

# unity in adversity

*staying connected during challenging times*

THE YEAR 2020 WAS A DIFFICULT one, and we are glad to put it behind us. We feared for our loved ones, we feared for our jobs, and we feared life would never be the same again. This is our new normal, and as hard as that is to accept, we must keep moving forward. In this month's "Leader's Corner" column, I want to reflect on the positive aspects I have seen and experienced this past year in my professional career and as a member of and volunteer for the IEEE Power & Energy Society (PES). This exercise has given me hope that we can survive the pandemic together.

As the PES vice president for Chapters, my role is to oversee the operation of the Society's professional and Student Chapters around the world. We currently have nearly 260 Chapters and 450 Student Chapters in more than 150 countries. PES Chapters provide the means for our Society to connect with members locally. Our Chapters are run by volunteers who are just like the people you work and live with in your community. They organize events to support the professional development of PES members in the community and provide them with networking opportunities. With the start of the pandemic, all local Chapter activities across the world were paused, but only for a brief period. Our volunteers regrouped and soon started organizing virtual events. Conferences and technical meetings

were transitioned to virtual events at low to no cost to our members. Distinguished lectures became webinars. Our "engines" were restarted and ran at a high speed in this new virtual world. As PES, we decided to not sit back but instead do just the opposite. We moved forward with strength and support for each other at the time we needed it the most.

## 2020 PES Student Congress

Let me tell you a story about the 2020 PES Student Congress. This biannual event was started in 2014, and our Society funds approximately 100 Student Chapters to send their representatives to this training and networking event. The event supports the growth of student membership and ensures that our Society continues to flourish for years to come. These young students will carry the torch lit by the inventors of electric power systems and founders of IEEE/AIEE more than 130 years ago. The fourth Student Congress was scheduled to be held August 2020 in Montréal in conjunction with the IEEE PES General Meeting. When it became clear that all IEEE conferences and events were being switched to virtual events, our orga-

nizing committee for the Student Congress was faced with an enormous challenge to create a first-ever virtual congress in an extremely short time and with many uncertainties, such as the number of potential attendees.

Our organizing team of student volunteers from Sri Lanka, Canada, Tunisia, and Brazil united to pull off an outstanding event. The virtual congress was free of charge, with registrations exceeding 2,000 student participants from across the world. The sessions included online competi-

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tions, debates, soft-skills training, multicultural events, leader forums, and training on how to run successful Student Chapters. The event was broadcast via social media outlets, and it was a huge success.

To make this happen, our student volunteer leaders donated hundreds of hours of their own time on weekends and evenings for one reason

only: the positive difference it would make for our members around the world. That truly mattered to them. This volunteering spirit is just one of the examples where I have witnessed the strength of our Society and the support and benefits that emerge when we work as a team.

## Become Involved in the PES

Students are the future of our Society, and this is emphasized in the PES's five-year strategic plan. We are currently seeing less participation in our Student Chapters at universities in North America, and fewer students are transitioning to PES membership upon graduation. All of us can do something to change that. No matter where you live in the world, please consider offering a free webinar. Talk to the students at your local university about your job and your career. Tell them why you find a career in the field of power and energy so worthwhile, and explain how they can benefit from being involved with our Society. If you can help create a new PES Student Chapter or revive an inactive one at your local university, please do so.

And if you work with a young colleague just out of school, encourage

him or her to join our PES community for a more successful and fulfilling career, just as you and I have experienced. Our Society's foundation is in the development of standards that have enabled us to build and operate arguably the most complex engineered systems known to humankind. Our technical committees are the perfect place for young professionals to grow and mature into technical leaders of the future.

I also encourage you to get in touch with a professional PES Chapter near you. It is very easy to find your nearest Chapter at <https://www.ieee-pes.org/pes-communities/chapters/chapter-locator>. Check out Chapter activities and consider giving a presentation about your professional interests. I challenge all PES Chapters, both student and professional, to organize at least one virtual event per month. You

can help reach that goal by both offering to present and participate virtually in presentations given by others.

If you are still wondering what is in it for you, active involvement with PES Chapters will help you build your professional network, learn new skills, stay up to date professionally, develop leadership skills, and be recognized for your accomplishments through PES Chapter awards. And along the way, you will also create friendships that will stay with you for life. There is absolutely nothing to lose and everything to gain.

I wish that you all stay safe and connected during these challenging times. You are welcome to reach out to me with questions or ideas at [mazana.armstrong@ieee.org](mailto:mazana.armstrong@ieee.org).



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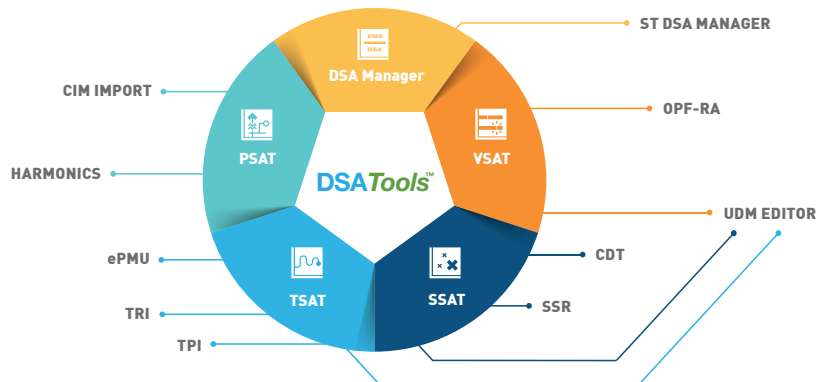
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