

ELEMENTS' FIFTH ANNIVERSARY



Rod Ewing

You hold in your hands the last issue of the fifth year of publication of *Elements*. During these past five years, we have published 29 issues (five during the first year) with a total of 180 thematic articles and 1990 pages. The success of *Elements* is clear from the numbers: There are 15 participating societies with 12,134 members and 1846 library subscriptions. Eliminating the overlap in subscriptions, 11,671 copies are mailed to our readers in 100 countries every two months. In addition to its wide distribution, *Elements'* impact factor has risen to 3.069 in 2008 (for comparison, *Geology* is 3.754; *Contributions to Mineralogy and Petrology*, 3.853; *Earth and Planetary Science Letters*, 3.955; *Geochimica et Cosmochimica Acta*, 4.235). *Elements* has joined the ranks of the major journals in the geosciences. More importantly, *Elements* has given voice and visibility to a large community of scientists with a common interest in geochemistry, mineralogy, and petrology—previously we existed as nearly invisible, fragmented communities, isolated by discipline and geography.

Elements has been successful for many reasons: it was the right idea at the right time. As more and more societies switch to the electronic medium, there is still a strong market for attractive, informative, hard-copy publications. Still, good ideas can fail in the absence of skilled and dedicated supporters. We have had the good fortune to be guided by editors who are among the best in our scientific community: Pierrette Tremblay, Ian Parsons, Mike Hochella, Bruce Watson, Susan Stipp, David Vaughan, Hap McSween, and the most recent addition, Tim Drever. There were also other important moments and people who made critical contributions. The fifth anniversary is a good time to remember and reflect on some of the key decisions and individual contributions.

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The idea of a scientific magazine for which each issue has a thematic focus was not new. In fact, *Elements* was very much created on the model of the Materials Research Society's *MRS Bulletin*, first published in 1975 (as a two-page newsletter) and now published monthly (impact factor = 5.29). The first thematic issue, on ion-beam processing, was published in 1987. At that time, the MRS Council had many reservations, mainly financial, about whether MRS should take the risk of publishing the *Bulletin* in its expanded monthly form. I was one of the cautious skeptics. Looking back, I now understand that the *MRS Bulletin* was key to the process of defining the field of materials science and spreading this vision around the world. The MRS now has about 16,000 members, and there are 13 MRS adhering societies under the umbrella of the International Union of Materials Research Societies. One of the first steps in creating *Elements* was to contact Elton Kaufmann, a previous chair of the *Bulletin's* editorial board, and Betsy Fleischer, the present editor, for advice and information. Elton provided the calm assurance that any good idea would succeed, but only as long as you included pictures of people, and Betsy provided a full list of details that would have to be addressed. We had no business plan; no idea of costs or income. Betsy shared her spreadsheets, and we discussed in detail how to produce and finance such a magazine. Without Betsy's help, *Elements* would have had a very difficult, if not impossible, beginning. Betsy has followed the progress of *Elements* over the years and now borrows some of our "innovations" for the *MRS Bulletin*.

No history of *Elements* would be complete without a story about Pierrette Tremblay, the only person present at every step in creating and sustaining *Elements*. When the concept of a magazine, such as *Elements*, was first proposed, there was limited enthusiasm for the idea. The individual societies were wedded to their own publications and society newsletters. At that time, Pierrette was in charge of the Mineralogical Association of Canada's newsletter, which had just been upgraded with color and expanded to include a wider range of articles and news. The MAC newsletter was one of the best among the society newsletters. It was very much her "baby," and so the idea of replacing the MAC newsletter with a new magazine was not immediately attractive. However, as the discussion continued, Pierrette was one of the few who listened carefully, added her own ideas, and finally, joined and supported the

idea. This was a completely unselfish decision, and once "converted," Pierrette embraced all aspects of the creation of *Elements*. It is rare to find an individual whose professionalism extends far beyond their own group or society and whose decisions are always based on what is best for the broader scientific community. Pierrette is exactly this type of person—thoughtful and unselfish.

A good and timely idea supported by excellent people can still fail without the commitment of the community that it wants to serve. As already described, the initial reaction to the proposal to create *Elements* was lukewarm at best. The proposed magazine had no name and there was no familiar example for reference (of course, if there had been a good example in the geosciences, there would have been no need for *Elements*). I was most involved in the discussions in the MSA Council. Although Pierrette and I had prepared a business plan, there was no way to be sure of the numbers because we had no idea of who might join the effort. I remember very well presenting the proposal to the MSA Council in the fall of 2003, but I did not pass around the budget spreadsheet because I had no idea of whether the figures were close to correct. The only thing I knew for sure was that the *MRS Bulletin* was a success and that a revenue equal to the total cost of society newsletters plus advertising income should put us in the range of *Elements* being possible. Surprisingly, the MSA Council approved the idea contingent on two other societies joining the effort. MSA immediately prepared to discontinue the publication of the *Lattice* newsletter in 2004 in anticipation of the new magazine appearing in 2005. The Mineralogical Society of Great Britain and Ireland and the Mineralogical Society of Canada immediately joined the effort, followed in short order by the Clay Minerals Society and the Geochemical Society. MSA also provided *Elements* with a legal home and the means of doing business. Alex Speer provided critical advice at every step, and to this day he handles much of the administrative load related to finances, subscription lists, and the mailing of *Elements*. The business plan was approved by the MSA Council in 2006, well after the first issue of *Elements* was published. Without the common vision of the first participating societies and the support of Alex Speer, *Elements* would not have been possible.

I would be remiss not to note another important source of support—our advertisers. Advertising is an essential part of the business plan, and advertising provides information that serves our community. But there is no greater challenge than selling advertising in a magazine that does not yet exist or is just a few years old. Still, a few advertisers made an early and consistent investment in *Elements*. I want to single out RockWare and Excalibur Mineral Corp. for advertising continually with us since Volume 1, Number 1—a full page on the back cover of every issue of *Elements* for RockWare!

Looking beyond the fifth anniversary, the main remaining challenge is to establish a firm financial foundation for *Elements*. Our business model relies on the support and cooperation of the fifteen participating societies (with others expected to join). These societies are represented on the Executive Committee, essentially a board of directors for *Elements*. Some societies are large (>2000); others, small (<200). Some have established administrative structures with a staff, and others have much less. Each society has its own financial resources and limitations, which affect their decisions and vision of what *Elements* should be. Moving forward will inevitably be complicated as we navigate through the different needs of these diverse societies. Still, I hope that three principles will guide us through future decisions:

- *Elements* should have the resources to maintain its already high standard
- *Elements* should have the widest possible distribution, to act as an effective voice for our community of mineralogists, petrologists, and geochemists
- We, as members of this community, will provide the time and financial support required to make *Elements* a success

We often judge the value of *Elements* by what we pay for a year's subscription. The true value, however, is that *Elements* is a journal that we can put in the hands of others who are not members of our community—their positive impression of what we do as scientists is critical to the success of our profession.

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