

SMPTE San Francisco Section – A Profile

By Joyce R. Hurwitz

The San Francisco Section is unique in many ways. In the view of Section Chairman Vernon L. Kipping, consultant, this is attributable to many factors. The first, and most important, element is people. The section is fortunate in having a number of dedicated people with both the knowledge of the industry and the requisite interest to give freely of their time and expertise. Kipping feels that there is a "spirit of sharing" that prevails – an auspicious combination of people and research activities, and their application to advancing and participating in communications technologies.

The geographical location and climate also contribute much, in Kipping's opinion, to the level of activity found in the San Francisco Bay Area. Also extremely important is the presence and proximity of such institutions of learning as the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford University, and the Stanford Research Institute, which support original study and development. Other educational facilities in the area, such as San Jose State University, San Francisco State University, Napa Valley College, and San Francisco City College, offer facilities as well.

Three student chapters of the Society have recently been established within the Bay Area: in 1990, at Napa Valley College School of Television, under advisor Prof. Gary Vann; in 1991, at San Jose State University, under the direction of Christin Hardman; and, also in 1991, at San Francisco State University, with co-advisors Evelyn K. Miller and Winston Tharp. These developments have inspired move-



San Francisco Section Chairman Vernon L. Kipping.

ments at other schools to establish student chapters.

The proximity of such leaders in the industry as Dolby Laboratories, Lucasfilm, Faroudja Laboratories, Zoetrope Studios, Ampex Corp., Lockheed, NASA-Ames Laboratory, and others all contribute significantly to the dynamics of the section. The strong support of Eastman Kodak Co. and its staff continues to be an important force as well. Also very essential is the support of local television broadcasters who have provided their facilities for meetings and have sponsored conference events such as the wine and cheese parties at several of the annual television conferences. The section's location near Silicon Valley, with its vast technological and intellectual resources, also creates a powerful force for activity.



Peter Hammar (R), Governor and Past Chairman, conversing with Gary Vann, faculty advisor of the Napa Valley College Student Chapter.

On a slightly different note, The San Francisco Section may be the only section with its own "navy." A former Coast Guard cutter, the 125-ft. *Alert*, has been made available to the section for bay cruises by its owner, member Barry Bose. The vessel has been used for technical sessions as well as for networking among SMPTE members. When it was unavailable, a similar vessel was provided by a local Sea Scout unit.

When asked to comment on what in his view gives the San Francisco Section its special character, SMPTE Governor Peter Hammar, Hammar Communications, replied that he believes it is the high concentration of video engineers in the Bay Area, who are involved in maintenance, operations, and design. There is also a large pool of design engineers in the region, and the fields of video and magnetic recording have spawned many distinguished careers.

SMPTE Sections Vice-President John A. Carlson, Monaco Labs and Video, has long been active in section affairs. He has served in many capacities, including chairman, secretary/treasurer, and manager. The section has also produced two former presidents of the Society, Charles E. Anderson and M. Carlos Kennedy. Former President Anderson, a member of the Ampex team that introduced videotape recording in 1956, is of the opinion that the San Francisco Section was largely responsible for the continuation of the Society's annual television conferences, which at the beginning did not attract a large attendance. Anderson also said that the section was responsible for introducing the idea of a theme, social activities during and after the conference, and the practice of a complementary exhibit with the papers (now discontinued). Television conferences have been held in San Francisco on the average of every two years since the 1970s. The most recent meeting, now called the 26th Annual SMPTE Advanced Television and Electronic Imaging Conference, was held in San Francisco on February 7-8, 1992.

Werner Ruhl, who was active as secretary/treasurer and chairman of the section in its early years, recalls that until about 1955, San Francisco and Los Angeles were included in the Pacific Coast Section, until San Francisco became a section in its own right. Some of his fellow members in the 1950s were Bill Palmer, R. A. Iseberg, Leo Diner, Harry Jacobs, Joe Roizen, Charles Anderson, Charles Ginsburg, Bill High, and Walter Ball. Some of the best meetings, in Ruhl's opinion, were a presentation of Cinerama at the Orpheum Theatre



Werner H. Ruhl, one of the section's early and most active members.

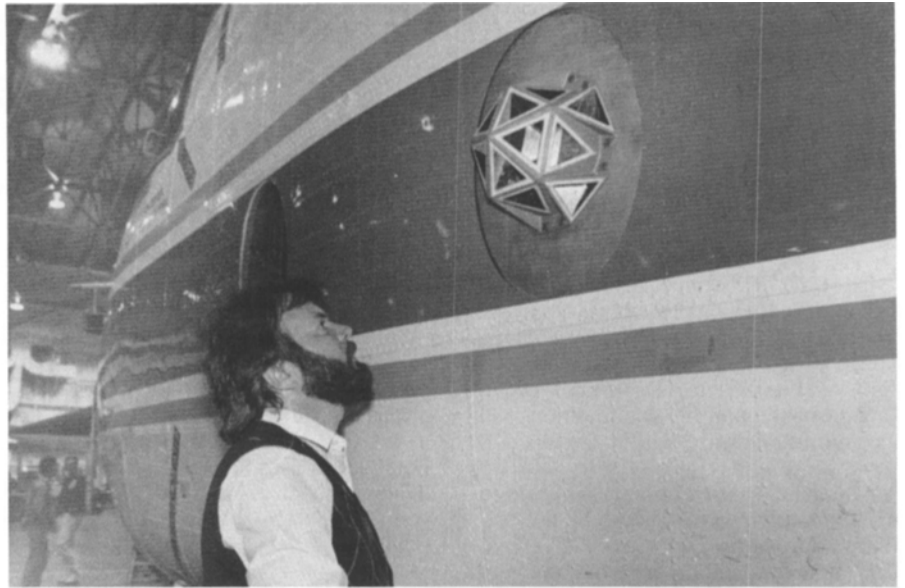
and another of Todd-AO at the Coronet Theatre, as well as Joe Roizen's talk and demonstration of the videotape recorder. In the early days of the San Francisco Section, many members of the Hollywood Section would fly up the coast to attend meetings.

Other memorable sessions include the May 8, 1979, meeting where the featured speaker was Dr. Elliott Levinthal, director of instrumentation, Research Laboratory of Stanford University. Dr. Levinthal spoke on the *Viking* mission to Mars and the technical aspect of the movie *Mars in 3-D*, based on data taken by the *Viking* orbiters using advanced computer techniques he had developed. The film includes scenes from the orbiter, science test lander, and actual scenes of the Martian surface. It was an incredible experience for those assembled to view scenes from Mars in both color and 3-D.

The section is seeking to improve means of communicating with its membership and to enable those living in remote geographical areas to participate in meetings or to be able to see them via delayed satellite telecast. It is also hoping to set up a telephone that can be used by members seeking last-minute information on meetings and changes in schedule.

The scope of the section's activities is demonstrated by its frequent contribution of meeting reports to the pages of the *SMPTA Journal*. Almost every issue contains a report from the section. For example, the October 1991 issue featured reports on the meetings held June 27 and July 25 of that year. Attendance ranged from 125 to 140.

The program at the June meeting focused on electronic news gathering and the vehicles that make it possible. To augment the talk, six mobile units were assembled in the parking lot of the studio, in addition to a helicopter and a boat docked



John A. Carlson, SMPTE Sections Vice-President, examines special prismatic observation port on NASA research aircraft during section activity.



At a typical section meeting, William A. Palmer (L) shows his Palmer Interlock to an interested attendee.

outside. Those attending were given the opportunity to examine the units, ask questions of the owners, and witness demonstrations. After about an hour, the 125 attendees assembled inside the studio for presentations on custom-built accessories designed for unusual television applications. Also described were the factors to be considered in the design and construction of large mobile units.

At the July meeting, the fundamentals of computer animation technology were explained. Show reels from Bay Area computer animation firms provided a suitable conclusion to the evening's activities.

Peter J. Ludé, Sony Communication Systems Division, serves as secretary/treasurer for the section and has been responsible for much of the programming. He is currently preparing a special presen-

tation for a meeting to be held in the near future, where he will discuss his company's role in the coverage of the Winter Olympics.

Recent section meetings have covered such diverse topics as multimedia development, computer animation technology, digital tape formats, computer graphics and special effects, Hi8 and S-VHS recording technologies, new products introduced, and an investigation into whether or not the radio/TV signals transmitted by Earth have been received by intelligent life in the universe. Needless to say, all of these topics have fueled lively discussions among attendees.

Many thanks to Section Chairman Vernon Kipping for sharing his memories and thoughts on what is clearly a labor of love for the San Francisco Section.