



## President's Column

Alan E. Willner



### **“(In)Coherent Reflections of Alan Willner, LEOS Member”**

*“The greatest reward for working in this field is the opportunity to interact with [LEOS] colleagues and to all I offer my thanks and friendship.” Gary Eden, when receiving the 2005 Aron Kressel LEOS Award.*

I write my last column with much happiness. Indeed, it was a wonderful privilege and deep pleasure to serve my community as President of LEOS. I am greatly enriched by having worked closely with numerous dedicated, bright, and selfless individuals. There is really no better way to express my grateful feelings than to quote Gary Eden above. No commentary is required.

*“John Wayne, American.” Inscription on a special U.S. postage stamp after the actor passed away.*

At this year's LEOS Annual Meeting, I was handed a conference registration badge. Below my name, it said simply “Member.” No ribbons, no special Presidential designation. I was so proud to wear that badge since the most prized affiliation is LEOS Member. This reminded me of an instance when I was at AT&T Bell Labs, and someone pointed out an article that was co-authored by the President, an Executive Director, and a Member of Technical Staff at Bell Labs. The by-line simply stated that all three were “Members of the Technical Staff,” a title that remained their most fundamental, valuable and unchanging essence.

LEOS is not about seeking honor but about bestowing honor. People are asked to serve and are nominated for awards. As stated in Ethics of our Fathers, *“Let the honor of your fellow be as dear to you as your own.”* That is what we are all about.

As President, I served our community and enjoyed it. My term is nearly over, and I happily hand over the position to the extremely capable hands of John Marsh, LEOS President 2008. Although I will be LEOS Past President for the next 2 years, I remain with the title of LEOS Member, thrilled to be part of our community and willing to volunteer for our society.

### *LASER: Light Emission by Stimulated Emission of Radiation*

What starts a laser? It is spontaneous emission. It has been said many times that you need to be both good and lucky to have a successful career. Even the most coherent thing we know needs to have a good design (i.e., stimulated emission inside a resonant cavity) and requires luck (spontaneity). LEOS has helped me personally to be good and lucky. Publications, awards, committees – all important venues for being good. However, LEOS' high-quality activities and publications create many points of contact that maximize the probabilities of being lucky and

making the right connection. I am a case in point. I had just been offered a position at AT&T Bell Labs to work with Ivan Kaminow when the June 1988 LEOS Newsletter arrived in my mailbox. As a young student, I was impressed that the section highlighting CLEO had a photo of Ivan. I asked several people, and it was clear that Ivan was a famous fellow. Deal sealed, and I went to work for him. How many people do I presently interact with that I met casually 20 years ago at a LEOS event? Many!

*"Youth is wasted on the young." George Bernard Shaw, Nobel Laureate in Literature.*

NOT! I was struck by the number of students that attended the LEOS Annual Meeting this year. How can a person NOT be energized about our vibrant future when seeing the camaraderie they display and the high quality papers they deliver!! As I looked out at the packed Awards Reception, I saw our youth and our elders, such as Henry Kressel (LEOS' first President), Tom Giallorenzi, and Gordon Day. I felt warm and cozy being blanketed by the bedrock from our past and the hope from our future. I will state that my most pleasurable activity as President was signing the Graduate Student Fellowship Certificates, knowing that I am the representative of something very special to a young person and helping to plant a seed for a bright future!

*LEOS Has Out-sized Technical Influence*

We are blessed with a plethora of outstanding people, and our technologies have impacted many aspects of society. Just for fun, I scanned the list of winners of the IEEE Medal of Honor, IEEE's highest award, during the 30 years of LEOS' history. Of the past 30 winners, an astounding 10 are associated with technologies that are part of LEOS. This monumental contribution comes from a society that represents less than 2% of the IEEE membership!! What would communications, medicine, consumer electronics, spectroscopy, manufacturing, sensing, and lighting be without us? I am tingling with anticipation just by thinking about other markets that could be dramatically influenced by our technologies.

#### *Lesson Learned*

*"Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? He who learns from all people." Ethics of Our Fathers.*

Perhaps the most valuable lesson I learned is that our members approach issues from very different viewpoints, but nearly everyone has the best interests of the society at heart. Once I truly absorbed this, I would listen to differing opinions and just marvel at the insights that our people have, even if I disagreed with them. My respect of, appreciation for, and closeness to these people only increased.

Due to being intimately involved with governance, my appreciation for LEOS as an organization also dramatically increased. As our guiding principle, LEOS exists for our members. A simple yet powerful example of this is the \_ page advertisement in a previous LEOS Newsletter for educational activities by a different professional photonics society, that being SPIE. I don't think you will find Newsweek Magazine being advertised in the pages of Time Magazine, since they are competitive corporations. LEOS is a non-profit organization that has the best interests of its members at heart, and if taking a course by SPIE has value to the members, then that's considered good.

I am extremely proud to be a member of such an organization.

#### *Heartfelt Appreciation*

In my first column in Feb. 2006, I listed a cadre of people whom I owed a debt of gratitude from before becoming LEOS President. The list of people to whom I am indebted has grown significantly. Due to simple practical limitations of space, I will limit my deepest appreciation to just a few individuals:

to Rich Linke, my outstanding partner.  
to Gail Walters, the heart and soul of LEOS.  
to all Staff, whom I greatly respect and who are my extended family.  
to Scott Hinton, my wise mentor.  
to John Marsh, the extremely able keeper of our future.  
to my students, from whom I have learned more than they have learned from me.  
to my colleagues, who make every professional activity both exciting and enjoyable.  
to my teachers, primarily Drs. Ivan Kaminow, Tingye Li, and Richard Osgood.  
to my parents, whose guidance, support, encouragement and love will always be with me.

Most importantly, I want to give my most heartfelt appreciation to my loving wife, Michelle, and our wonderful children, Moshe, Asher, Ari, and Jacob. Michelle was with me at my first LEOS volunteer activity (LEOS Annual 1992 in Boston) and was with me as I finished being LEOS President (LEOS Annual 2007 in Orlando). My volunteer activities are due to her understanding and patience. My family is my rock.

*Respectfully submitted,  
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*LEOS Staff and Willner family at the 2007 Annual Meeting in Orlando.*

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