as the first position of our nascent and newly forming Political Action Group. The 2030 initiative has been supported by AIA National, the US Conference of Mayors, the National Association of Counties, and many other organizations. You can find out more about the 2030 initiative here:
www.architecture2030.org

We **ENDORSED** the concept of **required continuing education for Architects**. This is one area where California is far behind the curve nationally, being one of relatively small number of states where there is no requirement for continuing education to maintain licensure for practicing Architecture. Things in our world change quickly, and the importance of design in all aspects of the shaping of our communities and environment is unprecedented.

You can expect to hear more about these and more in the coming months from your fellow AIA members.