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Social Distancing

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As is certainly the case for many of you, I have found great value in my SPIE involvement to establish and strengthen professional networks in support of my career development, and to maintain insight into current research trends and advances. Some of that is achieved through written communications: journals, proceedings, and other technical publications. SPIE's primary strength, however, has always been in its organization of outstanding scientific conferences in optics and photonics. The personal interactions that occur during these conferences, ranging from the formal presentations to side discussions over coffee or in the hallways, have proven invaluable to me over the course of my career.

I have been thinking a lot about this as I have been spending more time at home than ever in my life, teleworking on a daily basis, and socially distancing myself from almost everyone in response to this COVID-19 pandemic. Had this not occurred, I would have just returned from the SPIE Defense and Security Sensing Symposium in Anaheim, California. Through my involvement as session chair, I certainly would have gained new insights into the latest work in infrared technology and hyperspectral remote sensing, and further strengthened my professional relationships with colleagues throughout the world who also regularly attend.

Not so this year. The pandemic forced SPIE to change the symposium into a virtual format with online posting of presentations and videos, and a forum for posting questions, answers, and comments. I really commend the SPIE staff for making the best of a difficult situation, and I found value in the virtual engagement from the safety of my own home throughout the week. I took advantage of the opportunity presented, downloaded and viewed many recorded presentations, and interacted through the online forum throughout the week. But I doubt that many who engaged in the digital forum would consider this a replacement for the richer professional interaction that is achievable in an in-person conference. Despite the advances in technology that allow us to effectively do many things at a distance, we still remain social creatures by nature.

Fortunately, the business of scholastic journals appears to have been minimally affected by the pandemic as we tend to do much of our work remotely anyway. Our staff has been mostly teleworking from home, and I see little difference in the interactions among the staff, editorial board, reviewers, and authors. With conferences being cancelled or moved to virtual format, I have reached out to a number of conference chairs asking them to consider special sections related to their conference topics. What better time than during a period of stay-at-home orders for SPIE conference presenters to spend the time to write up their recent work at a journal-quality level and submit it to *Optical Engineering*. Personally, I have taken advantage of the time away from meetings and travel to pursue a few research ideas that have been on the back burner for a while. You might use this time in a similar fashion.

It is difficult to know, at this point, how this pandemic will evolve across the globe. Clearly, it is having many significant near-term impacts, and there will undoubtedly be more long-term consequences to come. Most of these are and will be negative, some quite catastrophic, and my heart goes out to all those affected by the virus, especially our SPIE colleagues throughout the world who have been negatively affected. The impacts on scientific conferences are trivial by comparison to these life-threatening situations.

All trying situations, however, come with positives. On a daily basis throughout this crisis, we see people gracefully adapting to the difficult situation at hand, and many people—most notably our healthcare workers—who go above and beyond the call of duty for the sake of those in need. Stepping back from the situation, we see a bit more clearly what is really important in

this world, and one can take many positives from a retrospection like that. From a professional perspective, I look forward to getting back to a time when we can again routinely engage on a person-to-person level.

Like many of you, I pursued optics as a career because of the love of the science and have come to learn that it is really all about the people.