



My first caving experience was the Bone-Norman through trip in Greenbrier County, West Virginia. After eight hours underground, we emerged from the [Norman entrance](#) and I asked [my trip leader](#) if we could do the trip again, every day, for ten days, starting tomorrow. That day, this dedicated caver was born. They call me Cruiser.

It wasn't until [OTR](#) that I realized caving is a way of life. That weekend I started to understand what truly makes cavers special. I took note that cavers my age are few and far between, so I took action and started to introduce my friends to caving. If recruiting is a priority, ensuring cave access also needs to be a priority. That means maintaining good relationships with landowners, large hunt clubs, or land trusts and communicating effectively with leaders, like our Chair of the NSS Directorate has already done in the Letter to the Secretaries featured in the [April Issue](#) of NSS news. If bringing in new blood as the future stewards of caves is a priority, protecting and conserving caves needs to be a core value communicated to all members.

The [NSS membership is aging](#) and there are fewer young cavers. The [average age of new members](#) in the 1950's was 24. Today it is 32. Membership reached a peak of 12,000, but in recent years has fallen by 3,000. The ability to recruit new members is directly dependent on training capable trip leaders that have the time and energy to volunteer and lead. Effective recruiting is heavily influenced by the internet. [Caves.org](#) is the central location people arrive at when searching online. To recruit younger cavers let's make it easy to find a grotto, onboard them with caver guide, and explicitly show members the benefits for paying dues. I am personally interested in working on the website because the first thing a new caver does when considering membership is search on Google. Because I am a [software engineer](#) with experience building online products and community, I believe we can improve using modern measurement tools and analytics.

I have relevant experience and I want to make a difference. When I was 21 years old, I founded an [online science community](#) that has grown to 150,000 members, (including [NSS cavers](#)). I am a [published scientist](#) with a B.S. in Biology and was recognized by [Science Magazine](#), [Wall Street Journal](#), [Science Friday](#), and [Forbes 30 under 30](#). My science and business background will help me contribute to the board on an operational level. More importantly, I understand how to build an online community from scratch and [measure the community impact](#). Beyond that, we need a membership that is engaged. This means understanding what motivates volunteers to put blood, sweat, and tears into recruiting, activating, and retaining membership. Now is the time to transition the NSS to a more digitally connected network. I can support the board with the technical and operational expertise to get this done.

I am actively listening to our membership and can get things done. In preparing for this run, I've had the opportunity to speak with many of you in person, online, and over the phone. One caver mentioned that if a member renews membership for 3 years, they become lifers. Working together to understand why members renew and why members leave will allow us to grow the next generation of stewards ready to protect caves for multiple generations. I am coming in with a perspective not yet represented on the board.

Whether you are a hardcore project caver, a cave rescue nerd, an armchair caver, none of the above, or some of the above, as a member you are key to the NSS future. This is a challenge I am excited to work on. It would be an honor to serve.