

# SPE Foundation Supports, Augments Society Programs

Joel Parshall, *JPT* Features Editor

The SPE Foundation has a single purpose: to support and augment society programs through supplementing the normal funding capabilities of SPE. In carrying out its mission, the foundation helps to ensure excellence in SPE programs through a partnership among individuals, industry, and the society. The foundation is composed of all living past presidents of SPE and is directed by an executive committee comprising a president, past president, secretary, treasurer, and two vice presidents, as well as the sitting president and immediate past president of SPE.

Established in 1977 and legally incorporated as a nonprofit entity separate from SPE, the foundation raised the funds to build a permanent home for the society in Richardson, Texas. The Richardson office building was completed in 1984 and is owned by the SPE Foundation, which leases it to the society. Approximately 85% of the lease revenue is given back to SPE to support its programs. A major beneficiary is the Distinguished Lecturer program, which receives 50% of its yearly budget from the foundation. Voluntary contributions from SPE members help to support the foundation. While the foundation receives no funds from SPE members' annual dues, a dues-state-ment-checkoff option has facilitated contributions by enabling members to elect to contribute concurrently with their dues payments.

The foundation funds and administers the Gus Archie Memorial Scholarships, awarded to outstanding incoming college freshmen undertaking petroleum engineering curricula, and the Nico van Wingen Memorial Graduate Fellowships in Petroleum Engineering, awarded to SPE student chapter members at the PhD level who intend to pursue careers in academia.

When special SPE projects arise, the society can call upon the foundation to help fund them. During the 1990s, funds



**SPE Foundation members break ground for the new SPE headquarters in 1983.**

from the foundation helped to finance a society initiative to place all SPE technical papers on CD-ROMs. Then came the biggest project undertaken by the SPE Foundation since construction of the Richardson office—the highly successful effort to raise the funds needed to upgrade the spe.org website into a comprehensive knowledge portal connecting users online with the full spectrum of society, career, technical, educational, and industry resources available through SPE. Having committed USD 5 million of SPE funds to the project, the society turned to the foundation in 2000 to raise an equal amount to finance the balance of the initiative.

“We were delighted to see this come along; this was just the kind of thing we had wanted to do,” said Dennis Gregg, then immediate past president of the SPE Foundation and cochairperson of the fund-raising campaign along with Don Stacy, foundation president at the time.

In keeping with a foundation decision made at the outset, all funds solicitation was done by members of the SPE Foundation or the society. The foundation selected a campaign cabinet to carry out the funding drive and worked with a fund-raising consultant, who provided strategic advice.

“Dennis and I were ambivalent on hiring a consultant at first,” Stacy said.

“Naturally, we felt like doing our own thing. But they really proved their worth in helping us to structure our approach and then follow it. At first, I had the idea—and maybe Dennis did, too—of something like a United Way campaign, where you go all out for 60 days and wind it up at the end of October. To be quite blunt, that was a ridiculous idea in an industry where it sometimes takes 6 weeks just to get an appointment and then another 6 or 8 weeks, perhaps longer, to get an answer to your request.”

“The first thing we did was to solicit ourselves, all the former presidents; they all gave,” Gregg said. “We followed that by soliciting the (then-) current SPE board, and they all gave, and then we approached former board members, who likewise gave. All of the money raised totaled close to a half-million dollars. So that was a real good start. But most importantly, it was effective when we approached companies. We had ‘given at home.’”

The campaign cabinet decided which members would approach which companies, including major multinationals, midsize companies, independents, national oil companies, and service companies. The first large contribution, and biggest of the campaign, came from Chevron. “Once we got that, the train started leaving the station,” Stacy said. Other pledges, some of them quite large, were received. With that momentum, the campaign soon passed its goal—raising a total of USD 6.5 million. The enhancements to spe.org have now been implemented, and SPE will continue to add features.

Looking ahead, the SPE Foundation is seeking to further development efforts on behalf of the society. The Omega Association, established by the foundation in 1999, recognizes people who have made provisions for a planned gift, or have contributed USD 10,000 or more to SPE through the foundation. An ad-hoc analysis of how the foundation might improve awareness among society members about individual giving opportunities was completed

recently by a committee led by Trustee Bruce Bernard.

“At present, the foundation funds 50% of the annual cost of the Distinguished Lecturer program, which is probably one of the best-received programs that SPE offers its membership,” says Roy Koerner, SPE Foundation president. “That program probably runs about USD 400,000 per year, and we would like to be able to fund 100% of it.”

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Additionally, a committee under the leadership of Arlie Skov, the foundation’s immediate past president, is completing a long-range plan for the foundation that will be presented at its next board of trustees annual meeting, held in conjunction with the SPE Annual Technical Conference and Exhibition at Anaheim, California, in November.

“As we become increasingly global, we’re looking at what this means for the foundation, which is chartered and incorporated in the United States,” Skov said. “There are some legal requirements that may need to be met in various countries in order to give citizens there the opportunity to take full advantage of contributing to the foundation.”

In addition, the foundation informally serves as a forum to discuss ideas that may translate later into SPE initiatives or help initiatives already being developed. Recently, the foundation discussed the impact that industry growth and resurgent demand for petroleum engineers

is having on university petroleum engineering faculties, which is resulting in faculty shortages while student enrollments rise. The foundation executive committee expressed its concerns to the SPE board and volunteered foundation assistance that the board might find useful. A board initiative on this issue was already being developed, and to assist this effort, Gregg and other foundation trustees facilitated a series of meetings between SPE, the industry, and academia. A formal SPE initiative to mitigate the shortage has now been launched.

Another area the foundation has explored is ways in which the industry might improve its public image. A promising avenue the foundation identified is the opportunity for companies to use their expertise in drilling and maintaining wells to help provide safe drinking water, along with improved hygiene and sanitation, in developing countries where they operate. The foundation brought this idea to the SPE board’s attention. This led to successive columns recently published in *JPT* by SPE President

Abdul-Jaleel Al-Khalifa, foundation Trustee Lyn Arscott, and foundation President Koerner urging members and their employers to engage in voluntary service on behalf of society, including a discussion by Koerner of ongoing safe-drinking-water programs in which the industry could easily participate. An email link on spe.org has now been established to help interested members to learn more about these safe-water initiatives and to connect with their sponsoring agencies.

Looking back over the 30-year history of the SPE Foundation, Stacy said, “It has served its purpose well. The foundation has retained the support and guidance of senior members who otherwise might have faded from the scene after retirement. As a result, the foundation has been able to provide substantial financial resources to SPE’s various programs and work creatively as a partner with the SPE board to serve the society’s members.” **JPT**