TMS Ad Hoc Committee: Doing More to Recognize the Best and Brightest

Ray D. Peterson

Like every professional society, TMS has a long history of recognizing members for their technical achievements and service to the membership and society in general. Yet recently we seem to have developed difficulties within our Honors and Awards systems.

We are not unique in this matter; almost all societies are seeing fewer nominations for awards, most awards are reserved for senior members, and very few women and minority members receive awards. Additionally within TMS, we have seen that as our field has evolved some awards no longer represent our primary fields of interest.

Currently TMS members are eligible to receive awards at three levels: Division, Society, and Legacy Awards through our parent society, the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical, and Petroleum Engineers (AIME). In general, awards at each level are more prestigious than the awards at the level below them. Yet we see inconsistencies in this structure today.

TMS leadership wants to recognize our "best and brightest." We believe there is not a lack of deserving individuals—only a lack of nominations. We also believe that all members should be able to aspire to a major award and not be excluded by the field they work in or their choice of employment.

For all of these reasons, I asked the TMS Board earlier this year to implement an ad hoc committee to review our awards system and make recommendations for improvements. The committee focused on three areas: nominations, new awards, and committee structure.

Nominations

Our goal is to increase the pool size of worthy candidates for all awards. To this end, the nomination and application process has been streamlined. All nominations can now be made on-line. We will continue to accept nominations from all members in other formats as well. We have asked each technical division to name a "Nominations Champion" to help identify potential candidates for awards. The division and committee members generally know who among their membership is most worthy of recognition. Finally, we will institute a system that "maps upward" an award winner to the appropriate nomination pool at the next level (provided the original nominator wishes to do so). For example, all division winners of service awards would be moved up to the nomination pool of society-level service award. Of course, we would continue to seek and accept other nominations for the same award. We hope this will increase the pool of qualified nominees for all awards.

Awards

Most of our awards are still relevant to our core values, but some changes are needed to bring balance. First, a new award has been created that will recognize members in the mid-section of their career much like the TMS Fellow Award recognizes senior members. While there are a number of criteria for the award, a key provision is "Sustained excellence and achievement in business, technology, education, public policy, or science related to materials science and engineering." Class size will be limited to five members per year.

To make a high-level society award that all members can aspire to we will

create three new awards centered about processing, structure, and properties. Although award names have not yet been determined, we envisage these awards being named after outstanding early members of TMS who were known for expertise in these fields. Any member in an area of materials science and engineering should be eligible for at least one of these awards.

Finally we hope to make a high-level award based on the acquisition of an AIME award to recognize outstanding technological achievement. We expect this to be one of our "Pinnacle Awards."

Revamp Committee Structure

If we change our awards, this gives us a chance to restructure our various awards committees. Work loads among committees vary greatly as does membership makeup. We currently have ten committees and consequently require a large number of our members to fully populate the committees. Our plan is to decrease the number of committees from ten to seven. Each committee will have more focus and responsibility.

Our awards system is not broken, but improvements can be made. That is what we have attempted to do in this update of the awards program. Since we are already in the nominations cycle for 2010, these new award changes will not be seen until late 2010 and will not be awarded until 2012. In the meantime, I would ask all members to consider who they know who deserves to be recognized for their technological achievements or for their service to our members and TMS. Then fill out a nomination form and recognize them!

Ray Peterson is Technology Director at Aleris International, Rockwood, Tennessee, and the 2009 TMS President.