



Letter from the Executive Director



George Jetson's Professional Society

I'd like to let you know about some recent developments that show how AICHE continues to be a leader when it comes to cooperative activities with other professional societies. In my July 2004 editorial, I noted that we've engaged in discussions with many societies to broaden AICHE's array of meetings, publications, and training. In the last year, we've added significant value to our portfolio of offerings through cooperation with the American Chemical Society, ASME, the Institution of Chemical Engineers, IEEE, the Society of Petroleum Engineers, the Society of Plastics Engineers, and the Commercial Development and Marketing Association (CDMA).

As AICHE moves into its second century, the "market" drivers for professional societies are changing rapidly. Chemical engineers' information needs — and job opportunities — are increasingly diverse. We don't just see this in areas like biotechnology and nanotechnology. We're even seeing the application of chemical engineering talent in areas like investment banking. Against this background of change, the Internet continues to drive expectations for the delivery of information to a level we couldn't imagine a decade ago. People want critical content immediately— anytime, anywhere, and in easily searchable format. There's also some expectation that information should be FREE! Moreover, the chemical enterprise and the practice of chemical engineering are now global, in a "flat world," as Thomas Friedman has characterized it.

We can see this dramatic change most clearly in students and young professionals. There's an explosion of social networking on the Internet. At our annual student conference in San Francisco last year, I asked 1,500 undergraduate chemical engineers a question: How many of them visited either MySpace.com or Facebook.com at least once a day? Virtually everyone raised her or his hand. I asked this same question of students at the Indian Institute of Technology in Mumbai. As you may have guessed, the result was the same. The world truly is flat and the Internet is driving this change.

Of course, this cultural shift poses big challenges for knowledge-based organizations like AICHE. How do we serve members in a world where the tools for global communication change so rapidly? How do we support the investments, time, and expertise needed to keep abreast of technology trends? The clear answer, I believe, is even stronger cooperation with other societies and commercial organizations for content development and the very best technologies for its delivery.

In the past two years, AICHE revamped its website and database capabilities. We've incorporated state-of-the-art webcast systems, blogs, an E-library, shared-file systems for volunteer groups, and more. These changes required an investment of more than \$1.5 million. Many members and AICHE divisions generously donated to these efforts because they saw how important it was for AICHE to make these changes. Since then, AICHE has looked to leverage these investments and develop partnerships that can help future investments in IT infrastructure and service to members. Here are two examples:

- This past February, AICHE moved its Member Service Center into the offices of the Society of Plastics Engineers in rural Brookfield, CT. The 800 number and e-mail address (xpress@aiiche.org) for contacting your member service staff remain the same.

- AICHE and the CDMA have formed a partnership in which AICHE provides "back office" services for CDMA. To complement this activity, a committee of AICHE members is working with CDMA volunteers to develop joint programs. CDMA includes many chemical engineers who specialize in product development. Some of the profession's leaders foresee product engineering emerging as a key element of the discipline alongside more traditional process engineering.

Our founders stated that AICHE should "promote pleasant acquaintance and social and professional intercourse among its members." The words surely strike our ears as archaic, just as the methods we use to do these things today would strike our founders as revolutionary. However, sharing their spirit, we'll continue to adopt the latest tools to meet the needs of chemical engineers as we move into AICHE's second century.

John Sofranko
Executive Director, AICHE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kristine Chin
(212) 591-7662
krisc@aiiche.org

MANAGING EDITOR

Cynthia F. Mascone
(212) 591-7343
cyntrm@aiiche.org

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Gerald Parkinson
gparky@cox.net

REGULATORY:

William A. Shirley
(888) 674-2529
envtllaw@
charter.net

PATENT LAW:

Henry Heines
mh@
townsend.com
Frank C. Eymard
frank_eynard@
albermarle.com

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

Karen Simpson
(212) 591-7337
kares@aiiche.org

ART & DESIGN

Jesse Gunzel
(212) 591-8678
jessg@aiiche.org

ILLUSTRATOR

Craig Carioscia

AICHE

GENERAL INQUIRIES

1-800-AICHEM
(1-800-242-4363)

MEETINGS/EXPOSITIONS
(212) 591-7324

MEMBER ACTIVITIES & SERVICES

(212) 591-7329

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

John A. Sofranko
johns@aiiche.org

GROUP PUBLISHER

Stephen R. Smith
steps@aiiche.org

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