



AICHE[®] THREE PARK AVENUE
NEW YORK, NY
10016-5991
www.aiche.org
AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF CHEMICAL ENGINEERS

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cynthia F. Mascone
(646) 495-1345
cynmtm@aiiche.org

**SENIOR
EDITOR**

Joanna Ziemlewski
(646) 495-1347
joanz@aiiche.org

**ASSISTANT
EDITORS**

Gordon Ellis
(646) 495-1348
gorde@aiiche.org

Matt McKeon-Slaterry
(646) 495-1349
mattm@aiiche.org

**CONTRIBUTORS
EDITORS**

T. Kevin Swift
kevin_swift@
americanchemistry.com

Miriam Cortes-Caminero
miric@aiiche.org

**PRODUCTION
COORDINATOR**

Karen Simpson
(646) 495-1346
kares@aiiche.org

ART DIRECTOR

Paula Angarita
(646) 495-1328
paula@aiiche.org

AICHE

GENERAL INQUIRIES
1-800-AIChemE
(1-800-242-4363)

**MEETINGS &
EXPOSITIONS**

(646) 495-1315

**MEMBER ACTIVITIES &
SERVICES**

(646) 495-1330

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DIRECTOR**

June C. Wispelwey
junew@aiiche.org

GROUP PUBLISHER

Stephen R. Smith
steps@aiiche.org

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Staying on Top of Your Game

Chemical engineering has undergone a tremendous evolution since AIChE was founded in 1908, as the November 2008 Centennial Celebration issue of *CEP* so vividly illustrated. (If you missed that issue, you can find it at www.aiche.org/CEP/Issues/2008-11/index.aspx.)

One thing has remained constant over the years: AIChE meetings. Since the Institute's inception more than a century ago, chemical engineers have looked to AIChE's conferences as a great way to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills they need to do their jobs effectively.

For many years, the AIChE Spring National Meeting was held in conjunction with the Petrochemical and Refining Exposition — Petro Expo — at the Astrodome in Houston (the conference center and exhibit hall adjacent to the Astrodome.) It was heavily focused on refining and petrochemicals, and its Loss Prevention Symposium was essential to professionals involved in process safety. The Spring Meeting was *the* conference where industrial chemical engineers went to learn, share ideas, and network.

This year's Spring Meeting is rapidly approaching — it will take place March 21–25 at the Grand Hyatt in San Antonio, TX. In addition to sessions related to process safety and refining and petrochemicals, it will also include large segments of programming related to energy, process development, management, distillation, and environmental management. It will be *the* place to go to learn, share ideas, and network. The article on pp. 13–15 summarizes some of the meeting's highlights, as well as some of San Antonio's attractions.

With the explosive growth in information technology, it's tempting for us to rely on new media like Facebook, Twitter, Google, blogs and e-mail for gathering and sharing information. But there is no substitute for face-to-face networking. Sure, you can learn a lot by reading a speaker's paper or presentation slides, or by watching archived sessions on ChemE on Demand. But the benefits of being there in person — listening not only to the speakers' presentations but also to the questions and answers, and, perhaps more importantly, taking part in follow-up discussions with the other attendees — are immeasurable. Even the act of traveling to a common destination has been the catalyst for new business — I've written news stories and recruited authors based on conversations with fellow passengers on airplanes and airport shuttles.

Another constant is the hard work and dedication of the many volunteers who organize these meetings. What goes on behind the scenes for a year or so before the event may not be visible to the average meeting attendee, but without these individuals, the meetings would not be possible.

As the economy begins to show signs of turning around, the corporate accountants might start loosening the purse strings and freeing up some travel money. Now might be a good time to request some of those funds. What you take home from San Antonio will be certainly help you and your company stay on top of your game.

Cynthia F. Mascone
Editor-in-Chief

