

# Stay Focused, Stay Connected

By Yi Guo

As I write this message, it is the end of 2020. Looking back, my life as a professor has changed since March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States. We quickly adjusted and adapted to virtual learning environments, and our homes became office, classroom, and research lab. With the kids also staying home for remote classes, there was heavy

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housework to keep the environment organized and clean. In-store shopping was replaced by online orders, which were backed up due to a lack of essential workers to deliver them. Many times, I found myself hoping for a household robot that could provide a helping hand with chores or a delivery robot that could drop off groceries regularly. Well, they are not here in 2020. The isolation has been mentally exhausting, and bad news and death tolls from nearby retirement communities and assisted-living facilities made it worse. More than ever, we need robots to serve humanity and help address the pressing challenges faced by our society.

The year 2020 has also witnessed unrest caused by social and racial

inequality and distrust of authority. The information age has brought unprecedented challenges, solutions to which require the collective wisdom of a diversified group of experts. There are many lessons to learn from human collaborations, and it is hoped that robots will interact with humans in a better and more efficient way. It is our responsibility to establish trust and enhance the acceptance of robots. We need to do this right from the beginning.

Roboticians have experienced a new way of connecting through virtual conferences in 2020. The 2020 IEEE/RSJ International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems (IROS) pioneered a new on-demand platform that provided easy access to prerecorded videos of technical talks, workshops, and tutorials anywhere, anytime, and with any device. Free registration to the IROS on-demand offerings broadened attendance globally and, in particular, benefited participants around the world who would not have the opportunity to experience a robotics conference traditionally. There were more than 24,000 registrations as of 29 December 2020. This pilot may inspire new ways of organizing international conferences in the postpandemic world.

After a few years on the editorial board, I feel honored and excited to lead *IEEE Robotics and Automation Magazine (RAM)* and serve as its editor-in-chief. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank my predecessor, Bram Vanderborght, for his



vision and efforts in leading *RAM* over the past five years to today's strong position in the landscape of IEEE periodicals. I would also like to thank Editorial

Assistant Antonella Benvenuto for her dedicated services to *RAM*. My gratitude also goes to the retiring associate editors (AEs), Pinhas Ben-Tzvi, Alexander Dietrich, Angela Faragasso, and Soren Schwertfeger, whose terms ended in 2020.

It is my great pleasure to welcome Joyce Arnold from IEEE Publishing Operations as *RAM*'s new editorial assistant. We have also selected a diverse group of highly respected researchers worldwide in their subject areas relevant to robotics and automation to serve on the editorial board, including a new editor, Jindong Tan, and seven new AEs, Kingsley Fregene, Antonio Frisoli, Jonathan Kelly, Ka-Wai Kwok, Surya G. Nurzaman, Weihua Sheng, and Enrica Zereik. Together with our existing AEs and *RAM* Column Manager Amy Reeder, the team will work closely in serving the community and ensuring *RAM*'s continued growth and success.

*RAM* publishes technical articles that present original scientific results through a focus on working systems. It is also a forum connecting the entire IEEE Robotics and Automation Society community as well as a channel for sharing Society news and communication about activities. *RAM* special issues report research findings at the forefront of current trends and emerging topics.

As we are in a new era of scientific publication and facing major competitors in the areas of robotics and automation, I am committed to further strengthening RAM, with the goals of delivering innovative and high-impact articles in a timely manner, improving connections with the community, and broadening outreach to industry and the largest possible audience. I thank all of the authors, reviewers, and readers of the

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magazine, and I welcome your feedback. Together, we are marking our footprints in the field of robotics and automation during this generation-defining moment.

This March issue, which is focused on the robotics response to the COVID-19 outbreak, presents timely research and actual deployments of robots during the global pandemic. Special thanks go to the guest editors, Lino Marques, Robin Murphy, Kaspar Althoefer, Satoshi Tadokoro, and Cecilia Laschi, who worked very hard with a tight schedule while dealing with many challenges during this difficult time. I hope you enjoy reading the issue!

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