

SMPTE New York Section — A Profile

By Joyce R. Hurwitz

This article, featuring the New York Section, is intended to be the first in a series of articles on SMPTE local sections. Membership, of course, is the lifeblood of any organization, and the Society is no exception. In the words of Sections Vice-President Irwin W. Young, Du Art Film & Video, "SMPTE is more than standards — it's people."

Perhaps a little historical background might be helpful. When the Society of Motion Picture Engineers (SMPE) was first formed in 1916, it had a total membership of 23. A few years later it was deemed necessary to divide the growing membership into geographical areas, or sections, for meetings purposes. As set forth in the Bylaws and Constitution of the Society published in the *Transactions of the SMPE* in 1924, provisions were made for sections to be authorized in any state or locality where the active membership exceeded ten. Geographical boundaries would be determined by the Board of Governors, and local sections could be formed upon written petition signed by ten or more active members. Each section would nominate and elect a Chairman, two Managers, and a Secretary, and would be governed by a Board of Managers consisting of the Section Chairman, Past Chairman, the Secretary, and two Active Members. All members and honorary members of the Society in good standing, residing in that portion of any country set apart by the Board of Governors, are considered members of that Section.

An organizational meeting to form the New York Section of the Society was held on March 6, 1920, at the Engineering Societies Building in New York City. About 150 members were present, with SMPE President J. I. Crabtree, Eastman Kodak Co., acting as temporary chairman. At that time, the geographical boundaries for the Section were defined by the Board of Governors as an area enclosed within a circle having a radius of 50 miles from Times Square. At this first meeting, a motion was made that the Board of Governors reconsider this



New York Section Chairman Roger Salles.



Past Chairman Timothy J. Spitzer.

matter and recommend the boundaries as those of the metropolitan area. The present-day SMPTE New York Section covers this metropolitan area, including all of the boroughs of New York City and its suburbs, and adjacent areas of New Jersey and Connecticut. At the second meeting of the Section the following month, a Chairman, Secretary/Treasurer, and two Managers were elected.

The geographical diversity of the membership is what sets the New York Section apart from most of the others. This is both a boon and a hindrance, for various reasons. The main benefit is the richness of the New York metropolitan area, which contains all of the different disciplines found in the SMPTE. According to Section Past Chairman Timothy J. Spitzer, Du Art Video, the greatest advantage of the Section's New York location is that most of the leadership and financial headquarters of the major broadcasters, major laboratories, major manufacturers, and major post-production facilities are here — the Section has access to the heavy hitters of the industry. Another important advantage is that members can connect and interact with many people of allied interests. The Section is also able to present a wide range of topics and programs of interest to people in many different areas of the industry.

Current Section Chairman Roger J. Salles, Geocam Corp., concurs. Salles, who will serve as chairman for the 1989-1990 term, is attempting to strike a balance between tutorial, engineering, new products, and educational programs. He feels strongly that the Society must be viable and meet the needs of the members. The difficulties lie in trying to find topics that appeal to the broadest possible audience, so that the membership does not break off into various splinter groups. The Section encourages input from both members and visitors as to program content and what they would like to see the Society provide.

The New York Section has two special projects that it is attempting to bring into maturity — the Open Forum and the Industry Advisor Program. The Open Forum began some time in 1989, starting out with questions relating to the Society or the featured programs. In its current format, a segment of each meeting, usually following the program, is devoted to a discussion of any issues participants would like to bring up. Members can take advantage of the expertise of others in the audience in an informal atmosphere, with discussion and input from others in the field. The subjects are not necessarily related to that evening's presentation, but can relate to any area having to do with motion pictures or television. This is

especially helpful to the younger members of the Society, who can benefit from the others' experience, and it also helps to keep the members apprised of the latest techniques and controversy in the industry. A great deal of networking and information exchange takes place during these animated discussions. In a recent meeting, for instance, there was a lively exchange concerning the differing techniques used by post-production people on the East and West Coasts.

Interestingly, the concept of the Open Forum would seem to have been foreseen as early as 1927 by Dr. H. P. Gage, Society Vice-President, as published in the February 1927 *Transactions* of the Society. He commented, "The purpose of a scientific society is to enable workers in a given field to think out loud. Everybody who is pushing the field of knowledge beyond the point which it has already reached has got to work by himself in his own cubbyhole. After a while he goes stale, and then if he can meet his fellow men and think out loud, it will be an inspiration to him."

The second project the New York Section is involved in is its Industry Advisory Program — informally known as "Big Brother." This is a two-tiered program, just getting under way, wherein a young or student member is paired with a veteran advisor. This mentor relationship has obvious advantages to the student, while the veteran members have the benefit of coming into contact with fresh ideas and potential new talent for their companies. Contacts have been made with various educational institutions within the area, such as New York University, Brooklyn College, Fashion Institute of Technology, and the Institute of Audio Research, among others.

Jay H. Ballard, NBC-TV, is serving as Secretary/Treasurer for the 1989-90 term. He also feels that the New York area is of tremendous importance as a production center — this is where the money is spent. He would like to see the Section focus more on tutorial and other educational programs, not just of general interest but specific job-related seminars for television. Ballard feels that a lot of the older people in the industry are getting ready to retire and that it is an obligation of the Society to teach the up-and-coming new generation, espe-

cially the first-year practitioners, what is going on in the industry. He feels that the Society should be doing more in the sphere of tutorials and the exchange of ideas, since the industry has fragmented into many areas of special interests. There has been a large growth of new segments of the industry, such as post-production houses, which the Society must reach. Freelancers are also becoming much more important, and their needs must be met.

Ballard sees a need for more tutorial programs for the new generation, to update and refresh the knowledge in the face of rapidly changing technology. Last year the New York Section had an extremely good turnout for a program on Advanced Television. They are striving to reach new members by offering programs which will be of benefit in their everyday work.

In addition to Section Chairman Roger Salles and Secretary/Treasurer Jay Ballard, six members were elected to the Board of Managers. Paul Berger, Sony Communications Products; Norman Rosenshein, Unitel Video; and Linda A. Young, Du Art Film Laboratories, will serve as Managers for the term ending June 30, 1990. David A. Elliot, ABC-TV; Paul A. Heimbach, Home Box Office; and Mark Schubin, Technological Consultant, will serve through June 30, 1991. Michael Johnson, Eastman Kodak Co., doubles as Membership Chairman and Film Program Chairman, and Walter Druker, Compton Capital Corp., is Publicity Chairman for the Section.

The New York Section acts as host for the Society's Technical Conference and Equipment Exhibit, held in New York City every two years. Members make up the General Arrangements Committee, and take care of all of the non-program details associated with the conference. According to Tim Spitzer, they are planning to be exceptionally active during the upcoming conference in 1990.

One of the most successful meetings of the Section was the standing-room-only group of 125 members and guests attending the May 1989 meeting at HBO Studios. Peter Dare, Sony Communications Products Co., was the featured speaker. He described Sony's all-digital edit suite, which was introduced at the 1989 NAB show, and commented on the benefits



Secretary/Treasurer Jay Ballard addressing group at recent meeting.

and problems encountered in connecting a variety of digital devices in one system. Other very successful meetings have included visits to film studios in Astoria, special presentations at motion-picture and IMAX theaters, and visits to broadcasting studios and post-production centers. Members are frequently polled by the Section to determine what sort of programs they would like to see presented at future meetings.

The Section is trying to serve members by holding meetings right after work to accommodate commuters, so that they can get home relatively early. Every SMPTE member in the greater metropolitan area is automatically a member of the New York Section. Meeting notices are sent out monthly to 1100 members, but only a small number participate. The average number at the meetings ranges from about 50 to 75, with a turnout of about 150 reported for special presentations such as the November 1989 meeting on digital post-production held at the screening room of Warner Communications in Rockefeller Center.

Members are urged to come to their local section meetings — they may be passing up a chance to keep abreast of the latest happenings at no extra cost. In addition to receiving the monthly *SMPTE Journal* as part of their affiliation, members can use the monthly section meetings to network with other people with similar interests and catch up on the latest trends in the industry. The New York Section, as well as all of the Society's sections, invites all members to become active participants.