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PR executive gets own day

Nov. 14 made Gary McCormick Day for society's chair-elect

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It's not often you go into a meeting with industry peers and leave with an entire day named in your honor. But Gary McCormick is at the top of his profession.

As part of Friday's PR Day on the University of Tennessee campus, Nov. 14 was officially declared Gary McCormick Day by the mayors of Knoxville and Knox County.

McCormick is the 2009 chair-elect of the Public Relations Society of America and is likely the first Knoxville public relations practitioner to serve in that capacity for the 22,000-member international organization. "It's a great honor to be listed among icons in the industry," he said.

McCormick is an executive for Scripps Networks Interactive and HGTV and has been a member of PRSA for nearly two decades, most of that time in East Tennessee.



He said that despite the economic downturn, the public relations industry is still going strong.

"Companies still have to communicate with their customers, as well as their own employees and stockholders. It's all about trust," he said.

McCormick was joined at the Friday event by PRSA's current chair-elect, Michael Cherenson, who is executive vice president of Success Communications Group, a national firm based in New Jersey. Cherenson agreed there always will be room for public relations as long as

public trust is an issue for companies, as with the recent Wall Street bailout.

"It takes professionals to rebuild that trust. That's our job," he said.

He said corporations nationwide appear to be keeping public relations in their budgets for 2009.

"Now we have to make sure they understand how important we are," he noted.

One way public relations experts are increasing their value is through social networking, according to McCormick.

"Web sites like Facebook and Twitter are changing the way we do business. We can help companies keep up," he said.

Thanks to the Internet and e-mail, there are virtually no secrets anymore, and Chersonson said companies need to know how to stay in the game. "Every corporate memo can be published with the click of a button. The companies that understand how to manage information will do well. The ones that don't will go away."

Industry numbers suggest the men have reason to be confident. Public relations as a profession came about in the 1940s. Today, it's a \$6 billion industry with companies that are publicly traded on Wall Street and agencies that are multinational.