



A Greater Influence

— Contributed by Dwight E. Neuenschwander, former Zone Councilor, past SPS/Sigma Pi Sigma Director, and SPS Publications Editor

After 19 years, that included some critical transitions for which she provided stability and continuity, SPS Supervisor Sonja Lopez (pictured on the left; at right is Sacha Purnell) has decided to pursue other opportunities. We want you to know about her, because she has touched your life.

There was a time when Sonja's departure would have risked the sinking of both SPS and Sigma Pi Sigma, simply because nobody else both knew what to do and could spend full-time doing it. In particular, when the AIP Education Division moved from New York City to Washington, DC, in the late 1980s, nobody in DC, other than SPS Historian Dr. Peggy Dixon, knew how the society worked and what it was expected to do. Between Peggy's memory, and Sonja's can-do spirit that carried everything forward, the Society's programs, policies, and institutional memory were preserved and refurbished.

Those days of imminent crisis are over. That Sonja can now turn her attention to another worthwhile endeavor that will touch another community of lives, and SPS/Sigma Pi Sigma will continue to thrive in her absence, is a tribute to Sonja's 19 years on the flight deck of our Society.

At the end of June the SPS Executive Committee received this message from SPS Director Dr. Gary White that marked the end of an era in the SPS National Office:

Hi, all,

It is with great sadness that I relay to you that I received word recently from Sonja that she has decided that she needs to devote her full attention to her newest project, The Shire School. I'm sure that most of you have a story to tell about how Sonja has played a critical role in some SPS endeavor (or personal crisis) over the past 20 odd years, but from my perspective she has been the glue that has kept this engine together, and the fuel that has kept it running, in lean times and otherwise. She will be sorely missed.

You may know that Sonja has long been involved in the effort to "Turn Autism Around", especially regarding the connection between autism and vaccine additives; she initiated The Shire School for children that are considered "on the spectrum" a few months ago, and they had a great start locating a building, finding appropriate teachers and reaching an important fund-raising goal but the first class enters soon, and she let me know that she needs to be engaged in the effort full-time starting the week after next.

She will be missed...

Gary White, Director, Society of Physics Students & Sigma Pi Sigma

Here are a couple of responses sent to Dr. White and copies to other Executive Committee members:

[Colleagues:]

Is there any chance that Sonja would attend the [2008 Sigma Pi Sigma] Congress [at Fermilab this coming November], and that we could honor her there? This is a period of milestones. With the varied transitions of Peggy [Dixon, former SPS Historian], Don Kirwan [SPS Director in the early 1990s], and Sonja, we lose all our contacts to the first AIP Education Office in DC. For so long, the historical memory of what needed to be done on an annual basis was only in the heads of Peggy and as she learned, Sonja. For a decade, the organization would

have convulsed at the departure of Sonja. Now she will be sorely missed, but she and others have done a wonderful job of institutionalizing her memory, and now we can survive. Her spirit and good judgement, we can never replace.

With joy for Sonja and all the lives of children she will touch, and sadness for us,

Thomas Olsen

SPS Historian, former Zone Councilor, Past President of Sigma Pi Sigma

[Colleagues:]

While I am sad to hear that Sonja is leaving SPS/AIP, it is characteristic of her that she would do so in order to do something good for somebody else. There, too, she will have so much to offer that would not happen otherwise...

As a zone councilor and chapter advisor in the early 1990's, I found that if a student or chapter needed something, or whenever I had a question, Sonja would take care of it, promptly, effectively, and with good cheer. When I was asked to come to AIP in late 1994, my uncertainties about managing SPS and Sigma Pi Sigma were alleviated by the knowledge that Sonja was in the office. With Sonja there I knew that, no matter what I did, the ship would stay on an even keel. During those years she was our sounding board and consultant. Her mind was repeatedly a fountain of splendid, sensible ideas. She always worked in the interests of the students and the society. She has always been a person of wisdom, a can-do spirit, and of 24-karat integrity, always. Time has shown putting confidence in Sonja to always be a sensible decision.

Gary [White] is quite right in making analogies between Sonja and the engine that runs the ship, the glue that holds it together, the fuel that keeps things going. It is a tribute to Sonja that SPS and Sigma Pi Sigma are running smoothly now, as she trained the staff and was the institutional memory during a crucial time...I remember, I was there.

Sonja has had an influence on so many SPS members, most of whom have never met her personally...

SPS/AIP has been enriched and made better by Sonja's 19 years of exemplary service. The Shire School for children will be likewise be blessed with her presence indeed.

Best wishes to Sonja and to the new beneficiaries of her talents and spirit.

Dwight E. Neuenschwander

former Zone Councilor, past SPS/Sigma Pi Sigma Director, and SPS Publications editor

A follow-up from Dr. Gary White:

Hi, all,

We had an emotional (and positive) parting event for Sonja last week, and she is now working full-time on The Shire School...she seemed very grateful to AIP for 19 great years, and a little relieved to be able to focus her energies on the new project and not have to think about any more hour-long commutes, but promised to stay in touch, for example—She has been invited to attend the Congress in November, and has indicated that she will be there, so I am sure that she will look forward to seeing you there.

We thank Sonja Lopez, with gratitude, for her 19 years of exemplary service to the students, faculty, and friends of the Society of Physics Students and Sigma Pi Sigma. Most of all we thank her for her friendship, and wish her, her family, and her new work well.

