

From: Hunter Branstetter

Hello,

Please find my nomination information in the form of answers to the nominating committee's questions, which are pasted below and my resume which is attached. If you have any questions or need any further information, please don't hesitate to follow up.

Best,

Hunter

1) Why are you interested in serving on ACA's Board? **Candidly, I had not seriously considered serving until prodded by some friends and fellow boaters, but on reflection (and after some helpful follow up from Beth Spilman), my interest is primarily twofold. First, I think serving will be a rewarding way to get further and more broadly involved with and give back to the paddling community. Second and equally important, I think that I could meaningfully contribute to the ACA as an organization by serving as a director.**

2) What specific knowledge, skills, abilities and talents will you bring? **I hope that I can bring a broad array of knowledge, perspectives, and skills to the board.**

As someone who has been involved in paddle sports for more than two decades and who both learned from and then taught classes through my local ACA-affiliated club, I have a fairly longstanding familiarity with the ACA and some time-developed knowledge of the ACA through both osmosis and observation. Assisting as the deputy state director for Tennessee has certainly helped me become more aware of the ACA's current efforts and focuses. All of which is to say that I can't claim a comprehensive knowledge of the ACA (and may be in the "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing") but I would not be starting from scratch in terms of institutional knowledge. And I would like to think that I have a decent finger on the pulse of at least my local/regional paddling communities.

As a former member of Team USA who competed at the most recent ICF Freestyle World Championships in 2019 (and who is aspiring to continue competing at the world-championship level at least

through 2023 when the U.S. next hosts the competition), I can offer the perspective of paddler currently engaged in high-level competition.

Through local clubs, through grassroots organizing, and occasionally using my legal knowledge, I also have a fair amount of experience in coordinating and assisting with issues not only that many hobby-level paddling enthusiasts face but also on which the ACA works such as access, conservation, safety, and deescalating conflicts (and ideally increasing cooperation) among different user groups on the water.

Although the current best-practices consensus from a legal/professional-responsibility standpoint is generally for attorneys to avoid serving as counsel to a nonprofit board while also being a director of that board, based on my day job as an attorney, I can still bring many of the skills that assist in my law practice (e.g., timeliness, clear communication, strong analytical skills, attention to detail, etc.) to bear in serving the ACA. Even if I'm not offering legal advice, I can at least have a perspective comparable to a "friend with a law degree."

Finally and relatedly, both based on my experience as legal counsel to a variety of different boards (nonprofit, for profit, and governmental) and on my experiences serving on the boards of several nonprofits, I have a strong foundational understanding of the ethical obligations for board members, competence and prudence requirements, and duties that directors owe to the boards on which they serve. Over the last several years, I have actually conducted or assisted with several different "how to be a good board member"-type seminars.

3) What do you believe are the most important challenges facing ACA at this time? From what I have seen and heard, the ACA's biggest challenges arise from what is also a great strength and opportunity: representing and serving broad and varied (although certainly overlapping) cohorts of paddlers while having a finite amount of resources. For a concrete example of this tension, I can imagine that trying to adapt to the massive proliferation of new (and sadly often untrained and under prepared) recreational boaters and harness them into the ACA fold by explaining what the ACA is and demonstrating the benefits that the ACA can provide presents significantly different challenges from those that arise from being the Olympic/Paralympic NGB for paddlesports or representing and supporting athletes who represent the U.S. at the Olympics/Paralympics or other world-championship-level competitions. And all of those roles, while valuable

and perhaps related, do not necessarily translate directly to the ACA's incredibly important work in the realm of instruction and safety or in its representation and assistance to its club members and affiliates (including the super valuable but likely difficult task of providing insurance).

Candidly, and channeling the voices of some boaters I have heard rather than my own opinions, I suspect there may still be some necessary work to be done to establish/re-establish the ACA's credibility (particularly after the previous executive director's departure about which some paddlers, myself included, heard rumblings or innuendo) and its value proposition for paddlers of varying levels—whether it's the hypothetical novice recreational boater who just purchased a boat from a big-box store and neither knows the ACA nor immediately appreciates when that person is “just going to the local river or lake” or the hard-charging Class V boater who mistakenly thinks that they've transcended what a club can offer and aren't aspiring Olympians so they're outside of the scope of what the ACA cares about or can help with.

Similarly, I've heard some lament that, on the Olympic-level competition front, we seem to be repeating a cycle of having the ACA be the NGB, then spinning out USACK in the 1990s (which, if I understand the history correctly, was not by choice), then laboriously merging USACK's NGB role back into the ACA over the course of the 2010s, and now potentially spinning off those same responsibilities again.

4) How would you address those challenges? Taking the challenges described above in reverse, I'll confess that I lack the comprehensive understanding necessary to make a real and educated recommendation about the ACA's NGB role. Although I'm loath to identify a problem without offering solution, I can recognize that I'm far enough out of my depth that any proposed solution would be ill-informed and thus not likely to be particularly constructive.

On the latter points about reasserting the ACA's credibility and value proposition, I fear that there's not an immediate answer—even if these issues are more of optics than substance. But continuing to maintain and expand the quality and caliber of the ACA's multifaceted work and to further improve the clarity and reach of its messaging will not only help address these issues but also help the ACA flourish. Communications alone cannot immediately increase credibility (that comes with time), but effective outreach and communication coupled

with appropriately tailored and well-developed programs (of which the ACA already has many and for which I am hopeful that others are being or could be developed) can certainly demonstrate the ACA's value to the broad range of paddlers that it represents.

In terms of the broad challenge of the ACA's having to represent and help a number of different constituent groups with limited resources, I have two admittedly contradictory suggestions. First, the ACA will need to continue to be as efficient as possible in terms of allocating resources to maximize not only short-term benefit but also long-term strategic development and further tapping into the robust assistance that its many volunteers—both as individuals and as clubs—can provide while not overreaching and engendering burnout. Second, the ACA needs to continue to expand, make more inclusive, and diversify its membership base and the services it provides to its members, whether those members are current or incoming. The growth in interest in paddlesports in the last several years (and particularly the COVID-19-induced surge in equipment purchases) provides a great opportunity for the ACA to create stronger bonds between and among various paddling communities, to foster a greater appreciation for stewardship of the water and safety on the water, and to show just how fun and enriching paddlesports can be.

5) Do you have any previous experience serving on a non-profit Board? Are you currently serving on a Board? **As I alluded in my response to question 2, I have board-service experience both as a board member and as legal counsel to boards. I currently serve on two non-profit boards—the American Constitution Society (a legal organization) and chatterbird (a contemporary chamber music ensemble).**

6) What do you expect from the ACA to make service on the Board personally rewarding for you? **Assisting fellow paddlers, developing a deeper and more informed sense of the nation-wide paddling community, and making a positive difference by serving would be the primary personal rewards.**

That said, in my experience, board members' receiving good inputs is critical to the board's having a good output. Some form of an onboarding process for incoming board members to learn more of the pertinent history of the ACA related to the board's current work, quickly get abreast of matters the board is addressing, and to start to develop a sense of potential issues on the horizon for the board would

certainly make it easier to hit the ground running and thus make the entire experience more rewarding. Similarly, for any nonprofit—but particularly a national one with a broad scope like the ACA—having timely access to pertinent information and adequate support from the organization (staff, committees, etc.) to help understand, synthesize, and act on lots of disparate information related to a number of different issues would certainly make serving more productive and personally rewarding.

7) Have you reviewed the job description? Are you willing to make a commitment to the listed obligations, including time, work and financial contributions? **Yes.**

Hunter Coleman Branstetter

SELECT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

- Attorney, SHERRARD ROE VOIGT & HARBISON, PLC, Nashville, TN (2014 – Present)
Judicial Law Clerk, The Honorable Bernice B. Donald, Circuit Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, Memphis, TN (2013 – 2014)

EDUCATION

- Vanderbilt University Law School, Doctor of Jurisprudence, May 2013
- Washington & Lee University, Bachelor of Arts in English, *magna cum laude*, June 2009

SELECT PADDLE SPORTS EXPERIENCE

- Whitewater Kayaking
 - As a competitor
 - 9th Place in Men's Squirt Boat at the 2019 ICF Freestyle World Championship
 - Nothing else ICF sanctioned but plenty of top-10 or better finishes in casual competitions and races (e.g. 2018 Spring Creek (TN) Race, 2018 Ottawa JimiCup, 2019 Bubbler Competition, or several Ocoee Downriver Squirt Competitions)
 - As an instructor
 - Taught kayaking and led kayaking trips using an adapted ACA curriculum at Camp Rockmont (Summers of 2004 – 2009)
 - Taught an advanced kayaking class (either straight-ahead intermediate or advanced kayaking or a variant like playboating or handpaddling) for a number of years for the Tennessee Scenic River Association's Canoe & Kayak School (2004, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, and 2015 but I could be a year off on some of those); teaching pool-based roll classes for TSRA (2009 – 2013, 2015 – present)
 - Organized and taught roll classes (2005-2009) and planned and taught two-semester long Whitewater Kayaking physical education classes through the Washington & Lee Outing Club (Fall 2006, Winter 2008)
 - Teaching roll classes and facilitating river trips for Vanderbilt University Outdoor Recreation (2009 – 2020 and hopefully to resume soon post-COVID-19)
 - These days I'm Class IV boater who mostly spends time on Class II – III+ refining my skills in playful boats—usually a squirt boat—and/or mentoring newer paddlers
- Other Paddle Sports
 - Enthusiastic and experienced whitewater river-boarder
 - Serviceable whitewater C-1, OC-1, and C-2 paddler
 - Somewhat experienced (but by no means good) whitewater paddle raft guide
 - Barely experienced but excited to learn more High Performance-class ocean surfer
 - Casual but always-happy-to-go flatwater canoe, kayak, or SUP paddler
- Whitewater-adjacent skills and training
 - ACA Swift Water Rescue (several times in the early-to-mid '00s, but I think the last course where I was a student was in 2006)
 - Long-lapsed Wilderness First Responder and EMT (TN EMT-IV licensure & NREMT EMT-B certification both expired in 2012)

CURRENT NONPROFIT BOARD SERVICE

- Board Member, chatterbird (2016 – Present)
- Board Member, Advisory Board Liaison, and Past-President, American Constitution Society, Nashville Lawyers' Chapter (2015 – Present)