



Kerski

Since 1989, **Joseph Kerski** has served as geographer in the Education Program at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). His work focuses on the creation and nurturing of educational partnerships

among government agencies, nonprofit organizations, private industry, professional societies, universities, community colleges, and K-12 schools for the enhancement of geography and science teaching and learning. He teaches frequently at schools and Colleges. Joseph conducts approximately forty GIS and geography workshops annually for educators, the general public, government, news media, scientists, nonprofit organizations, and private industry. Among other distinctions, Joseph serves on the Executive Planning Board of the National Council for Geographic Education, is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, and has been a member of the AAG since 1992. Joseph lives in Denver, Colorado with his wife and two children, who were featured last year in *The Boulder Daily Camera* with Joseph as the "World's Nerdiest Dad" for roaming the countryside with a GPS receiver.

AAG: What inspired you to work for the federal government?

Joseph: The whole idea of public service. We are doing things for the public and all the broad audiences that involves. I take that seriously. I'm here to serve. I also like being part of the rich history of the Department of Interior.

AAG: Why does USGS have a geographer on staff doing what you do?

Joseph: Because it's tied to our mission—it's not enough to just put out data or reports. The value added is to make it understandable to people, no matter the audience. Also, I think that unlike the way the government has been perceived in the past, we don't just do something 'to' a community; we work as part of a community toward common goals.

AAG: You do work with quite a variety of people.

Joseph: It's been a true privilege over the last fifteen years. We're all learning and you learn so much from others. I'm thrilled to be able to do this kind of work. You get to a certain point and realize that the subject matter is important, but the kind of people you work with becomes just as important as the subject matter.

AAG: How large is the group of people you work with?

Joseph: Well, let's just say, I get about 120 emails a day from various sources. It's sort of like drinking from a fire hose.

AAG: What about other geographers?

Joseph: I think that the geography community is just—it sounds corny—some of the neatest people to work with. There is always some sort of collaborative effort, and usually everyone is so enthusiastic about telling you what they're doing—it's something I find really refreshing about the geographic education and research communities.

AAG: I think your own enthusiasm must have something to do with it, too.

Joseph: It's hard not to be enthusiastic. I think we're all driven by some common concerns, about the earth and the environment, but also concern about people—and how they're affected by what is going on. Geographers are a caring bunch, trying to make the world a better place, not just environmentally but a better place to live.

AAG: Is that why you got into geography education?

Joseph: The reason why I got into education—as a former cartographer—was that I wanted to do be able to touch lives in a different way. It's expanded my thinking, even if it's something small like sending educational or research materials to someone who needs them.

AAG: How has it expanded your thinking?

Joseph: We are asking the questions, what does this really mean? Not just click, click, click.

AAG: How is that important where you work?

Joseph: We need folks now more than ever to think about big issues. I look at these job ads in the federal government and see how we need more than button pushers, but interdisciplinary thinkers—the big picture people—to deal with complex problems like urban sprawl, water quality, global change, natural hazards. Where are we going to get them from? Geographers are in one of the best positions to fill those jobs and we'll need more of them as these problems become paramount in the twenty-first century.

AAG: Did you always know you'd end up doing this?

Joseph: People told me you can't really have a career in geography. I began majors in engineering and business but I kept taking geography classes, thinking, "This is the only thing I really enjoy." My advice—sounds sort of hokey, but—is to follow your dreams. Why go to a job every day that you don't like to do? Do something that you're passionate about.

AAG: Is there any place you are particularly passionate about?

Joseph: I'm a real fan of ordinary places. Sometimes I walk around industrial areas, where people live, everyday geography. Many people would say that's 'just' a field or 'just' an intersection but for geographers it's never just 'just!'

AAG: I understand you have agreed to co-chair the local arrangement committee for the AAG Annual Meeting in Denver in 2005. Any interesting plans?

Joseph: It'll be fun—a lot of good connections. I've got a list of twenty different places in mind for field trips already.

AAG: Your excitement is contagious.

Joseph: You know, we're all doing this together—all of us geographers, we've all got a role to play and it's a team effort. Wouldn't it be something if we could know all that we're doing collectively and what a difference that is making? ■

Editor's Note: Suggestions for members to profile are welcome. Please send names and contact information to Patricia Solís at psolis@aag.org.