

PROFESSIONAL OVERVIEW AND OPINION

I am educated and experienced in nonprofit program research and development, funding and management, both in administrative staff positions and as a board member and officer. My nonprofit education and professional experience span 25 plus years and include working with The Smithsonian Institution, and other prestigious nonprofit agencies. I was an active member of NAHA from 1994 until the winter of 1999. I have direct volunteer experience in key committees of the organization. I ran for the office of Treasurer on the slate of officers stepping forward in 1998 with a primary goal to provide for an audit of financial and program activity that would have addressed issues that, unresolved then, have now led to the current untenable controversy. My personal experiences related to the specifics of the petition are outlined in an affidavit; however, I believe I can also address the situation with the objectivity of my nonprofit education and experience in this overview and opinion.

It is my professional opinion that ineffective and deadlocked management is constricting the organization and is reflected in a declining active membership and atrophy of key functions necessary for continuity, stability and creative growth. This is also now reflected in a polarized aromatherapy community, with a significant constituency refusing to agree with the autocratic actions of the current and recent past NAHA management for the past several years. It is my professional opinion that management is failing to engage and retain volunteer energies to work on behalf of the nonprofit to facilitate healthy grassroots input for organizational direction and growth. Ineffective management has eroded continuity, removing key efforts towards a primary mandate of public education under the 501(c) 3 IRS designation and a needed establishment of ongoing research. This situation has hindered progress and growth into the future and now threatens the evolution of aromatherapy as a credible and verified endeavor in the United States, both because of the unprofessional actions of those in charge and their failure to recognize and deal with issues that needed to be addressed fairly and within the law.

There are many issues facing aromatherapy and the adjunct pure essential oil trade, including issues of culture, conservation, regulation, as well as safe and effective practice. What was once considered a “craft” industry is fast becoming a scrutinized industry by regulatory agencies and corporations interested in profits. Complex multiple issues are in need of being addressed aggressively on a peer-review level to provide the atmosphere in which those engaged in aromatherapy can provide and obtain expertise. The need to successfully interact with and influence myriad regulatory agencies, both in the trades and practice, as well as to pioneer interaction with the public and other professionals in related fields is a necessary organizational endeavor. I believe that the standards of conduct and stewardship of the current and recent past NAHA management have been unprofessional and lacking the necessary experience and judgment, and have failed to address internal problems in a timely manner, and have ignored the pressing greater issues that will affect members.

A condition of deadlocked management is reflected in the inability to retain key volunteer officers and committees. Conscious decisions by inexperienced management to remove key positions are also evident. Established committees have had little or no activity and new committees seem to have been created but do not function. There has been no active Treasurer for years, even though there was one listed on the website. Fiscal responsibility is a primary and necessary function for all nonprofit endeavors, and required by law within the statutes of the State of Colorado. This condition has removed the necessary checks and balances and has resulted in gross financial mismanagement that now requires an extensive fiscal audit. In spite of the fact that new bylaws have been adopted, there was not a broad-based committee effort to consider and perfect bylaws revisions, nor a preliminary call for member input prior to a vote for adoption. Nor does it appear that the new bylaws have been filed with the IRS and or State of Colorado.

Examples of failed committee impetus:

A recent poll of all members identified as active within the Council of Aromatherapy Schools and Educators CASE (created to replace the NAHA Education Committee) has resulted in absolutely no responses that would support that it is an active, viable entity, serving the function as outlined in the bylaws. It appears as if this committee is nothing more than a way to advertise aromatherapy schools. The three respondents (of the 32 committee members listed) to this query have indicated that they have had no active participation or contribution, and their only involvement is to contribute their \$250 a year to be listed as an “approved school.” Since much research is needed to validate aromatherapy as a Complimentary Alternative Medicine (CAM) or alternative medical practice, research towards this end should be considered a primary and ongoing function of the organization. All other international aromatherapy organizations recognize the need for continuous research and periodic revision of standards for safe and effective aromatherapy practice. There is evidence that a failure to participate in and keep abreast of new research can result in an ingrown and non-evolutionary organization that only exists to bring credibility to educators who are teaching erroneous information and thereby preventing needed research and development. NAHA management has failed to provide ongoing leadership in this area, yet it presents (in the bylaws) to unsuspecting members that quite the opposite is true and that it has actively engaged educational leaders in the field to this end. Another imperative for NAHA would be to accurately portray the cultural as well as the scientific underpinnings to support aromatherapy and to actively engage in the dialog surrounding the myriad ethical issues with regard to fast-developing world policies involving and affecting ‘natural’ products, a key component of aromatherapy.

Another NAHA committee created to establish product standards (even though many members objected to its establishment and saw the pitfalls associated thereof), called True Aromatherapy Product (TAP) spent considerable organizational dollars in legal fees (\$10,000 or more according to some reports), now unfortunate expenditures because the trademark applied for has lapsed into abandonment. It was a flawed program that should have not been adopted without further consideration, and presented ethical conflict with the IRS mandate. However, no announcement regarding the lapsed trademark has been

provided to members. There is no current TAP committee established in the bylaws or other NAHA documents, however, schools and educators are allowed to use the TAP “trademark” once intended for manufactured products. There appears to be no documentation regarding the organization’s action in this regard and reflects the inability of the current management to state and carry out effective program goals, and reflects poorly with regard to participating schools and educators motives.

These failed programs show the inability of management to steward members’ monetary investment and intelligently lead the organization for credibility and future validation for aromatherapy. By now (14 years), the organization could be well established to apply for and receive grants and specific public donations for necessary research and development. Based on poor leadership and lack of organizational development and documentation, I do not believe efforts in this direction would be well received by granting agencies at this time.

There has been a decline in established operational standards and deterioration of policies and procedures that violate the statutes in the state in which NAHA is incorporated, as well as IRS statutes that apply. It is highly doubtful that major actions taken on behalf of the organization in the past several years are documented by board or member consensus, leaving little or no documentation for subsequent effectiveness and stable operations by future board members and volunteers. Recently removed or resigned board members reveal that they have found no records of numerous actions taken and official Minutes of the board and/or committees are sporadic or nonexistent. These recent board members have been told that no records exist in the corporate office. The recent request for the only remaining and duly-elected board member’s resignation fails to address the importance of continuity (usually accomplished with the overlap of board terms) and appears to be another effort to squelch an inquiry into corporate affairs by this elected officer, while blatantly ignoring the grave issues in the petition. This concealment needs to be investigated.

The comments of signers now gathering on the signatory of the Investigate NAHA petition, many of whom are members or former members, show strong objection, admonishment, disappointment and anger for the state of affairs. They are desirous of a lawfully established and well-documented endeavor that provides fair leadership and follows the appropriate rules, both for the membership and the agencies that oversee its activities. They are desirous of inclusiveness that will let their voices be effectively heard and create an avenue to contribute meaningfully. It is my opinion that the current management is failing to lead the organization and engage the U.S. and world aromatherapy community, failing to serve its membership within the law and has now, by not directly addressing the myriad issues that have accumulated, created the distrustful atmosphere that divides the small aromatherapy arts and sciences community in the U.S.

While I believe that a professional nonprofit administrator’s program assessment and a complete financial audit would determine the exact status of fundamental operations, I do not believe it will solve the core problems, and will provide only functional remedy. The leadership to revive any collective and organized endeavor has to come from within the

community itself. The new leaders stepping forth as the Interim National Board are continuing the previous evasive efforts to conceal, discount and ignore to respond to growing criticism from their constituency, slandering those taking a stand to support the petition, and representing the criticism contained in the petition as vindictive and personally motivated. A recent effort by the petitioners to move to binding arbitration in lieu of submitting the petition to the legal authorities has been rejected and refused outright by the organization. Effective new leadership must be able to re-gather the fragmented community, thoroughly address and remedy the errors of the past and regain credibility to inspire, direct and reward the volunteer members, while re-establishing a core mission and program goals that can be embraced and supported by members with their money and active participation. It is my professional opinion that this experienced leadership is not forthcoming. The newly stated mission and goals in the bylaws are factually incorrect, transparently flimsy and do not withstand careful scrutiny as the cornerstone for dedicated efforts that would serve the broad interests of aromatherapy.

Drastic changes that have been made, without consensus of the membership, have moved what was intended to be an inclusive grassroots organization with emerging professionalism and fairness into basically a dictatorship with appointed officers who are incapable of addressing the issues that confront them. Instead of adopting methods to resolve differences and controversy with consideration and fairness, subjective decisions are being made, not within the intent of the laws of Colorado and the accepted ethics and protocol for nonprofits. There is a needed investigative audit to determine the extent of mismanagement of funds and property. And, the board is acting against competent legal and professional advice in this regard that would have them move in a different direction. This ignorant condition is at the root of the problem and reflects the inexperience and inability of those in charge. It is my professional opinion that only dissolution will remedy the situation as it has now deteriorated beyond salvage. The accompanying opinion regarding bylaws deficiencies and lack of financial stewardship, coupled with the current unprofessional attitude of the Interim National Board (reflected in the attached letter from Michelle Miller sent to all NAHA members) will support the opinion that dissolution and formal investigation appear the only remedy.

Respectfully submitted,
Marcia Elston