

Mashpee Pilot Project

In the May 1996 President's Message, I discussed the Society's role in educating future generations so that the growth and economic health of the industries we support is assured. The proposition placed before you was that as members of the Society, each of us should be involved in contributing to strengthening the foundation of our profession and educating the coming generations of technologists.

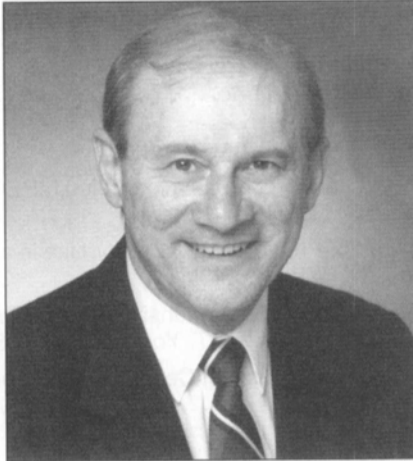
New Student Chapter Formed

Putting into practice what we preach, on April 25th, the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers inaugurated a new student chapter in Mashpee, Mass., and a new experiment in education began. What makes this group different from others is that the students who formed the Mashpee Student Chapter are high-school and middle-school students. They are experienced in videography, editing, and local television production. The school's contribution to programming covers local sporting events and other events of interest, including Board of Education meetings, and provides services to the community via a local cable channel. The work is done by the students under the guidance of the faculty advisors. The students are provided a learning experience, both in the classroom and by practice, and their work exhibits the exuberance and professionalism that only people who are really involved in a craft can bring.

In approving this new venture, the Society recognized that as the technical complexity of our industry increases with each passing year, those individuals who wish to succeed as professionals need to start learning their craft at an earlier age. Therefore, the Society agreed to support this pilot project on the coast of Cape Cod, less than an hour's drive from Plymouth Rock.

Practice Makes Professionals

The technical skills that the students bring to their work are impressive, given the few years that they have been exposed to the technology of television production. The convergence of digital technology and television technology is practiced on a daily basis, and the level of computer literacy within that group is high. These students understand the increases in capability that computer science brings to the television production environment



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and incorporate this into their work. Some of the students are adept at designing and implementing Web pages, others have applied their knowledge in the design and implementation of off-campus, local commercial video production and distribution facilities.

The idea of a Mashpee Student Chapter was developed by one of the student advisors, Michael Pietrowski, a long-time member of SMPTE. Mike and Robert Miceli, the other faculty advisor, were aided in the early organizational effort by John Brooks and Milt Shefter of our Hollywood Section, Paul Beck of our New England Section, and Dr. Piedad F. Robertson, president, Santa Monica College. During the development phase, the program has had the support of both John Carlson, the Society's past Sections Vice-President, and Fung Fai Lam, the Society's current Sections Vice-President. The project is supported by the Mashpee School Board and the Mashpee High School and Middle School administration, which understand the value of such a program and the advantages of association with SMPTE.

There are very few disciplines that bring together art and science like television and film production. The art forms represented by the Society rely very much on the technologies that supply the tools for creating the art, and this interaction and the opportunity to provide instruction that is both interesting and just plain "fun" is apparently well understood by the educators in Mashpee. A new Mashpee High School is scheduled to open in the autumn of 1996, and the facility is completely wired for television distribution. The students will

have a new and larger production facility to practice their art. . . and their science. The Mashpee Student Chapter is planning a mini-trade show in March 1997 at the new high school, and they are looking to the members of SMPTE to assist them in making this event a success.

The inaugural ceremony of the new chapter, which brought approximately 30 new Student and Active Members to the Society's ranks, was attended by local and state officials, as well as representatives of the Society. The ceremony was organized by the students and conducted by the Section Chairman, Jonathan Forsythe. Jonathan, who runs a tight ship, kept the evening's program on schedule. All of the speakers, including Representative Tom Cahir of the Massachusetts legislature; Beth Brown of the Massachusetts State Film Bureau; Paul Beck, SMPTE New England Section Secretary; Fred Motts, the Society's Executive Director, and myself, emphasized the potential of this new experiment by Mashpee in cooperation with SMPTE, and the possibilities of it serving as a model in other communities. Fung Lam has informed the Executive Committee that inquiries about the program have come from four other states.

Future Goals

The Mashpee program represents another mechanism that the Society is exploring to find new and better ways to fulfill our mission to the industries we serve. Those involved in the program, including Mike Pietrowski and Bob Miceli, the administration and board of the Mashpee School District, the members of the SMPTE New England Section, the Society's Executive Committee, and the Society's Sustaining Members (whose contributions make the support of Student Chapters possible) are to be congratulated for their willingness to explore new frontiers.

As with any other new effort, the Society and the Mashpee Student Chapter are sailing a somewhat uncharted course. We hope that by working together we can develop skills that will allow us to reach students throughout the world and permit them to benefit from exposure to the film and television arts and sciences at an early age. The goal is to help them become future outstanding contributors to those industries, so that the growth and economic health of the industries we support is assured.

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