

Biographical Sketch

Robert Shoberg

SMPTE

Vice-President

for Photonic Affairs

1982-1983



Robert Shoberg, President of Photonic Systems, Inc., is the SMPTE Vice-President for Photonic Affairs. A pioneer in photoinstrumentation, Shoberg established many of the original techniques for the photographic instrumentation used in the early missile programs. He worked closely with Dr. Werner von Braun, Dr. Kurt Debus, and other famous scientists at White Sands Missile Range and Red Stone Arsenal from 1947 to 1954.

Shoberg's entire career has been in the fields of high-speed photography, photoinstrumentation, and the extended field of photonics. Throughout his career he has been involved in the design and manufacture of high-speed cameras and photoinstrumentation equipment. He was largely responsible for the development of the single-shaft principle of image motion compensation in rotating prism cameras. Early developmental work was conducted in cooperation with A. Kent Boyd and, later, Ernest Whitley. The first rotating prism camera based on this principle was manufactured by Red Lake Laboratories.

After leaving White Sands Missile Range in 1954, Shoberg became Manager of the Fastax Division of Wallensak Optical Co. and, in 1958 he became Manager, Photo Products, Beckman & Whitley. He left Beckman & Whitley in 1961 to establish Red Lake Laboratories. The name of Red Lake Laboratories has something to do with Shoberg's favorite hobby, which is fishing. One of his favorite fishing grounds is Red Lake, an 800-mile-long lake in the northern part of Minnesota. The original logo was made in the shape of that lake.

In 1976, Shoberg became founder and president of Photonic Systems, Inc., where he continues with the development of high speed and instrumentation cameras.

SMPTE Activities

Shoberg joined the SMPTE in 1954 and he was made a Fellow in 1965. In 1973 he received the E. I. Du Pont Gold Medal Award "for his many contributions to the field of high speed photography and for his striving toward perfection in rotating prism cameras."

He was active for a number of years on the Photoinstrumentation Committee and currently serves on the Educational Advisory Committee, the Fellow Membership Committee, and the Progress Medal Award Committee. He is also a member of the Standards Committee.

Other activities include lecturing on high speed photography for a number of universities and scientific organizations.

Hobbies

As mentioned above, Shoberg's favorite hobby is fishing, and his favorite lake is Red Lake in his native Minnesota, which abounds in walleyed pike—a challenge to a dedicated fisherman. Red Lake is situated between Canada and North Dakota, and "it really gets cold there," Shoberg said, mentioning a temperature of 55° F below zero which he has experienced. Shoberg has done "a little" ice fishing, but he mentions ice fishing with no great enthusiasm.

Family

Shoberg's grandfather was born in

Sweden. Near the turn of the century he came to the United States, settling in Minnesota, where Shoberg spent his early years. He now lives in Sunnyvale, Calif., where his firm, Photonic Systems, is located.

Shoberg's wife, DeDe, often accompanies him to conferences, but his six children (four boys and two girls) have widely divergent interests. His daughter, Lyn, who works as a hostess for American Airlines, was chosen Hostess of the Year in 1982 from a field of 6,700 competing hostesses, and his daughter, Caren, is married to a TWA pilot. His son, Michael, who is active in labor relations, is president of the Postal Workers Union. John is president of a sheet metal corporation. Robert, Jr. is Production Control Manager for one of the divisions of the Grass Valley Group, and Charles is in the lumber business in Louisiana.

At the time of this interview, Shoberg was looking forward to visiting his young grandson and presenting him with a fishing rod, his very first.

Thoughts on High Speed Photography

Shoberg believes that the importance of high speed photography has not been sufficiently emphasized in recent years. He would like to "bring back the glory years," he said, when the invention of the strobe light by Harold Edgerton (with whom Shoberg was closely associated) opened up a whole new world of scientific exploration.

The first High Speed Photography Congress, held in Washington, D.C. in 1952, was a meaningful event to Shoberg. He presented a paper on High Speed Photography and the Missile Program (at that time he was Chief of the Photo Branch at White Sands Missile Range) and he recalls that during that first congress (and some of the subsequent ones) there was a strong feeling of enthusiasm for the developments in this field and great appreciation for its capabilities and what it could mean to science and industry.

Shoberg's dedication to his career is matched by his dedication to the SMPTE. "This Society is continually increasing in size, influence and prestige," he said. "After all," he added, "it is an international society and the importance of its services to science, to industry, and most of all to its members throughout the world cannot be overestimated." —Rae Hargrave