Dear EGUG Members,

Where has the time gone? I began this letter prior to the Christmas holidays and never did finish. It is now March and despite having a serious case of Spring Fever I am finally finishing this letter! I hope it finds all of you fired up and ready to make a difference in the EGUG Community. If not, maybe I can inspire you…

During the closing session of the 2012 Esri Electric & Gas GIS Conference, I offered up the observation that the GIS community was in the midst of a "Once in a lifetime opportunity." The convergence of data, software, hardware, and infrastructure has positioned us at the on the top of a technology wave with no end in sight. As you work on your to do list for 2013, I would like you to think about a question that has been on my mind since the conference. Is the EGUG community still relevant to Esri?

The first draft of this letter contained two painfully long paragraphs detailing how the founding fathers of EGUG were the driving force behind the development of ArcGIS on the Windows platform, the move from ArcStorm to SDE, and the long transactions and the geometric network, to name just a few contributions. The story finally ended with EGUG becoming just one of the many Esri User Groups. This wasn't exactly the inspiration I had in mind when I started.

The GIS world has changed dramatically in the last twenty years, and along with it, so have EGUG and Esri. The contributions EGUG made in the early days of GIS were simply more visible. This was largely due to the fact that the technology itself was so new that not many people had the resources (human or financial) to successfully start and finish a large GIS implementation. If we fast forward to 2012, we find 15,000+ people attended the annual Esri User Conference. In addition, Jack Dangermond tells us that over 780,000 maps have been shared on ArcGIS Online with between 90 and 100 million maps being made all over the world each day. Those numbers are mind boggling. When you put this information into perspective, the EGUG community has gone from being a big fish in a small pond to just one of many fish in the ocean. This doesn't mean EGUG isn't relevant to Esri anymore, it merely means our role has changed and must continue to develop as the technology landscape around us alters.

How do we make meaningful changes when we are a diverse community made up of individuals each focused on making GIS relevant within their own company? Perhaps a starting point is not to look backwards at what we did over 20 years ago, but to start looking into the future, with our entire community deliberately taking aim at what impact we can have with the entire suite of Esri products and then share what we have accomplished. The EGUG Community must develop this vision and share it in such a compelling fashion that others cannot help but join.

As much fun as it is to build new core editing applications every three to five years, this isn't where the majority of GIS growth is occurring. Even if you have 500+ people editing data on a daily basis, that number is dwarfed by the number of people that have (or want to have) viewing and analytical access to the vast amount of spatially enabled data generated and maintained by a utility. Esri's allocation of research and development dollars in recent years has made ArcGIS Online and runtime ArcGIS the heavy favorites for the future of GIS over the next five years. This focus is intended to capitalize on the desire to put GIS into as many hands as possible with minimal development cost and maximum ease of use. The more people that use GIS, the more organizational change can be influenced by spatial data decision making.

So, what are we waiting for? The last 10 years have seen several of the following items hold us back: Maybe you are still stuck in ArcGIS 9.x. Maybe you have successfully integrated so many different systems with GIS that you can't afford the time or cost to upgrade all the interfaces. Maybe software and database design decisions made five years ago are still haunting you. Maybe you have too many projects and not enough resources. Maybe you can't keep your resources trained on the latest development platforms before they switch again. Maybe your internal security policies make it next to impossible to venture out into the cloud. These and many other things have made it difficult for our community as a whole to be early adopters of new Esri technologies. But it doesn't have to be that way, does it?

The EGUG Community is here to help! Or at least we should be. This community is one of the most underutilized resources to which we all have access. With our heads down and shoulders to the grindstone there often isn't time (or money) to attend all the conferences, webinars, and seminars that are offered. Despite all the new projects being started throughout the EGUG community, it is often a challenge to get a full slate of user presentations to fill the tracks at the annual Esri Electric and Gas GIS Conference. That is a shame. How much value is never realized because we simply aren't aware that someone else has already solved the very problem we are struggling with today? How much money has been wasted finding out the hard way how *not* to do something? At each conference we try to find new ways to connect people and build personal networks that continue long after the last session ends. Only through active participation and sharing can we realize the potential within the EGUG community. Each of you reading this letter has something of value that another person might find educational or beneficial.

The EGUG 2013 President's Challenge: Step up and contribute to the EGUG community in at least one of the following ways. Share something new with another member of EGUG. Join and be active in the EGUG LinkedIn Group. Attend conferences. Make a concerted effort to network with fellow utilities. Volunteer to host a webinar or present at a conference. Participate in a Beta program and then share your results. If you do even one of these things, you will have furthered the impact of the EGUG community on future Esri software development.

So to answer my initial question: Is the EGUG community still relevant to Esri? I would say yes. We are collectively doing more impressive and challenging things than ever before. All we need to do now is share those accomplishments and findings with the rest of the GIS world!

Allow me to leave you with some less weighty thoughts:

The conclusion of the 2012 conference marked the beginning of my one year term as EGUG President. With so much to do and so little time in which to accomplish it, I would be remiss if I didn't extend some well deserved (and belated) kudos to the 2012 team.

I would like to thank Theo Laughner, Tennessee Valley Authority, for his enthusiasm and leadership. Theo viewed his term as President as an opportunity to connect with the community and generate discussion. I would say he was successful. Thanks Theo!

I would also like to thank John Ziakas and Questar Energy for being such gracious hosts of the 2012 conference. I heard nothing but praise for the job John and his team did from start to finish. Thanks John!

Lastly, I offer a big "thank you" to Bill Meehan, Patrick Dolan, Kevin Kirk, Laurence Litrico, Joe Bleistein, and the entire Esri team for all their hard work and dedication throughout the year!

Congratulations are in order for Bill Wickersheim on being elected EGUG Vice President. Bill follows in the memorable footsteps of former EGUG President Larry Wilke, who also hailed from Burbank Water and Power. Welcome aboard Bill.

Finally, I would like to welcome James Trevino, CPS Energy as 2013 Esri Electric and Gas GIS Conference Chair and thank CPS Energy for volunteering to host the conference in beautiful San Antonio October 20–23, 2013. The 2013 conference is already shaping up to be the best one yet as we look to build upon the successes of Salt Lake City! It is never too early to make your plans to attend. Mark the dates on your calendar now.

Housekeeping:
If you are not yet a member of EGUG, here's the link to the membership form:
http://www.esri.com/industries/apps/electric_gas/usergroup/index.cfm?fa=Form2

If you are not familiar with what this community does I would encourage you read the EGUG charter:
http://www.esri.com/~/media/Files/Pdfs/industries/electric/pdfs/egug_charter_new.pdf

One of the key components of this community is staying connected. We currently have 680 members of our EGUG LinkedIn Group. If you are not yet a member yet, here is the link:
http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=3572336&trk=hb_side_g
I look forward to seeing everyone in San Diego in July and San Antonio in October.

Wayne Meyer
SCANA Corporation
EGUG President, 2013