

Take It from Ginny, SSA Membership Is Worth Every Penny

By John Dunlap – Editor, SSA Globe

There are benefits to traveling around the world—seeing how other cultures exist, enjoying the scenery, arts, music and food. But another advantage to being a globetrotter is comparing life in other countries to that of the good, old USA. Ginny Stengel, who has worked with the Self Storage Association’s national office in Northern Virginia for 13 years, loves to travel. And she has seen how the USA’s awareness of self storage has grown and become a part of the American fabric, just as it is starting to take hold in other countries.

More importantly, in her role as vice president of member relations, she has seen how the SSA has taken a major role in the promotion of the industry, both in the United States and internationally. And she is especially aware of the benefits that membership in the SSA offers.

“I like to think of the SSA and its members as a team,” Stengel says. “And a team is always more effective than if we go it alone. We [the SSA] wouldn’t be here without the support of our members and I know that our members are stronger and more successful than if the SSA wasn’t doing its job. The SSA Value Proposition far outweighs the dues investment our members make.”

Stengel spends a good deal of her time speaking with members, as well as recruiting them. She also oversees SSA’s work with the state associations. In the course of her job, she hears the plaudits (and concerns) of members and works to make sure that everyone in the industry realizes the benefits of membership in the SSA. And what is she hearing from members?

“SSA’s conferences and trade shows always get high marks,” she says. “Not only for the information attendees take away from the educational sessions, but also for the networking opportunities they provide. You can’t get better advice from anyone like an industry peer who’s willing to share what they know—that is invaluable.”

“I also feel that people in the industry really need operations information that they can trust,” Stengel adds. “How to effectively and efficiently run a successful facility is the first thing on their minds. Our publication *Self Storage Operations Manual and Training Guide* written by Carol Krendl is really the operations bible for the industry. We’re

always getting requests for marketing help as well, so we’ve just published *Marketing Your Self Storage Facility*, available electronically, that addresses this particular area for our members.”

“I also hear from members that they really appreciate the *Self Storage Legal Review*. It’s the latest information on legislation, regulations and judicial decisions affecting the industry. Even if something has happened in another state or county, self storage operators know it could have an impact on them eventually. It’s a great way to stay informed and keep on top of the decisions they need to know about.”

Making Her Way to the SSA

Stengel grew up in Northern Virginia and attended Radford University, with a major in Marketing. She has been at various associations over the years, but counts her 13 years with the SSA as among the most special. She had been working at the National Association for Federal Credit Unions as associate director of membership when she learned about the opportunity at the SSA when it moved from Cincinnati to the Washington, DC area.

“The job and organization appealed to me because it was a fairly small staff, and the idea of learning a bit about each area of the organization was great,” Stengel says. “The industry and the real estate sector as a whole really interested me.”

In her years with the SSA she has seen some amazing changes in the industry, not the least of which is making good use of modern technology.

“Advancement in technology is far and away the most important change in the industry over the time I’ve been at the SSA,” she says. “When I first started, there were very few ads or listings of self storage facilities on the web, and certainly no one was able to rent storage spaces on the web. Today, it’s almost a complete reversal—everyone has an ad or listing on the web. The SSA has done a great job of educating its members on how to keep up with the latest trends in technology through articles in the *SSA Globe* and sessions at our conferences, challenging as that may be!”

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“The SSA has really embraced technology as a means to deliver our member benefits. We’ve done this by making our *Managers Certification Program* an online offering, as well as our Online University, monthly webcasts, downloads of conference sessions available on the SSA website, and the online *SSA Globe*.”

And what programs does she feel particularly strong about?

“The SSA Foundation Scholarship program has really been a win-win for SSA and its members,” Stengel adds. “The Foundation Board of Governors worked incredibly hard on this program, and it’s great to see it really take off. Also, the Self Storage Legal Network is the best deal in town! Where else can you get legal information from two of the top legal experts in the self storage industry (Carlos Kaslow and Scott Zucker) for a nominal subscription fee? It’s really a great way for SSA members to make sure they’re handling legal situations properly.”

And Stengel, who has had a devotion to world travel, is also happy to hand out suggestions as to her favorite places to visit. Among her travels has been fishing for piranhas on the Amazon, so she has a wide range of global experiences. And which did she enjoy most?



“I’m sure you know that this is my very favorite question!” Stengel concludes enthusiastically. “I’d go back to almost everywhere I’ve been, with very few exceptions. To me, that’s the sign of a great trip. My all-time favorite places are Tanzania, Australia, Greece, Brazil and Spain, all for completely different reasons. And travel in the U.S. is always a great adventure—there is just so much to see here. I’ve got one more continent left to set foot on (Antarctica) and over 100 countries to get to, so it’s hard to figure out where to go next. New Zealand perhaps?”

Wherever she goes, Stengel brings the same sort of enthusiasm for new sights and sounds as she does to promoting membership in the SSA. Now, about those piranhas... ❖