

President's Message
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Each year the RAS President prepares a report on the Status of the Society to present to the AdCom. I delivered my final State of the Society report at the ICRA banquet in Taipei in September. As I complete my two year term as President of the Robotics and Automation Society, I would like to share the highlights of that report with you, the members of RAS.

The Robotics and Automation Society currently has 6091 members world wide. The work of the society is carried out by numerous volunteers and coordinated by the eighteen members of the Administrative Committee, who are elected by all the members of RAS. There are five boards: Technical Activities, Membership Activities, Financial Activities, Publications Activities, and Conferences. Each board is chaired by a Vice President, who is elected by the AdCom, and includes at least one AdCom member.

Technical Activities--VP Bruno Siciliano

Technical Activities are the lifeblood and *raison d'etre* of the Society. The members of the Technical Committees (TCs) monitor and explore leading-edge and emerging research fields. The TCs serve as incubators for the exploration of new research areas and the development of new research communities, and provide forums for communication. TCs promote the dissemination of R&A knowledge through journal and conference publications, the organization of special events (sessions of RAS conferences, special workshops, etc., sponsorship of Distinguished Lecturers), and websites.

Publications Activities Board --VP Richard Volz

This has been an exciting year for the Society's publications, as we prepare to introduce a new journal, *IEEE Transactions of Automation Science and Engineering (T-ASE)*, with Peter Luh as Editor-in-Chief. *T-ASE* will reach beyond the mass production roots of Automation to include biotechnology and health; transportation, security and maintenance; service, construction and retail; and food handling and processing. It will publish foundational research on Automation--scientific methods and technologies that improve efficiency, productivity, quality and reliability. *T-ASE* will publish its first issue in July 2004. (Subscriptions will be offered at a special half year rate with your IEEE renewal form.)

With the debut of its sister publication, the *IEEE Transactions on Robotics and Automation (T-RA)* will change its name. In August 2004 subscribers to *T-RA* will receive their first copies of *IEEE Transactions on Robotics (T-RO)*, with Alessandro De Luca as Editor-in-Chief. The change of name will not be just a facelift. As T-RO focuses on Robotics, our primary goal is to use our new format to expand the interest of this top-cited journal to innovative areas while keeping its traditional scientific quality and rigor.

T-RA and IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine (which you are now reading) have been ranked three years running by Science Citation Index as 1st and 3rd among robotics journals. RAS volunteers --the Editors-in-Chief, the editorial boards, hundreds of reviewers, aided by the highly professional IEEE publication staff, are responsible for the success of our publications. We anticipate that T-RO and T-ASE will uphold this standard of excellence.

RAS is also actively involved in several joint publications. With the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), RAS sponsors the *MEMS Journal*; with ASME and the IEEE Industrial Electronics Society, RAS is a sponsor of the *Transactions on Mechatronics*. In cooperation with other IEEE Societies, RAS is a sponsor of four other Transactions: *Nanotechnology*, *Nano Biosciences*, *Mobile Computing*, and *Sensors*. RAS is a technical cosponsor of the *Transactions on Intelligent Transportation*.

Conference Board --VP Norman Caplan

RAS conferences are recognized for high scientific quality, their combination of theory and application, their international coverage and participation, and their increasingly inter- and transdisciplinary focus,

particularly in such fields as medicine, transportation, and semiconductors. As with our publications, the success of the conferences is dependent on the hard work of volunteer organizers and reviewers. The contributions of the TCs in organizing focused meetings in new areas have been outstanding. These qualities have resulted in steadily increasing attendance at all our sponsored conferences. In addition to the meetings which RAS financially sponsors or co-sponsors, the Society acts as Technical Co-Sponsor for many other meetings.

Membership Activities Board --VP Aydan Erkmén

The Membership Activities Board is responsible for services to individual RAS members and chapters, who are scattered all over the globe. RAS is known worldwide for its technical leadership. To maintain this leadership role, the AdCom and the Membership Board must support and encourage all members. RAS membership has hovered at around 6000 since 1999. The membership survey of 2002 revealed that members perceived the society to be very strong in publications, conference and technical activities, but that members were less satisfied with local chapter support and educational opportunities offered by the society. In response to these concerns, the AdCom and the Membership Activities Board are striving to improve communications and provide more services, particularly in professional and technical education and training. Some of the ongoing and new efforts include:

- Increased support for the Distinguished Lecturers Program, which provides travel funds for speakers for RAS chapters and can bolster the development of cohesive R&A regional communities
- Support for students' participation in RAS events
- New RAS-IFRR Summer School of Robotics Science--look for news about this exciting initiative on the web and in the March 2004 issue of *RAM*.
- Collaboration with the RoboCup Federation.

Financial Activities Board--VP David Orin

The Financial Activities Board provides essential support to all RAS activities. This year has seen several new initiatives for the benefit of society members. These include:

- Establishing the new Transactions, *T-ASE* (>\$US 300,000).
- Educational activities, in particular the RAS-IFRR School of Robotics Science
- Establishment of the Robotics and Automation Technical Field Award. This IEEE Institute level award, which includes \$US 10,000 will recognize individuals who have made major contributions to the field.

Despite the adverse effects of the general world economic downturn, unforeseeable events like the 9-11 disaster and the SARS epidemic, both of which directly affected RAS activities, and some financial difficulties at the IEEE corporate level, the finances of the Society are generally in good shape. RAS has consistently maintained good control of expenditures, and the IEEE corporate departments have shown visible improvements this year over their control of expenditures, so that the worst is probably past. Thus RAS is ready and capable to plan new initiatives to the benefit of our members.

Standing Committee on Long Range Planning--President Elect Kazuo Tanie

Much yet needs to be done. Among the recommendations of the Long Range Planning Committee are that the society work to improve and expand its relationship with industry. To this end, we are establishing a new Vice President to head up an RAS Industrial Activities Board which will work to use our strengths as the leaders in cutting edge technology to encourage industry people to attend RAS conferences and participate in our activities.

Finally, amendments to the RAS Constitution and Bylaws are being discussed aimed at improving involvement of members (e.g., students) in RAS societal activities and the transparency of internal procedures, such as nominations for officers and awards.