

IEEE Sections Congress 2011 – San Francisco, CA

Shannon Pisarsky

Sections Congress is IEEE triennial, worldwide gathering of IEEE members. The purpose is to appoint a primary section delegate to receive training on how to better the section and vote on recommendations to make IEEE better serving to its members and community. Sections are the base of the IEEE organization representing geographical areas (usually a large city). All sections report to IEEE regions and the regions to corporate. The majority of the volunteers in the organization are at the section level.

Sections Congress began on Friday August 18, 2011 with Computer Society Chair training. As the local section Computer Society Organizer, I attended the training to learn how to grow our developing Computer Society in the Akron/Canton section. I was able to meet other experienced Computer Society Chairs and share valuable information about program ideas and recruiting new members into the society. I made many contacts that I expect to draw from in the future.

On Friday evening, we had an opening ceremony with great keynote speakers. The first was Dr. Sehat Sutardja who is the co-founder of the Marvell Technology Group which specializes in semiconductors. He spoke about being a child in South East Asia and how his passion for engineering was seeded and took root. After Dr. Sutardja, Grant Imahara from the show *MythBusters* took the stage and regaled the audience with stories from his television show as well as neat engineering projects he has worked on including some for the Star Wars franchise and the Energizer Bunny. Both speakers are IEEE members and have been featured in IEEE's monthly Spectrum Magazine.

On Saturday morning, we attended a general session with motivating speakers. First was IEEE president Moshe Kam presenting "IEEE – Advancing Technology for Humanity", which was the theme for this year's Sections Congress. He highlighted many outreach programs that IEEE is conducting around the world to bring interest and awareness to field of engineering. Next, Vint Cerf, Google Vice President and Chief Internet Evangelist, gave an entertaining keynote address.

Saturday afternoon was spent in breakout sessions based on three tracks: "Empower the Member", "Enhance Geographic Unit Vitality" and "Serve the World". I selected a mixture of these tracks based on my interests. The first session I attended was a networking session where I was able to learn new skills for making contacts. Later in the afternoon I attended a session on the vTools that IEEE offers members for managing their section and creating websites. As webmaster for the IEEE Akron/Canton section, I was able to see what free tools the organization provides us with.

Saturday evening was an awards banquet where many distinguished professionals received awards for their service to the organization and the field of engineering.

Sunday morning was filled with more breakout sessions. I attended a session entitled "Managing Your Career" and afterward networked with professionals from the session. Later that morning I attended a session on using social media to boost section vitality and reach younger members. The afternoon was filled with workshops in using the tools that IEEE provides to manage the section.

On Monday morning we had a question and answer session with 2012 president-elect candidates. Immediately following this session, it was time to vote on the 34 different recommendations brought to Sections Congress from around the world. As primary delegate for my section, I voted on these recommendations. From the outcome of this vote, IEEE will use the top five recommendations to be worked toward in the next three years. The recommendations that the congress voted for are:

1. IEEE to develop a comprehensive long-term strategy to increase the number of next generation youth pursuing science and engineering careers.
2. As members maintain their IEEE membership over their years, IEEE must reward them for their loyalty. Rewards ought to be tangible and useful and can be done simply and inexpensively. Create Global Fidelity Programs including: (a) Continue membership Recognition 5-10-15-20 years of membership (b) Bonus for specific Benefits (e.g., reduced fee, IEEE merchandise, etc).
3. IEEE membership (including e-Membership) should include a Society membership as part of the basic membership fee.
4. Increased support to students in technical activities with grants to attend conferences and organization of technical competitions.
5. To encourage interest in pre-university students in engineering careers, IEEE to publish a subscription periodical (paper or electronic) targeted to high school students that highlights engineering activities of interest to those students. The periodical should also have articles promoting the benefits of an engineering career and what the students can do in college to get involved with IEEE.

Attending IEEE Sections Congress was a truly rewarding experience. It always gives me a charge to meet new people and network in my chosen field. It's gratifying to receive offers of guidance and mentorship with my career and volunteering endeavors. I was also able to help others by providing advice on what tools to use for web hosting and share our local section program ideas. I came away from Sections Congress with many ideas for making my section and chapter vital entities in which to serve the IEEE. I look forward to the next opportunity to do more of the same.