

Peter Corona became an AASA member in 1959 and has attended every annual conference since. A superintendent in various California districts from 1960 to 2006, he has spoken at 39 AASA conferences and represented U.S. education leaders on AASA-sponsored trips to the former Soviet Union and China.

Now in his late 80s, Corona's most recent conference in San Diego was extra special because he grew up less than two miles from the convention center in Little Italy. He has written a book on the area called *Little Italy: The Way It Was*.

Prior to the conference, Corona spoke to freelance writer Glenn Cook about his involvement with the organization as part of AASA's 150th anniversary coverage.

Tell me about your work in education. You've been described, in the pages of *School Administrator* no less, as "The Energizer Bunny has nothing on this man."

"I've always been active, and I've always looked for new ways to do things. I coached baseball at UC-Berkeley and played there, but when I got out, I had to get a full-time job, so I decided to become a teacher. I taught at all grade levels and coached. I introduced integrated football to Northern California and we had co-ed basketball 19 years before Title IX. I was one of the first people to introduce a grades 6-8 middle school program in the late 1950s.

"When I became a superintendent, it didn't matter where I worked. I lived in Walnut Creek, which is a suburban area outside San Francisco, and I was a superintendent in five districts over 34 years. The last 12 years of my career I took on interim roles, and I always left them with more money than when I went into the district.

"What you've got to understand, no matter whether I'm an active educator or a retired educator, education is my life."

What has AASA meant to you personally and professionally?

"It's the greatest organization I've ever belonged to. It's just amazing. My wife and I made a commitment in our early years of education that we would designate 10 percent of our money toward inservice and acquiring knowledge. Just like you tithe in church, we chose to tithe in education.

"When I go to the convention, I go to the meetings, but the informal meetings are every bit as important. I'm always talking to people. I talk to them in the hallways. I talk to them in the restrooms. I look at it as a 24-hour job the entire time I'm there.

"We get too provincial as superintendents. I want to know what is going on in Texas, Massachusetts, South Carolina. What I've found is that the people who attend these conferences are good people. All you have to do is take the initial step and say hi.

“What is interesting to me is that I have a constant desire to learn, a desire to expand. We are touching lives in education through the different programs we are dealing with. And we should always approach it that way, as if we have a thirst that won’t go away. The people we meet, the knowledge we acquire — it never ends.”

In 1998, the year you turned 70, you found race walking at an AASA conference. How has that enhanced your life?

“I was going to give a talk, ironically in San Diego, and was walking a mile and a half to go to the convention center when I saw a bunch of people over by Seaport Village. I started asking around and was told they were having a running/walking event.

“Now I could not run, per se, any more, but I was interested in the walking, and being a former athlete, I really liked the competitive nature of it. It has greatly enhanced my golden years and kept me in good physical shape. I recently won the nationals in Hawaii and had the fastest time for an 85-year-old in the world. And I owe it all to seeing what happened at AASA.”

Over the years, AASA’s membership has evolved as other education organizations have been formed to serve administrators. Do you believe the organization still has value for its members and others who are interested in K-12 education?

“Oh, yes. It definitely does. When I first attended an AASA conference, we had more than 30,000 people there. Now, obviously, there are less because of consolidation and some other things that have happened, but it’s still an invaluable meeting place and opportunity.

“Has AASA changed? Yes. Do I think we have to go with the changes? Yes. Should we remember the good old days? Yes. But most important, I think we have to make some good new days on our own.

“Really, if you think about it, AASA brings people together in a way that greatly enhances this profession, this calling we all have. If you go into it realizing that everyone in the room can do something better than someone else, and you take the time to find out what that strength is, then you can learn about that strength and find some way to apply it in your life. I know I certainly have.”