

GROWING MEMBERSHIP AND EXPANDING VALUE TO OUR MEMBERS

This month, I am pleased to introduce Nei Kato, Vice-President for Membership and Global Activities (MGA), who will share with us his plans for enhancing member benefits as well as for attracting new members and retaining existing ones through the development of value-added programs and new services.

Nei Kato is a full professor with the Graduate School of Information Sciences and the Director of the Research Organization of Electrical Communication (ROEC), Tohoku University, Japan. He has been engaged in research on computer networking, wireless mobile communications, satellite communications, ad hoc & sensor & mesh networks, smart grid, IoT, Big Data, and pattern recognition. He served as the Editor-in-Chief of *IEEE Network* (2015–2017), a Member-at-Large on the IEEE Communications Society Board of Governors, (2014–2016), the Chair of the Satellite and Space Communications Technical Committee (2010–2012), and the Ad Hoc & Sensor Networks Technical Committee (2014–2015) of ComSoc. He is a Distinguished Lecturer of ComSoc and a fellow of IEEE.

In this short message, we first want to share with you some of the results and numbers from 2018 as well as information about this year's initiatives. To start with, we absolutely must say thank you to some special people we had the luck of working with: Prof. Saewong Bahk, AP Region Director; Prof. Adlen Ksentini, EMEA Region Director; Prof. Lisandro Zambenedetti Granville, LA Region Director; Prof. Wahab Almuhtadi, NA Region Director; Prof. Song Guo, Director of Member Services; and Prof. Octavia Dobre, Director of Sister and Related Societies. All accomplishments during 2018 are in a huge part thanks to those people and of course because of the hard work of all of our chapter chairs, enthusiastic volunteers and the assistance of the ComSoc staff members. Once again, thank you for all your help and work.

In 2018 and the beginning of 2019 we have remained in close contact with ComSoc chapters across the planet, keeping a careful eye on their progress regarding membership numbers and recruitment. The objective was to motivate actions geared toward attracting new members as well as the renewal and maintenance of current members. Additionally, in 2018 we had our first ever iteration of the Membership and Global Activities Contribution Award, given to individuals or small groups that had exceptional efforts and results in recruiting and maintaining members in their local chapters.

This special attention has already started to pay dividends. In ComSoc and in most other similar institutions, membership growth is usually assessed by comparing the same month in different years (e.g. comparing January 2019 to January 2018 and January 2017). The reason behind this is that there are recurring trends across the year created by the grace period and membership durations in ComSoc. For example, there is always a huge dip in membership numbers in February due to non-renewals after the end of the grace period for members who joined at the beginning of the year. Since January 2018, we had 11 occa-



Khaled B. Letaief



Nei Kato

sions where there was a growth in membership numbers when comparing with the same month one year prior. This is extremely positive since ComSoc had a constant decrease in membership since 2015, with no positive months until May 2018. Once again, if 2018 was a more steady year than what we grew accustomed to it was because of the work of our board of directors and especially due to efforts from the many chapter chairs and volunteers. Many scientific institutions have dealt with problems regarding membership recently, so we are very proud that ComSoc is starting to turn this around. Of course, to keep this up and possibly do even better will not be easy, but we will work hard toward this and count on the continued support of everyone. The only road to success goes through us working together.

Nonetheless, despite a more stable year in 2018 regarding the number of members, we still have a long way to go. As of June 2019, we currently have 24280 active members. That is an approximately 1500 drop when compared to 2018. Clearly, much work is still needed. A special note to chapters in the NA Region, which has seen significant drops across most of its sections. For instance, the Boston, Baltimore, Vancouver, Dallas, Northern Virginia and Seattle Sections have all seen decreases of 15 members or more each since 2017. This is an urgent issue and we need to put special attention and work in this region so we can reverse this trend together. Of course, we count on help from the leaders and chairs of the local chapters in that region in order to make this possible.

In 2019, one of our initiatives to motivate member growth across all regions is a change in the funding allocation policy of ComSoc chapters. All chapters receive a baseline funding of US\$1500. This is a huge increase compared to 2018, a decision that we reached after evaluating the budget applications of all the chapters. On top of that, chapters that manage a net gain of three in the number of members over the year will receive an extra US\$500. This is a significative incentive and I sincerely hope that more and more chapters will attempt to achieve this goal, especially by informing local students of the benefits of a ComSoc membership, so they feel compelled to join and stay with our society. It is a ComSoc objective to establish ourselves as the leading organization for advancing both science and industry. The closer we get to this goal, the easier it will be to retain and obtain new members.

We are very excited about 2019 and hope we at MGA can do even better than 2018. More specifically, we hope our chapters can increase their number of members and we will work closely with them to make that possible. Let's keep working together to bring new talent to ComSoc in 2019, in particular student and graduate student members, who represent the future of ComSoc. Starting in late 2019 and following a new initiative by the ComSoc President, our Board of Governors has approved a one dollar membership fee for all ComSoc students, clearly indicating our strong commitment to our students.