Get Involved: Sai V. Raj, Symposium Organizer

Kelly Zappas

"Get Involved" is a recurring End Notes feature that spotlights the work of TMS volunteers and shows the wide range of activities available through TMS. This month, Sai V. Raj, a materials research engineer at NASA Glenn Research Center, discusses the challenges and opportunities that come with serving as a symposium organizer for the TMS 2011 Annual Meeting.

Q. For the TMS 2011 Annual Meeting, you are organizing the Physical and Mechanical Metallurgy of Shape Memory Alloys for Actuator Applications Symposium. Why did you choose to organize a symposium on this topic?

A. Although several symposia are held periodically on shape memory alloys (SMAs), they cover a broad range of topics. My co-organizers and I felt that there is a need to organize a focused symposium to bring researchers together to discuss issues specifically related to SMA actuators. We feel organizing this symposium is timely since there is a great deal of interest in the engineering community to develop these alloys for various actuator applications.

Q. What is involved in organizing a technical symposium? Is it a big time commitment? Does it require a lot of coordination with other organizers and presenters?

A. Organizing a symposium of this magnitude requires a large time commitment since it involves a lot of planning, coordination with different individuals and organizations, and taking care of the small and the big items to ensure that the whole process moves smoothly. It helps to have a dedicated team supporting you. My co-organizers have been wonderful in helping me in different ways.

Q. How did you get involved in organizing this symposium?

A. I am a long-time member of the Mechanical Metallurgy Committee. The idea of organizing this symposium came to me in 2008. I first floated the idea with my co-organizers, who were very enthusiastic about helping me organize the symposium. We then submitted a proposal to the committee, which approved it.

Q. Have you organized symposia for TMS conferences in the past?

A. Yes. I have co-organized four previous TMS conferences as a member of the Mechanical Metallurgy Committee.

Q. How did you first get involved in volunteer work with TMS?

A. I joined the Jt. ASM/TMS Mechanical Metallurgy Committee in the early 1990s. In 2000, I co-organized a very successful conference entitled Rate Processes in Plastic Deformation II: Towards a Unified Constitutive Theory of Deformation. I received many complimentary comments from many of the participants after the conference.

If you want to get involved in planning technical programming for upcoming TMS conferences, get in touch with the TMS technical committee that matches your area of interest. A complete list of TMS technical committees is available through the Committee Home Pages section of members.tms.org/admin.html. Log in as a TMS member to contact the committee chair directly. If you know of a TMS member who should be featured in a future "Get Involved" column, contact Kelly Zappas at kzappas@tms.org.

Q. What is the most rewarding aspect of serving as a TMS volunteer?

A. I enjoy interacting with my peers. The most rewarding aspect for me is to make new friends and build close relationships with my peers.

Q. Is it difficult to balance your volunteer and work responsibilities?

A. Yes, sometimes, especially when several activities have converging deadlines.

Q. What advice would you give to other TMS members who wanted to become more involved in planning and organizing technical symposia for TMS meetings?

A. Organizing any symposium is a time-consuming affair. It is important to pick a symposium topic that is of interest to the research community. In my opinion, the factors that are likely to lead to a successful symposium are good communication, an enthusiastic organizing team, advanced planning, and paying attention to details. We started the planning process for our symposium about three years ago, which allowed us to take care of many important issues before the TMS website was open for abstract submission. However, one cannot plan for all situations. So, one has to handle issues on a case-by-case basis.

Kelly Zappas is a contributing writer for JOM.