



The Society on Wheels Revisited

I was sitting having a cup of coffee on a Monday morning before driving to work.

I was thinking about our successful meeting in San Francisco the week before; 1,579 papers and 1,650 attendees; brilliant and entertaining presentations by our plenary speaker Federico Capasso, our Gordon Moore Medalist C. Grant Willson, and our “For the Rest of Us” speaker Vijay K. Varadan; the chance to interact and discuss science with colleagues; and the opportunity to see so many good and trusted friends. I was feeling quite happy and content when it struck me that I had to have this article written by the coming Friday; only a few days to go.

Luckily inspiration was just a few feet away. As I got into my car an article in *Interface* entitled “The Society on Wheels” came to mind. In the article, published in the summer 1996 issue, the writer (Brian Rounsavill) muses “I was behind the wheel of a remarkable combination of scientific results...” and discusses how the “old” car represented scientific contributions from what were then our twelve Divisions and one Group. With the coffee starting to kick in, I thought about how cars and technology had changed since 1996. Now, as then, it is not hard to see how the scientific and engineering contributions from the academic, industrial, and government members of our Divisions (now 13 of them) contributed to the operation, comfort, efficiency, and reliability of this vehicle: its hybrid technology, a cell phone plugged into the car speaker system for hands-free operation, touch-screen controls, MP3 player, rear-view camera, and finally a built-in GPS system that tells me how to get to where I’m going. I was ready to

drive onto the road in the newest iteration of technological miracles—amazing to think of the advances in just 13 years.

From “The Society on Wheels” my mind shifted gears to “The Society in the World.” We have come to a time in which the scientific and engineering contributions of the ECS community are particularly relevant and critical to the needs of the world community. If we look at the stated priorities of various countries, we see the need for environmentally-friendly cars using less or no fossil fuel, solar power and other forms of renewable energy, sensors, batteries, fuel cells, displays, electronic materials, catalysis, chip technologies... the list can go on. When we look at what our scientists and engineers explore and bring to the marketplace, it is a veritable “parts” list of the world’s needs.

Technological developments are also essential for enhancing productivity and providing employment, which in turn, increase the standard of living. Scientific developments are critical to technology advances and productivity increases in virtually all fields. Add clean water technologies to the list of needs and I think it is safe to say that all the people who make ECS what it is have an opportunity to play a major role in bettering the human condition in the coming years. This will be accomplished by ECS providing a robust framework—of quality publications and strong meeting programs—enabling the exchange and stimulation of ideas that will guide the way forward. With this I wish you all inspiration, clarity of thought, and creativity as we travel this road.

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