

Toronto's "Boot Camp" Seminars Act as a Driver for SMPTE Membership

By Mike Prest and Brad Fortner

The Toronto Section came first in the SMPTE "Recruit-a-Member Campaign" contest mainly because the campaign undertaken by the Society to increase membership coincided with the Section's May 2008 Boot Camp III technical seminar. In fact though, the Toronto Section has a long history of innovation in both driving new SMPTE membership, and adding to the value of membership.

A quarter century ago, when an active dialog existed among the Montreal, Toronto, and Rochester Sections, the Toronto Section worked closely with these Sections to develop a series of SMPTE mini-conferences that rotated between the three cities each year. Toronto also pioneered the concept of its January "satellite meeting" to be transmitted by satellite and organized to "conference-level" quality. This unique meeting allowed other SMPTE Sections, members in remote regions of Canada and in underserved areas in the U.S., to tune in to a SMPTE meeting. It allowed remote viewers to interact by calling in questions as if they were in attendance at the meeting. For many, this was the only interaction with other members in the Society outside of their area.

TORONTO'S SEMINAR HISTORY

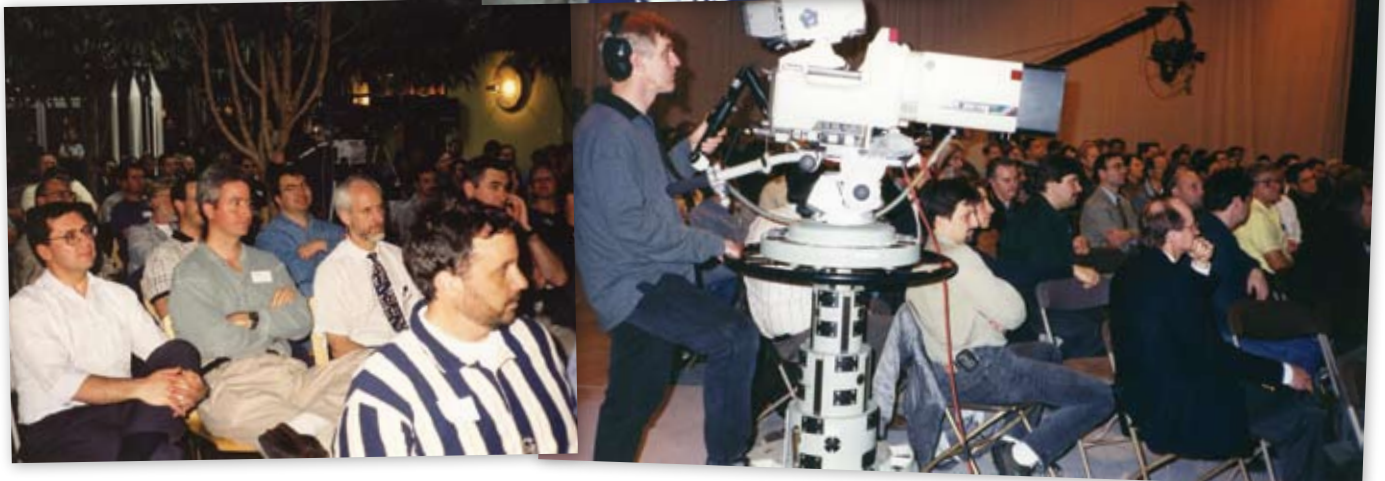
In 1994, the Toronto Section hosted its first technical seminar, which grew from an idea posed by Fung Lam, then Canadian Governor, to Fred Benedikt, then Toronto Section Chair. Lam was passionate about life-long-learning

and wanted to address multiple industry and SMPTE problems:

- The broadcast industry had rapid technology change.
- The broadcast technical community needed knowledge to cope with this change and to deal with existing and future technical production equipment.
- Many SMPTE members simply could not attend SMPTE conferences.
- Many SMPTE members did not have easy access to technical experts.
- A desire to increase Toronto Section membership.
- A desire to provide additional benefits for SMPTE membership.

The seminars provided for an in-depth understanding and familiarity with the skills necessary to deal with evolving industry technology. Attendance was limited to approximately 50 members providing for a hands-on experience in a casual and non-intimidating environment. They proved to be very popular with local members,

often selling out within a day or two of their announcement. Eventually these gave way to a series of two-day "Experience" conferences. Designed to accommodate more members these events holistically examined the workflows of post-production, movie production, and television production from all aspects of the business. These were overseen by Harvey Rogers who was later recognized with a SMPTE Citation for Outstanding





Service for his efforts in producing the events, which attracted hundreds of participants and new SMPTE members.

Since 2002 the seminar events, which occur 18 months apart, have now become “Boot Camp” themed seminars. The Toronto Section borrowed the title “HD Boot Camp” from the Rocky Mountain Section and for the first boot camp underestimated the overwhelming demand for the event, selling out a venue that had only 130 seats. That first event grew membership by 50. The Section’s second boot camp again sold all of its 220 seats and 80 new members were added. In May 2008 there were 230 attendees to Boot Camp III, bringing close to 100 new SMPTE members.

OPERATING A SUCCESSFUL BOOT CAMP

To run a successful boot camp the Toronto Section has discovered that the program needs to be extremely focused and based around a timely theme. Ideally, the presentations should provide a mixture of forward-thinking topics and papers of practical implementations that relate to technologies of the day. The agenda is intense and concentrated, with 20 papers delivered in one stream over two days. Boot Camp III included an 8 am to 6 pm conference agenda, meals, and a social event. Sponsorship funding, which was entirely raised locally by the seminar committee, allowed SMPTE members to attend the event at a very low \$99 admission fee and included refreshments and meals. Providing meals allowed for a fuller schedule and for networking opportunities between attendees and presenters. To encourage networking, the organizers streamed video and audio of the sessions live to a separate overflow/refreshment area so attendees could gather, and still monitor the sessions while networking.

Keynote speakers were added to the program to provide perspective beyond specific instances of technology. This year they included Mark Schubin, who presented a paper on human perception and its relationship to HDTV, and Bill Buxton who shared his perspectives on the film industry and how newer technologies can be employed to compete with higher budgeted movies.

New to Boot Camp III was a mini tradeshow that featured 20 vendors and included demonstrations of 3-D movie technology and live Virtual Set technology. The tradeshow was very popular and there have been requests to improve on and expand it for the next event.

Toronto’s boot camps have been highly rated by the attendees and presenters. They are seen as a major membership benefit in Toronto and would be beneficial for other Sections as well.

WHAT CAN OTHER SECTIONS LEARN FROM TORONTO’S EXPERIENCE?

The logistics of the boot camp are tremendous; the conference committee devoted over 1,000 hours to organizing the event. The support available for the event from SMPTE headquarters was limited to an advertisement about Boot Camp III in the *Journal* and it was featured on the SMPTE website main page. Everything else was accomplished locally including the design of local advertising “from scratch;” the design and sourcing of a conference bag,

and the design and implementation of an e-commerce solution for collecting money and registrations. The entire event was funded locally through money raised by the committee.

RUNNING A CONFERENCE EVERY YEAR OR TWO TO DRIVE LOCAL MEMBERSHIP IS NOT ENOUGH

Toronto, like many other media production centers, has been a victim of corporate concentration and technological change that has lessened the base on which SMPTE has historically drawn its membership. However, the number of members in the Section is stable and increasing from a decade ago. Membership in SMPTE relies on the strength and efforts of those on the local Section’s board of managers and the quality of local SMPTE meetings. Although local conferences may be one driver for membership, having a strong board of managers that undertake the delivery of local Section meetings adds the “glue” to retain membership. The Toronto Section operates an augmented board, which includes the Section Chair, Past Chair, Secretary/Treasurer, and four elected managers who serve two-year overlapping terms. The board also has four “manager-at-large” positions that allow for additional volunteer involvement in the local Section’s management. This structure allows managers to be paired to organize each meeting; programs are developed to be “manufacturer-neutral and non-commercial” staying true to SMPTE’s organizational mandate of providing well-rounded technical knowledge. Another innovation is the “live internet stream” of the meetings, and an archive of past meetings accessible to members. There are also “members only” events such as facility tours or other special events to add further value to membership.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

For Toronto, membership in SMPTE dates back to the Society’s formation, when in 1918 Bill Redpath became the first Canadian to join SMPTE. His Toronto-based company Pathe, manufactured portable motion picture machines. Redpath, who was one of Canada’s film industry trailblazers, had a Vaudeville act that included film projection as part of the show and then he traveled Canada’s train lines, projecting films on large sheets attached to the side of trains in Western Canada. For many Canadians those projections would prove to be their first motion picture experience. His early *SMPE Journals*, which date back to volume 1, exist to this day and are stored at the university where the Toronto Section meets.

The Toronto Section, as it operates today, really took root in 1952. That was the year that electronic television broadcasting started in the city. At that time, Redpath teamed up with Ron Ringler and revived the Toronto Section, which had been dormant since the start of World War II.

Today, the 12-person board of managers is made up of individuals from all sectors of the SMPTE family. It is a formula that many Toronto SMPTE members find essential and that is proven when the Section of about 450 members attracts as many as 200 to a Section meeting.