

“We are the few, advocating for the many.”



A Q&A With NAADAC's President

By DONOVAN KUEHN

Robert C. Richards, MA, NCAC II, CADC III, assumed the presidency of NAADAC at the end of the Annual Conference in Indianapolis last summer. Since

then, he has been working at a feverish pitch, with monthly Executive Committee meetings, presentations at regional conferences and outreach to the President and Congress over the tragic mass-shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Conn. The Managing Editor of *Advances in Addiction and Recovery* was able to catch up with Richards to learn about his thoughts and plans for NAADAC.

Q Donovan Kuehn: You have the opportunity to travel and speak with many addiction professionals and NAADAC members. What are the issues you're hearing about?

RICHARDS: (1) Will older existing members who don't have higher education degrees be forced out of the profession as credentialing changes? (2) Treatment operating costs continue to increase while reimbursement rates and funding continue to decline. How will the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) be "affordable" to providers? (3) With mental health services, addiction treatment services and medical services being pulled together, many are concerned that addiction services will be "swallowed up" by the others.

Q Kuehn: Do you believe that this is a good time for addiction professionals?

RICHARDS: I believe that it is both a good time and a difficult time for addiction professionals. There are still so many unanswered questions (re: concerns listed above) which generate a lot of fear for many addiction professionals.

In addition, with the "graying" of our work force there is a big gap between qualified "veteran" addiction professionals and those who are new to the profession. This could be a "bonanza" for younger professionals. In a very short time, as older professionals retire, younger professionals will have the opportunity to be on "the fast track" for advancement. Unfortunately, many addiction professionals are simply leaving the profession due to all of the changes.

Q Kuehn: How about for NAADAC?

RICHARDS: I am a "glass half full" type of person. My experience is that NAADAC has met and will continue to meet

all of the challenges head on and focus on turning them into opportunities. As we move forward, advancing the professionalism of our work force, our professionals and their credentials will gain more credibility. NAADAC has always been the leader in our profession and I believe that we will become even more so as we continue to advocate, develop new and innovative trainings and products. Our role at the "decision-making table" can only grow stronger.

Q Kuehn: What are the top challenges that the association faces this year?

RICHARDS: Making our voice louder by increasing our membership and making our presence known at the national, state and local levels. We have had great success in national issues and that will continue as the PPACA continues to develop.

Q Kuehn: Personally, what do you think will be your challenges as President?

RICHARDS: I am incredibly fortunate to be following in the footsteps of three outstanding NAADAC past presidents. Mary Woods, Pat Greer and Don Osborn have not only been wonderful friends and colleagues, but have also provided a great deal of quality mentoring to all of us on the NAADAC Executive Committee. All three have been so effective as President that my term has been made much easier.

Because we are primarily a membership organization, membership must be my primary challenge. Numbers have dropped dramatically, primarily due to the economy. We must not only regain, but also increase our numbers. The larger our membership, the louder our voice as we advocate for our profession. In turn, we will be mentoring our future leaders.

Q Kuehn: Why did you decide to pursue a role in NAADAC's leadership?

RICHARDS: Simply because I believed in the organization and that belief grew into a passion. When elected president of AADACO, (the Oregon affiliate) I discovered that, as Oregon's delegate, I had also become a NAADAC board member. I found myself welcomed by some of the most friendly, intelligent and dedicated individuals I had ever met and they wasted no time in "grooming" me for future roles (whether I liked it or not). Four years later, past NAADAC President Roger Curtis persuaded me to run for Northwest Regional Vice-president. (He didn't tell me that I would be running

unopposed.) I don't think I really grasped just how much we could influence the profession until I had completed my first, then second term. By the time I was asked to run for treasurer, and eventually President-Elect, I was already hooked. I love this organization from our newest member to our most senior veteran.

Q Kuehn: With so much going on in your life, how do you find time for NAADAC?

RICHARDS: It is a challenge, and my term as President promises to be even more challenging. I am also Executive Director of a very large treatment agency and do have a great deal of responsibility there. Luckily, my agency Board of Directors supports my role with NAADAC.

I am also dedicated to a Native American Spiritual family where I have additional responsibilities. They too strongly support my involvement with NAADAC, so much so that our drum circle attended last year's national conference, drumming for the opening ceremony and other events.

I am also extremely fortunate to have an incredibly supportive wife and family. They are already accustomed to having to schedule family events and vacations around NAADAC activities.

As for "spare time," what exactly is that anyway?

Q Kuehn: How would you describe your leadership style?

RICHARDS: I am a total "team work" person. I have been taught the team approach to leadership by several of the best. I embrace that approach for one simple reason, that being, it works. I have learned that authority based, autocratic leadership seldom works and usually results in micro managing, low morale and low productivity. Team work, however, empowers everyone in the organization, utilizes the best of their talents and results in far higher levels of morale and dedication. It is my personal belief that the newest, lowest ranking member of the team is equally as important as the most senior leaders. No one gets the job done unless everyone gets it done. Only by working together as a team can NAADAC move forward as the "Champion" of the challenges ahead of us.

Everyone must know and do their job. The board's responsibilities are actually very simple. They are responsible for oversight of the CEO, fiscal stewardship and advocacy. Everything else is the responsibility

of the CEO and her/his staff. If we all work together in our common interest we can't help but succeed.

Q Kuehn: If you could point out one thing that could turn a non-member into a member, what would it be?

RICHARDS: Motivation. We must motivate our work force to the *need* for their membership, as well as the advantages. Membership benefits are wonderful and we need to continue adding to them. However, we are in an economic and political climate where we need all addiction professionals advocating for our profession (and the clientele we serve). It is indeed one of our core principals. Unfortunately, it is estimated that only between five and 10 percent of eligible addiction professionals across the country are NAADAC members. We are the few, advocating for the many. We simply must get the message across just how important every member's voice is and how much difference each of them can make. The larger our membership, the louder our voice and the more "clout" we will have at the table.

We have to do a better job of carrying the message to our colleagues across the country about just how important it is for them to join our voice. I don't mean by using fear tactics, which seems to be so much a part of politics today, but by "cheer leading" and motivating others to join us. My experience is that when individuals learn just how important their voice is, they want to hear more about it.

Just think about what would happen if every NAADAC member convinced just one addiction professional to join NAADAC each year. Each year our numbers would double. In just four years we could have over 130,000 members. Now that is one incredibly loud voice.

Robert C. Richards has been a NAADAC board member for the past 12 years and is Executive Director of Willamette Family Inc. which operates eight facilities in Eugene, Springfield and Cottage Grove, Ore. During his 27+ years as an addiction professional he has worked as a counselor, clinical supervisor, administrator and educator. Richards has served as President of AADACO, the Oregon NAADAC affiliate, NAADAC Northwest Regional Vice President for two terms, treasurer, President-Elect and has been involved in numerous committees which include: finance, personnel, tobacco awareness, membership, capital campaign and development, bylaws, veterans and the NCC/NAADAC ad hoc committee. He can be reached at robri88@yahoo.com.

