

Greetings From the 2020 IEEE Robotics and Automation Society President

By Seth Hutchinson

In January 2018, Wolfram Burgard officially began his term as president-elect of the IEEE Robotics and Automation Society (RAS). Normally, the president-elect enjoys a two-year term that affords time for dreaming, planning, choosing a team, and generally laying the groundwork for a two-year term as president, during which time the team executes the plan to realize the dreams. In February 2018, mere weeks into his term as president-elect, events conspired to disrupt the normal process. Ning Xi, who had begun his term as president at the start of the year, was removed from office in March. Burgard immediately assumed the role of president of the RAS. There would be no two-year period of preparation; the term would be shorter than normal, ending in December 2019, and, perhaps most significantly, the term would begin in a climate of uncertainty and apprehension as a result of the circumstances surrounding the change in Society leadership.

During this period of transition and throughout Burgard's presidency, I served first as a member of the Society's Administrative Committee and then as his successor president-elect. In those roles, I had a front row seat from which to watch him guide our Society through difficult times. Like many of you, I had known Burgard for years as a researcher, but this was my first chance to work with him as a Society leader.

His leadership skills are rivaled only by his scholarship. He has been thoughtful, deliberate, well reasoned, and steady. At the end of his term, our Society had not only weathered storms; it had emerged stronger, more stable, and better positioned at the leading edge of robotics, one of today's most dynamic and exciting research fields.

By the numbers, our Society is stronger than ever. We now have more than 15,000 members, making us the fifth-largest Society within the IEEE. We have over 300 local Chapters, including 225 student branch Chapters. We sponsor or cosponsor more than 75 conferences, workshops, and symposia and are financially responsible for more than one-third of these. Participation at the 2019 IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation, our flagship conference, numbered over 4,000 registered attendees, a record turnout. Our journals received more than 4,000 submissions in 2019, up from fewer than 3,000 in 2017, and *IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters* published more than 1,000 articles in the past two years, making it the number one publisher of articles in the field of robotics and automation.

Quantity is not, of course, a reliable measure of quality, but I'm happy to report that, by objective measures, the quality of our Society has steadily improved over the past two years. For 2018 (the most recent year for which data are available), all of our periodicals had record-high values for their impact



factors. In robotics, *IEEE Transactions on Robotics* was ranked second by impact factor (trailing only *Science Robotics*), and its articles were cited more than 15,000 times, by far the largest number of citations to any

robotics periodical (including *Science Robotics*, which received fewer than 1,000 citations over the same period). We successfully launched the new *IEEE Transactions on Medical Robotics and Bionics* in 2018 and have taken over the leadership and development of *IEEE Transactions on Haptics*, broadening our scope in robotics research. The IEEE has taken note of our Society's success, launching its own webpage devoted to robots as well as a section of *IEEE Spectrum* dedicated to developments in robotics.

Additionally, in the past two years our Society has begun numerous activities that aim to make a positive impact beyond our technical contributions. Within our Society, we are in the process of developing a comprehensive code of conduct and establishing the Committee to Aid Reporting on Misconduct Concerns. Together, these initiatives will help to rigorously define and vigorously enforce our Society's core values, particularly regarding abuse, discrimination, and harassment. Beyond our Society, a newly appointed ad hoc committee has been tasked with developing a comprehensive strategy for our educational programs, pulling together activities ranging from our program for Creation of Educational Material in Robotics and Automation



Figure 1. RAS immediate Past President Wolfram Burgard (left) and current RAS President Seth Hutchinson.

and Technical Education Programs to the tutorials and workshops held at our conferences. To reach beyond our typical constituencies, we have enhanced our Developing Countries Faculty Engagement Program, which provides grants and one-on-one mentorship to faculty members in developing countries, allowing them to attend our conferences and helping them develop professional networks within their research domain.

Looking back over the past two years, I'm proud of the way our Society responded to a moment of adversity, impressed with Burgard's leadership in difficult times, and inspired by what the future holds for us. It is a privilege for me to follow him as RAS president for the next two years (Figure 1). *BA*

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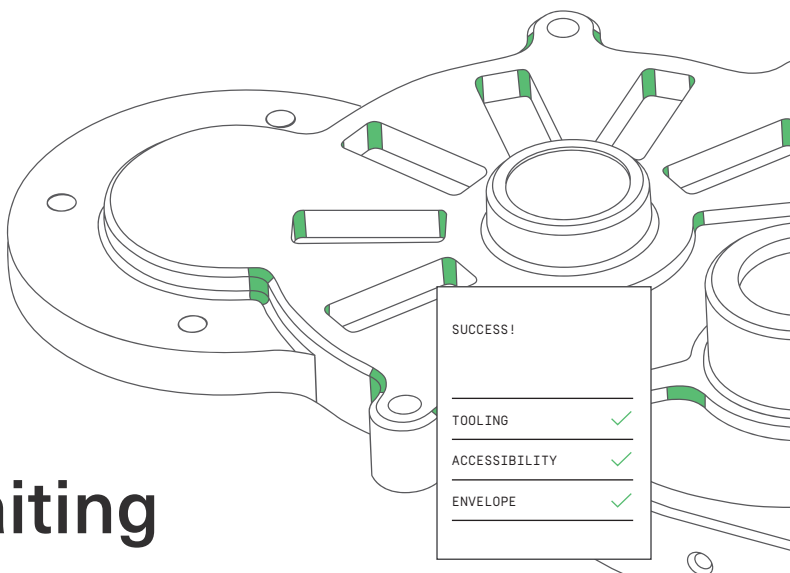


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