A Leadership Challenge in 2009

As president of the IEEE Computer Society, I am going to ask each of you to take a moment to reflect on what your membership in the Society has meant to you. I will also ask you to share your personal experience with someone in 2009.

Many professionals do not understand the importance, contribution, and necessity of nonprofit technical organizations like the IEEE Computer Society. The Society, and organizations like it, are challenged with membership retention. One of the most interesting, albeit US-centric, statistics that I found is that “In the 1970s two-thirds of Americans belonged to organizations with regular meetings that they attended; that number had dropped to around one-third by the 1990s” (Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone, Simon & Schuster, 2000).

While there are many theories as to why this is occurring, the main concept that abounds is that in this digital age many have become too “digitally disconnected” to think about volunteer work or social organizations.

WHY JOIN AN ASSOCIATION?

There are many reasons why individuals join technical associations. When asked, people usually respond that they join because of the perceived benefits they receive. I classify these benefits into two categories: tangible and intangible. Tangible benefits are those that are immediately identifiable—material goods and services provided as an exchange for membership dues. Intangible benefits are harder to quantify or measure, but they are also a very important part of an association’s identity. Table 1 provides a list of what I see as some of the value offered by IEEE Computer Society membership today.

STRATEGIC FOCUS

The IEEE Computer Society Board of Governors remains focused on continuing the transformation of the Society so that we can provide increasing value to our membership. As previously mentioned, the Board is maintaining an emphasis on how we can properly position the Society to support our members and support future growth.

I feel extremely privileged to have been able to lead a collaborative team of outstanding thinkers during this, our sixth strategic planning cycle, which began in June 2007. It is the hope of all those who contributed to this effort that with the completion of the 2008 Strategic Plan, the vision and mission of the IEEE Computer Society will be refined and the forward thinking and definitive strategies required to support governance decisions will be provided.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIC GOALS

- **Goal 1.** Industry professionals and their employers will value the IEEE Computer Society as a major resource to achieve success through the identification of practitioner-focused activities, products, or services. For each activity, product, or service, newly proposed or already engaged, a clearly delineated community should be identified. In addition, prior to approval, all planning, return on investment, and implementation measures should be described.

   - **Goal 2.** The IEEE Computer Society will improve the professional competencies of students and...
professionals through education and certification and will be valued as a resource for software engineering certification.

- **Goal 3.** The IEEE Computer Society will provide a global forum for the world’s computing professionals, provided through online customized access to expertise, products, and services.

- **Goal 4.** The IEEE Computer Society should identify, document, and foster interoperability between stakeholders, both within and outside the Society.

- **Goal 5.** The IEEE Computer Society will focus on controlled planning and internal restructuring, making measurable improvements to the Society to reposition it for growth and renewal.

### THE 2009 TEAM

The 2009 Executive Committee includes past president Rangachar Kasturi, Douglas W. Hood Professor and chair of computer science and engineering at the University of South Florida; and president-elect James D. Isaak, retired from Digital Equipment, and teaching at various New Hampshire colleges.

John W. Walz, senior consultant at the Sutton Group, is the first vice president, Technical and Conference Activities. Alan Clements, professor at the University of Teesside, UK, is the second vice president, Educational Activities. Sattupathu V. Sankaran, IT consultant for SAP Labs, is the vice president for Chapters Activities. John Harauz, principal consultant, P.E., CSDP, at Jonic Systems Engineering Inc., is the vice president for Standards Activities. Sorel Reisman, managing director of the Merlot.org consortium and professor of information systems, California State University, Fullerton, is the vice president, Publications. James W. Moore, senior principal engineer for the Mitre Corporation, is the vice president for Professional Activities.

The Board secretary is David Alan Grier, associate professor of international science and technology policy and international affairs at George Washington University. Donald F. Shafer, chief technology officer at the Athens Group, will continue as the treasurer. As prescribed by Society bylaws, *Computer*’s editor in chief, Carl K. Chang, professor and chair of the Department of Computer Science, Iowa State University, is also a member of the Executive Committee.

In addition to Computer Society executive director Angela Burgess, the three members of the IEEE Board of Directors who are elected by Society members serve as nonvoting members of the Executive Committee: IEEE Division VIII Director Steven L. Diamond, president and CEO of Picosoft; IEEE Division V Director Deborah M. Cooper, founder and president of an independent consulting firm; and IEEE Division V Director-Elect Michael R. Williams, professor emeritus of computer science at the University of Calgary.

In 2009, George V. Cybenko will return for his second term as a member of the Board of Governors. Newly elected to the Board are Elisa Bertino, Ann DeMarle, David S. Ebert, David Alan Grier, Hironori Kasahara, and Steven L. Tanimoto.

I look forward to working with this excellent group of leaders in our field.

### EXPRESSION OF APPRECIATION

I would also like to thank a number of individuals who are completing their terms of service to our Society.

The following Society leaders completed terms on the Executive Committee in 2008: Joseph R. Bumblis, vice president for Technical and Conference Activities; Antonio Doria, vice president for Chapters Activities; Michel Israel, second vice president and secretary; Stephen B. Seidman, vice president for Educational Activities; and 2007-2008

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**Table 1. Benefits summary.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tangible benefits</th>
<th>Intangible benefits</th>
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<tr>
<td>Access to technical committee/council/and task force platforms</td>
<td>Enables technical vision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continuing education: 1,300 online course titles, approximately 3,500 online books, four e-newsletters</td>
<td>Supports desire to keep current in technical field</td>
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<tr>
<td>45 technical committees and councils/11 standards sponsors (900 standards)/local chapters/educational activities</td>
<td>Helps build a community of colleagues/peer networking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global membership with local chapters networks</td>
<td>Allows participation in local/regional activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700+ active standards, conference proceedings, and numerous other online materials</td>
<td>Supports creation of standards and dissemination of information relating to field of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topical working groups (for example, standards, technical), conferences, publications (e-mail, news, and networking services)</td>
<td>Affiliation—supports desire to belong to group of technically like-minded individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discounts: Conferences, certification preparation, publications, career networking</td>
<td>Supports development of career opportunities</td>
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**JANUARY 2009**
IEEE Division VIII Director Thomas W. Williams.

Departing from the Board of Governors at the end of 2008 were Richard H. Eckhouse, Gary McGraw, Robert H. Sloan, Makoto Takizawa, and Stephanie White.

I also would like to acknowledge the contributions of members of the Computer Society staff, including Anne Marie Kelly, associate executive director; Evan Butterfield, director of products and services; Violet S. Doan, director of membership development; John Miller, director of finance and accounting; Richard J. Price, director of sales and marketing; Ann Vu, director of business and product development; and Leo Wadsworth, interim director of information technology and services.

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT

I am issuing a personal challenge in 2009 to each IEEE Computer Society member. If you are not actively involved in the Society today, become more engaged this year (www.computer.org). Our vision is “To be the leading provider of technical information, community services, and personalized services to the world’s computing professionals.” Our association is only as good as the strength of its volunteer membership.

Here are some ways to become more active in the Computer Society this year:

• Submit a paper to one of the many Computer Society publications.
• Check out one of our 45 technical councils, technical committees, and task forces.
• Participate as a speaker or help organize one of our many conferences.
• Help any one of our 11 standards sponsors support the development of one of our 700+ active standards through balloting or as a member of a standards working group.
• Get involved and support your local IEEE Computer Society chapter.

I would also challenge each of you to describe your personal IEEE Computer Society experiences to a colleague. Nothing works quite like sitting down with an individual with whom you have a relationship—that individual down the hall who you respect—describing just how the Computer Society operates and the benefits that you have personally experienced as a member. These are the experiences that I describe when I speak to my friends. If each of us just took the time to speak with one or two individuals this year, what a difference we could make for the future of the IEEE Computer Society, its mission, and ultimately our profession.

Think about this for a moment: What will happen to the next generation of technologists if we do not recruit? As a member of the Board of Governors, I can tell you that our members are a central focus. As a board, we are aware that the needs of our members are changing. This changes the requirements for our methods of membership engagement and support.

I believe so strongly in giving back to the profession and to the Computer Society. I believe in the benefits that I personally have derived from the Computer Society, not just now, but those tangible and intangible benefits that I have enjoyed over the years.

The IEEE Computer Society is an organization that keeps me engaged and that I want to share with others.

Susan K. (Kathy) Land, CSDP, is employed by Mitre, a not-for-profit organization chartered to operate in the public interest, which manages three federally funded research and development centers for the US government. Contact her at skl@computer.org.