USAB 1981 Report

Last year, United States IEEE members achieved one of their major professional goals of the preceding eight years: widespread pension reform. The pension victory and other 1981 professional activities of the USAB are described in this report, along with plans for the future. The USAB is a volunteer group of IEEE members who meet voluntarily to respond to member needs and deliver member services. Work on employment, executive, Governmental interaction, and societal/technical concerns summarizes the 1981 USAB program.

Employment

Pension reform. In response to member surveys, the USAB made concentrated efforts over many years to achieve pension reform. IEEE studies concluded that since many company plans require 10 years or longer to vest, and numerous IEEE engineers change jobs in less than the 10-year period before becoming vested, many EEs were not vested. In addition, 64 percent of U.S. IEEE members were ineligible to establish tax-sheltered individual retirement accounts (IRAs), the USAB said, because Federal law prevented individuals already participating in company plans from establishing IRAs. And even those engineers who could participate in company plans may have found them wanting, thus the board argued, many EEs could be left without adequate pension funds accumulated through company plans or tax-advantaged IRAs.

Under the Economic Recovery Act, endorsed and supported by USAB, all employed individuals can contribute to IRAs. Now, EEs and others who may not vest in company plans have an IRA and may defer retirement savings, if they choose to take advantage of it.

In addition, following a three-year effort, USAB negotiated a group IRA for members. Richard J. Gowan, IEEE-80-81 Vice President of Professional Activities and USAB chairman, called the new tax a “major victory for the engineering profession,” involving “one of the most important efforts that USAB has made over the last decade.” Thus, a major goal of the IEEE pension effort has been met, the USAB is continuing to work on the pension issue. USAB volunteers met during September of last year to discuss ways of (1) encouraging members to invest in IRAs, (2) decreasing the vesting times required by conventional corporate retirement plans, and (3) opposing reductions of corporate pension plan benefits tied to Social Security increases.

Detroit gala. Another membership commitment is USAB, pinpointed high unemployment in the Detroit Southeastern Michigan Section, due to layoffs in the auto industry. Beginning in 1979, Professional Activities Committee and Section leaders, and IEEE officials, organized Section line jobs leads to a Southeastern Michigan hot line.

Finally, in the engineering manpower area, the USAB supported the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study on the engineering workforce. It also approved the recommendation of an interdivisional subcommittee on the implementation of an interdisciplinary program on engineering education.

Career concerns. Last October in Denver, the USAB Career Maintenance and Development Task Force organized the second national career conference in two years. Entitled “What’s Working to Enrich Engineers,” the conference was attended by 125 participants. Information on the conference proceedings available from the Washington Office.

Draub Uniform Code of Ethics. In November, the USAB Ethics Task Force submitted a draft conference in Washington, D.C.

The IEEE Washington Focus
A supplement provided by the IEEE Washington Office*

USAB organization

Under Dr. Gowan over the two years, the USAB completed a major reorganization of its activities, creating four major councils: the Membership Activities Council; the Governmental Activities Council; the Education Activities Council, and the Technology Activities Council. To make the board more responsive to members, a nominations and appointments committee was also designed to select candidates to head each of the four councils, as well as candidates to become the controller and national (PAC) chairman.

Professional Activities Committee. One volunteer calls the Professional Activities Committee (PAC) “the heart of the organization.” As noted above, PAC members in the Regional and Sectional Sections have been instrumental in initiating, supporting, and implementing USAB policies at the local, state, and Federal levels.

The PAC bi-monthly Report, Impact, informs PAC members about their counterparts in other Regions and Sections. Additional USAB publications such as the monthly Legislative Report and the quarterly Legislative Alert continue to provide members with current information. Other publications include the PAC flyer, booklet, and source booklets on such topics as pensions, patent rights, and ethics. These materials are incorporated and updated in the PAC Source Book.

Some $66,000 of USAB funds was distributed to the PACs through the Regions and the Divisions. These funds have been used by PACs for high school counseling projects. Another special practice, local sub data banks, seminars, workshops, continuing education programs, state/local government interaction, and newsletters.

Interaction with IEEE entities. Many of the 1981 USAB activities reflected the increased support cooperation of IEEE officers, committees, and outside organizations. For example, the Ethics Committee’s guide was made by the Ethics Committee and the IEEE Code of Ethics, which was made for all members of the IEEE.

The first time last year, the IEEE President participated in the National PAC Workshop held in Minneapolis, Minn. Also, President Robert W. Benson was joined by Robert W. Benson, IEEE President, Dr. Gowan, and other delegation members. Tax credits, USAB also supported legislation (later enacted into law) that gives R&D tax credits to high-technology manufacturers such as USAB members.

Societal/technical concerns

In addition to its major professional activities last year, the USAB was involved in numerous technical activities that have an impact on society.

Educational excellence. More than 400 individuals attended a conference to review a guide for evaluating nuclear power plants, hosted by the IEEE in conjunction with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. With the support of USAB, the meeting attracted individuals both in and outside the nuclear power industry to employ probabilistic risk assessment (PRA) techniques. The group produced a revised review guide that is undergoing further changes in a similar conference this year.

Professional Activities. Last year, the joint Technical Activities Board (TAB) and USAB ROD committee provided technical assistance.

Richard W. Benson, IEEE President (left) and Richard J. Gowan, IEEE-80-81 Vice President for Professional Activities, at the PAC Fair, held in Washington, D.C., in July.