

## Virginia B. Robinson

AGA D.C. Chapter President 1984-85

AGA National President 1989-90



- **Can you tell me about how you got started in your government career?** A federal recruiter came to Howard University as I was graduating on a Friday to interview me for an accounting position. He informed me that there was a shortage of accountants and told me that I'd receive a special pay rate if I contracted to work for the government. The following Monday, I started working as a cost accountant at the Bureau of the Census.
- **How has the financial management profession changed since you first joined the government?** The profession has expanded to encompass new developments in information technology and related disciplines that have become integral parts of financial management. Many laws have been passed to change the nature of the work and the composition of the workforce. Private sector concepts and methodologies have been incorporated in public sector financial management as it continues to evolve with the myriad of laws, rules and regulations required to be implemented in government.
- **Would you describe your first involvement with the AGA?** My initial involvement with AGA came early in my career. Continuing professional education (CPE) was not encouraged in my office. I learned about AGA from a friend, attended meetings and benefitted so much from the Association that I decided it was worthwhile to continue to take annual leave to attend meetings, as required by my office.
- **What were some of the biggest changes that happened at the AGA during your career?** One of the biggest changes that occurred was the change from the Federal Government Accountants Association to the Association of Government Accountants. Another significant change was the emphasis on accountability, not just accounting. There was recognition that public sector financial management also encompassed budgeting, financial reporting and analysis, auditing and other related disciplines. Recruiting and growth in our Washington Chapter grew exponentially. DC had membership of over 2,000 and the total AGA membership was approximately 18,200 in 1990, when I was National President. Attendance at lunch time DC chapter meetings at the George Washington University was around 250. During those days, our chapter placed great emphasis on student chapters and having faculty involvement.
- **Who at AGA inspired you the most over the years? How did this person influence you?** I will say Professor Raymond Einhorn. I loved his teachings and he was such an encouragement and inspiration to me. In my early years, I was shy and somewhat reluctant to speak up. He said to me: "I wish you would speak up more, but on the other hand, when you do speak, you really have something worth adding to the mix; so, stay as you are and you'll do well." I was also inspired by the outstanding leadership exhibited by past National

Presidents Andy Barr and Art Schoenhaut. They were influential, brought prestige to AGA and were willing to share their expertise and connections with those of us who were just getting started. I was also influenced by June Brown. She was a real leader and gladly lent a helping hand and words of wisdom.

- **Can you describe the significant financial management milestones you achieved at the federal agencies you worked at?** Significant financial milestones achieved in federal agencies where I worked included advancing up the career ladder in progressively responsible positions within a short timeframe. My career commenced directly out of college and continued while I was going to school in the evenings and preparing for professional certifications and job advancements. As a junior cost accountant at the Bureau of the Census, I added to the professional practices of allocating costs to jobs and preparing reports on various appropriations for the decennial census. I moved from that position to Supervisory Cost Accountant at the Naval Research Laboratory (NRL), where I provided major support to the Chief, General Accounting to develop reports for our reimbursable activities. While still at NRL, I became an internal auditor conducting audits of the NRL Industrial fund and performing inventories of the agency's high value metals in the Reactor and the Cyclotron. At the Military Sealift Command, I produced consolidated reports for all of our sealift operations around the world and conducted cost and pricing analyses in support of contracts for shipping operations and construction awarded to companies such as Lockheed Martin and Bethlehem Steel. At the Department of Commerce, I worked on the development and modification of accounting systems. While at the Department of Energy, I served as Chief of Accounting Systems for the Department and, at the Government Accountability Office (GAO), I led the review and approval of Executive Branch accounting systems and the development of audit standards for GAO evaluators and the Inspector General. Last, in my position as Executive Director of the Joint Financial Management Improvement Program, I coordinated the financial management work of the GAO, U.S. Treasury, the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Personnel Management, resulting in guidance for federal agencies to follow in complying with applicable laws and regulations. My achievements culminated in becoming a career Senior Executive before age 40. I attribute accomplishing that milestone, in part, to my AGA endeavors.
- **You served as the D.C. Chapter President and AGA National President. What can you tell me about the priorities that you addressed during these periods? What are your proudest accomplishments?** As D.C. Chapter President, my Board and I focused on expanding our education and training offerings to members and potential members. We had numerous successful education and training events. Our Chapter won the National Newsletter award that year, plus we made increased outreach efforts to local universities to focus on student chapters, contacted faculty and invited them to meetings and seminars. Our programs were excellent. With the help of a fellow Chapter President, Tom Mundell, we were able to get Professor Abraham Briloff to speak at a Chapter meeting. He was so engaging. I was able to get Doctor Briloff to speak at the Professional Development Conference (PDC) that year and the audience exclaimed his virtues. It was the first time I had ever seen a speaker get a standing ovation for a keynote speech. It was one of my proudest moments in AGA and, indeed, in my career. We learned so much from him. Before and after I became National President, I used what I learned from him: get your technical knowledge, do your research,

and place the proper emphasis on ethics. With the help of Dick Willett and other AGA colleagues, I always made sure we had our share of ethics training at professional events.

Other proud AGA moments came when I was D.C. Chapter President. Many chapter members and I worked in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program. It was so rewarding to help someone prepare their tax return. During my term, a group of us also volunteered as teachers and counselors in the Small Business Training Program sponsored by the Department of Commerce to assist small business men and women develop budgets and handle the financial aspects of their businesses.

During my tenure as National President, we faced a notable challenge in the financial arena. We still had a substantial unpaid hotel bill from the previous year's PDC. With the help of dedicated and helpful AGA colleagues, and an innovative Finance and Budget Committee, that challenge was put behind us. Although a major dues increase was necessary as a result, the AGA members took it in stride. As President, I felt a need to really connect with the local chapters and I visited with the leaders and members from 57 AGA chapters. Also, under my leadership, the annual National Leadership Training (NLT) event was established. Members were so supportive. The NLT was highly successful and that event has continued ever since.

Actually, that financial challenge paled in comparison to my next one. The hotel in Atlantic City cancelled our PDC reservation in March (just a few months before this training event was to take place). Thankfully, our outstanding Nashville Chapter leaders stepped up to the plate. It was like nothing I had seen before in my career. They said "if you trust us, we promise you won't be disappointed." With their tremendous work, we developed an outstanding technical program. For example, for the international segment, we had world-class speakers that included the former President of Brazil, the Deputy Auditor General of China, and Deputy Director of the Swedish National Audit Bureau. All were excellent.

In those days, we had the major awards events in the evening with the top officials in the area co-presenting awards. The highest-ranking financial management official in the state was Bill Snodgrass, who co-presented the awards with me. I was so proud when the Chapter members walked across the stage to get their awards. The Nashville Chapter leaders had already given me the keys to the City, the Governor had proclaimed it National Accountants Day and a CPA chapter member of the Grand Ole Opry had our AGA national leaders presented live on stage. There is no way I can describe how I felt, and still feel, about our Nashville Chapter.

My other proudest moments have been when my former students come up to say "I did it, I passed the CGFM exam." I greatly enjoyed teaching the AGA's CGFM classes for about 15 years and serving on the first CGFM Board.

- **Would you describe some of the challenges you faced during your terms as D.C. Chapter President and/or as the AGA National President?** Challenges are described in the preceding question, along with our efforts to overcome those challenges.
- **Can you describe an AGA project or effort that was the most fun for you to work on? What made it memorable?** I enjoyed working on the first contested election in AGA. I

won't describe it as fun, but it was good to work on it to help ensure that we had good criteria for the campaign and the ensuing election. It was the first time that a woman had applied to be AGA National President and there have been several women presidents in AGA since.

- **What advice would you offer to early-career AGA members?** I like to suggest to early career members to focus on getting CPE in their specialty area because technical competency helps to build confidence and will enable you to do your job better and be more competitive. Get certifications under your belt. Take advantage of networking with AGA folks who can be of help to you. Also, be active in committees and make presentations to enhance communication skills. Strive for higher positions in professional organizations such as AGA at the earliest opportunity.
- **What is your favorite AGA event to attend? Why?** My favorite AGA event to attend is the annual Professional Development Training. Another favorite is the chapter's annual awards recognition event. It's so rewarding to be able to extend congratulations to the folks who make the extra effort for the benefit of all of us. Great award-winning efforts enhance our profession too.
- **What is your favorite memory of a particular AGA event?** One of my favorite memories is the PDC at the National Aquarium in Monterrey, California. Quite a few members, including myself, had a bit of a challenge eating our lunch at the beautiful aquarium. Our entrée was fish and we were seated where we could see all of the beautiful fish floating around us.
- **What are your expectations for the future of government financial management? What do you think will remain the same in the next 10 or 20 years? What will be different?** I expect that government financial management will continue to evolve to levels of improvement in the future by the efforts of public and private sector employees.
- **Is there anything else that you would like to share your fellow AGA members?** Continue to draw upon the resources of AGA for the betterment of the organization and yourself. Actively participate in your professional association to help it grow and improve. Don't hesitate to make suggestions for improvement and be sure to help implement them.





Double Chapter Presidents - DC Chapter and National – at the March 2017 Luncheon:  
Doug Glenn, Virginia Robinson, Evelyn Brown, Lisa Casias, and Samuel T. Mok