

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Charles E. Harris, SEM President



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SEM President
1998-1999

"SEM must strategically plan for the future."

SEM has initiated several changes during the past decade in an attempt to meet the changing professional needs of our members. These changes have had a positive effect on our Society according to the latest member satisfaction survey conducted by email in October 1997. 90% of the survey respondents are moderately to extremely satisfied with the Society. When compared to the member services provided by other professional societies, 80% of the respondents said that their SEM membership is well worth its cost. However, there are several current trends that require our immediate attention. Even though the Society membership has increased by about 8% over the past decade, about 25% of our members drop their membership every year! This very high membership turnover rate creates the potential for significant yearly fluctuations in membership. However, the good news is that the number of new members that join the Society each year suggests that we have a relatively large pool of potential members. The primary source of new members being the trial membership given to nonmembers who pay the full registration fee at one of our annual conferences.

To reverse this trend, we must seek answers to fundamental questions such as who we are, what is our vision of the future, and how do we fulfill our potential? We must establish the future technical directions for experimental mechanics. In addition, we must be visionary in determining innovative new methods of delivering services to our members in the information age. One of my three presidential goals for 1998-99 is to update the SEM Strategic Plan with an exciting new vision of the future, which I am calling "new horizons for the third millennium."

Long Range Planning Committee IV (LRPC-IV) completed the last study for the Society in February 1992. The SEM Executive Board adopted the recommendations of LRPC-IV and appointed an ad hoc committee to assure the extension and implementation of the LRPC-IV process. In 1996, the Executive Board reviewed LRPC-IV and again endorsed the framework as appropriate guidance for the future direction of the Society. Many of the recommendations contained in LRPC-IV have been implemented. In fact, the genesis of most of the significant "institutional" changes to the Society that have occurred in recent years can be traced directly to the recommendations of LRPC-IV. The changes include development of a new financial management system, streamlining the organization hierarchy, making changes to the Spring Conference, and we are now working on the revitalization of our Technical Divisions. However, the general guidance to "increase and broaden the Society membership" has not been achieved even though most of the specific recommendations in LRPC-IV were implemented.

It is interesting to note that 58% of our members have joined the Society since 1990. We must understand the professional needs of these new members and identify ways to improve our Society so that it will benefit all our members. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon the current leadership to pass on to the next generation of engineers and scientists a relevant and vigorous Professional Society that promotes the practice of experimental mechanics as enabling the development of advanced technologies that benefit the broad international community of people.

I have commissioned a Task Force with a charter to develop a new vision for SEM of the future and the associated strategic plan for the Society. I have challenged the Task Force to address the new technical directions for experimental mechanics and to examine ways to increase our membership without losing our identity and heritage. The Task Force will also explore the role of the professional society in the future and propose visionary new methods of delivering services to our members. I have appointed Professor Michael A. Sutton, University of South Carolina, to lead this Task Force. The study will be completed during the coming year and the new strategic plan will be reported to the Society in the Year 2000. I invite you to get involved in the long range planning process by participating in the member surveys to be conducted in 1999 and by providing your suggestions directly to members of the Task Force by using the SEM web site (www.sem.org).

Charles E. Harris