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INTERVIEW

Member Services Board: New Services for a New World

Interview with Ricardo Veiga, Director of Member Services

By Stefano Bregni, Global Communications Newsletter Editor in Chief, Vice-President for Conferences, and Ricardo Veiga, Director of Member Services

This is the second article in the series of eight, started in December 2020 and published monthly in the IEEE ComSoc *Global Communications Newsletter*, which covers all areas of IEEE ComSoc Member and Global Activities. In this series of articles, I introduce the Vice-President and six Directors of the Member and Global Activities Council (namely: Sister and Related Societies; Membership Services; AP, NA, LA, EMEA Regions) and the two Chairs of the Women in Communications Engineering (WICE) and Young Professionals (YP) Standing Committees. In each article, one by one they present their sector activities and plans.

In this issue, I interview Ricardo Veiga, Member of the ComSoc Board of Governors (BoG) as Director of Member Services.

Stefano Bregni

Ricardo Veiga

I must say that this opportunity is a big pleasure for me. I met Ricardo for the first time almost 20 years ago, when he was serving as ComSoc Director of the LA Region (2004-05) and I was preparing for one of my first Distinguished Lecturer Tours. For my first experiences as ComSoc Distinguished Lecturer, I chose Latin America. It is a memory that will never fade away.

Ricardo is an Associate Professor at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and responsible for Planning and Management Control for the Faculty of Engineering. He has also been working in the communications industry for 25 years, participating in the start-up of several companies.

He was member of the ComSoc BoG as a Member-at-Large and Regional Director. He also served as Chair of the ComSoc Argentina Chapter, receiving the Chapter Achievement Award. He also received the ComSoc Latin America Region Distinguished Service Award, the IEEE RAB Achievement Award, and the IEEE Third Millennium Medal, among others.

Stefano: Hello Ricardo. You are serving as ComSoc Director for Member Services in one of the most difficult times ever experienced not just by IEEE ComSoc, but by all of humanity in the last century, if we exclude the World Wars. Everything happened right after we began our term last year. I still remember our discussion at the ComSoc Management Retreat last January, on how to improve ComSoc services to members, what to give more and better, what new initiatives to launch. The pandemic disrupted all those plans. It is necessary that we continuously have to adapt in uncertainty.

Ricardo: Last year will remain in our memories as the year in which the whole world changed in a few weeks. Almost everything you were used to doing, you had to change. So ComSoc activities had to change as well. It is remarkable that, within this New World and all the difficulties, ComSoc has increased around 8 percent the number of members since 2019.

Stefano: Would you please summarize what is the Member Services Board (MSB) and what are its activities?

Ricardo: The MSB is responsible for the oversight of all services and programs addressed to members and chapters, and oriented to membership retention and development all over the world. In particular, this Board is responsible for developing and providing individual-level membership services globally. This Board is responsible for developing and offering programs, and member activities to:

- Promote community development and activities of common interest
- Engage young members and support leadership development
- Engage industry around the world in membership programs
- Develop and offer programs to serve the industry and academic institutions
- Promote professional development.

It is important to highlight that their implementation is a teamwork handled in collaboration with the four ComSoc Regional Directors: Sumei Sun, Asia/Pacific (AP); Christos Verikoukis, Europe Middle East and Africa (EMEA); Nury Ramírez, Latin America (LA); Fawzi Behmann, North America (NA); and Trish Jaraicie and Cindy Tiritilli from ComSoc Staff.

Stefano: What did you and the Board do during this awful 2020?

Ricardo: Early in 2020 we became aware of COVID-19 making its first appearance in China. As early as February 8, we reacted by beginning a discussion among the Board about the possible impact on member services and adjusting plans for DLTs in affected areas. A few weeks later we had to suspend one of our most successful programs among our Chapters, the Distinguished Lecturer Tours (DLT). This program is aimed at giving lectures by a Distinguished Lecturer (DL) at a minimum of three different chapters or locations during the tour.

Immediately we envisioned a new alternative program, which we called Virtual Distinguished Lecturers (VDL). We developed and launched this new program, being the most successful program of this kind among all IEEE Societies, with more than 68 VDLs reaching 110 Chapters during 2020.

Stefano: What about the Chapter Awards and funding?

Ricardo: ComSoc has 216 chapters worldwide (two new chapters were added in 2020) and has established four Chapter Achievement Awards (CAA), and one Chapter-of-the-Year Award (CoYA). These awards recognize and reward the best chapters for their outstanding achievements in providing to their members the highest quality of service. So, the Achievements Awards Committee has selected the Austin (NA), Bangalore (AP), Sweden (EMEA), and Argentina (LA) chapters for the CAA regional awards, while for the CoYA has also selected the Austin Chapter.

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CHAPTER REPORT

Two Very Different North Jersey ComSoc Events Held in 2020

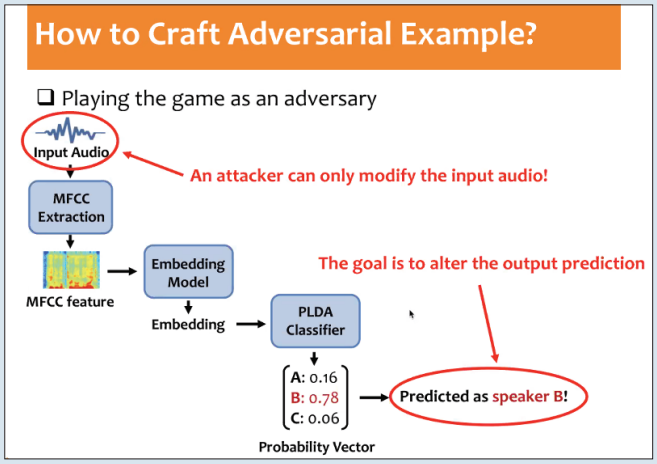
By Amit Patel, IEEE ComSoc North Jersey Section Chapter Chair, USA

This article is a tale of how the North Jersey Section ComSoc chapter (New Jersey, USA) held two very different workshops in 2020. The pandemic caused the chapter to pivot to a new approach for its annual IEEE North Jersey Advanced Communications Symposium (NJACS) on September 12, 2020. Like so many other chapters, the traditional in-person events had to change to online substitutes. The year started out with normal seminar, workshop and distinguished lecturer planning. The chapter even held an in-person Embedded Microcontrollers training event in February. But things quickly changed in March and all activity halted for a short time until there was better understanding of how to do online events.

Our first big workshop of the year started planning in mid-to-late 2019 and was held on Saturday, February 22, 2020 at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Newark, NJ. The topic was an "Introduction to Embedded Systems Using ARM Microcontrollers" (https://events.vtools.ieee.org/m/212083). It was co-sponsored by the Controls Society Chapter and Young Professionals Affinity Group. The workshop was a hands-on event with microcontroller kits ordered for each registrant. Two instructors lectured and guided each participant with how to use tools to develop software and interface external peripherals, controllers, and circuits. It was an intensive and practical workshop in embedded systems, designed for electronics engineers, software engineers, and other technical professionals.

The basic end-to-end process of designing an embedded system, from components to working software and the skills to troubleshoot an embedded processor, were demonstrated. Participants enjoyed lunch at the event and took home the embedded ARM microcontroller kits and instructional workbooks from the event to continue further learning at home. A YouTube video from the class is shown here: https://youtu.be/LzZtFxZLLvg

The chapter's second big workshop was the eighth annual Advanced Communication Symposium. Normally, it is a live in-person event hosted at the Babbio Center, Stevens Institute of Technology, in Hoboken, NJ, on a fall Saturday in conjunction with a student poster competition. This year, those plans had to change to a Zoom event hosting just seminar speakers. The student paper competition could not be held due to the logistics of collecting submissions, doing presentations and judging. The symposium consisted of four keynotes. The symposium was well attended with close to 70 attendees, speakers, and volunteers from the NY/NJ metro-area.



Slide from Prof Liu's talk on Adversarial Machine Learning.

Participants at the embedded systems workshop learning to use their new development board kits.

The program ran from 1pm to 5pm with welcome remarks given by Symposium Chair Dr. Adriaan van Wijngaarden, Nokia Bell Labs. Acknowledgments and thanks to the many technical and financial supporters were given by Mr. Amit Patel, IEEE North Jersey Section ComSoc Chapter Chair. Symposium Program Chair and Stevens Professor, Dr. Yu-Dong Yao, delivered opening remarks. Additional co-sponsors for the event included the IEEE North Jersey Section, ComSoc Chapter (which had received additional financial support from the IEEE Communications Society), and its Information Theory, Vehicular Technology, Computer Chapters and METSAC.

Dr. Yao then gave program remarks and introduced this year's theme of "AI and Deep Learning." The program began with Prof. George Sklivanitis, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL, giving the first lecture on "Autonomous Space-Time Waveform Design for Controlled-Interference Spectrum Coexistence." This was followed by Prof. Huaxia Wang, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK, on "Exploring Artificial Intelligence in Wireless Communications and Internet-of-Things Applications." The program continued with "Practical Adversarial Machine Learning Attacks Against Voice-controllable Systems" by Prof. Jian Liu, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN. This was followed by a lecture on "Deep Learning for MIMO Systems in 5G and Beyond: Enabling Mobility and Enhancing Reliability" by Prof. Ahmed Alkhateeb, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ. Abstract summaries and speaker biographies for all presentations can be found at https://events.vtools.ieee.org/m/243903.

In his closing remarks, Dr. van Wijngaarden thanked Stevens Institute of Technology for hosting the symposium virtually. Additional thanks went to all co-organizers and volunteers for their hard work that made the symposium a success, including Michael Newell, Registration Chair, and Bennet Meyer, CEU coordinator. Please contact the organizing committee or volunteers for any additional follow up questions or feedback on the event.

CHAPTER REPORT

IEEE Vizag Bay Section: Inauguration of Communication and Signal Processing Societies Joint Chapter

By TSN Murthy, Chair of the IEEE Comm/SP joint Societies Chapter, IEEE Vizag Bay Section, India

The emergence of the professional society of ComSoc/SPS joint Chapter in the regional IEEE Section of Vizag Bay, India illustrates the growing interest of the IEEE members, engineers and professionals in the Chapter's activities. The Chapter makes it possible to rejuvenate and establish a firm network of peers, technocrats and knowledge base of communication and signal processing in the region. Strongly standing on this foundation, the Chapter establishment has been taken up. For a deep insight, it is important to have the torch as bright as possible. In the analogy, the elites of the field of communications and signal processing have often taken the responsibility as torch bearers. In the line, the ComSoc/SPS Chapter has been inaugurated with an excellent participation which is a blend of academia and industry in the city of Visakhapatnam.

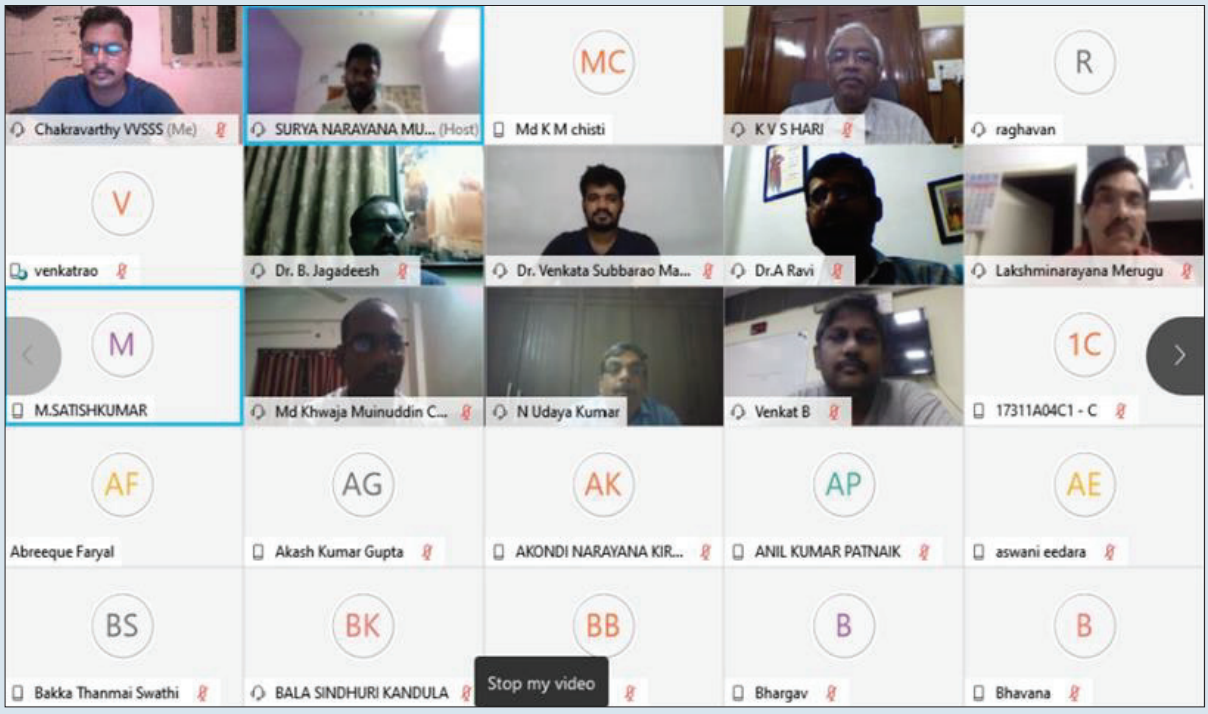
The inaugural ceremony was completed with all its grandeur through a virtual meeting via Cisco WebEx Meeting on 26 September 2020. The Chief Guest was Dr. K. V. S Hari, IEEE Fellow and Professor, India Institute of Science (IISc) Bangalore, India, and Vice President-Membership, IEEE Signal Processing Society. The ceremony was presided over by Dr. T. S. N. Murthy, Chair, ComSoc/SPS Joint Chapter, IEEE Vizag Bay Section, Dr. VVSSS Chakravarthy, Vice-Chair, ComSoc/SPS Joint Chapter, and Dr. Lakshmi Narayana Sadasivuni, Chair, IEEE Vizag Bay Section. The inaugural meeting was followed by a technical talk on "Sensing and Signal Processing for Autonomous Navigation" by Prof. K. V. S. Hari. The inaugural and technical session attracted an overwhelming participation of aproximately 180 IEEE members/non-IEEE members.

Dr. T. S. N. Murthy, Chair, welcomed all the members for the inaugural ceremony of the ComSoc/SPS Joint Chapter. He briefed the agenda of the meeting, welcomed the inaugural chief guest, Prof. K. V. S. Hari.

Dr. VVSSS Chakravarthy, Vice-Chair, introduced the chief guest with his brief bio-data. Dr. T. S. N. Murthy, Chair, invited Prof. K. V. S. Hari garu to inaugurate the Joint Chapter by lunching an inaugural video (https://youtu.be/5cu4RkJ7K2c).

Dr. S. Lakshminarayana, Chair, IEEE Vizag Section, congratulated all the members of the ComSoc/SPS Joint Chapter. He also briefed about the association of Prof. K. V. S. Hari with the IEEE Vizag Bay Section.

After the inauguration, Prof. K. V. S. Hari initiated deliberations with a technical talk on "Sensing and Signal Processing for Autonomous Navigation." During the talk, he mentioned that the emergence of autonomous navigation systems has spurred many innovations in the design of sensing, computing, communication and control systems. In his talk, he presented two case studies of designing and developing autonomous navigation platforms using machine-learning tools. First, he decribed a system design used in large vehicles for collision avoidance based on using cameras and deep neural networks. Second, he decribed the design of a sensing platform using LIDAR, cameras to collect data related to road traffic in India. After his technical talk he also briefed about the Signal Processing Society and the benefits of SPS membership. After completion of the talk, Prof. K. V. S. Hari answered all the questions raised by the audience. The official meeting was concluded at 7pm with the vote of thanks delivered by Dr. N. Udaya Kumar, Secretary, ComSoc/SPS Joint Chapter.



Technical talk attendees during the inaugural function of IEEE COMSOC/SPS joint Societies Chapter, IEEE Vizag Bay Section, India.

INTERVIEW/*Continued from page 1*

In order to support local activities, ComSoc usually provides some funding. Last year, because of the pandemic situation, we have added a second funding support, so the chapters could develop special strategies in order to fulfill their members' needs.

Stefano: What's next? Any new membership services that you are planning for for 2021?

Ricardo: We are planning to develop additional special activities and programs during 2021. We have envisioned an opportunity to leverage Chapter activities with Technical Committees (TC) in a synergistic way developing a win-win relationship: the TCs by organizing VDLs that can reach every Chapter around the world, while the Chapters can promote among their members the participation in TCs' activities. We are also launching two upgrading membership campaigns: a) Become a Member, to promote among graduating students; and b) Become a Senior Member/Fellow, for recognizing other members.

We have proposed for the next year a new discount on ComSoc membership dues, using the selection criteria used by IEEE worldwide, which was approved by the ComSoc Board of Governors, leading among other IEEE Societies. It is expected this proposal will help to promote membership of many colleagues around the world.

Within the MSB we are focusing on Regional needs (existing and potential Chapters), and especially on the promotion of women and young professionals in ComSoc's activities and leadership. Although this Board has a good diversity balance of geography, gender, age, professional background (researchers, industry professionals), for example, we have additionally created a new position in the MSB to strength women and young professionals' views. And we are thinking to include one student representative to have a voice of the future of ComSoc.

Stefano: Are we going to have any more Chapter Chair Congresses soon? Any new discussion forum to identify how to broaden our services to Members? Best ideas often come from group discussions and by comparing different standpoints. Virtual meetings, in my honest opinion and personal experience in this year, are not equivalent and not so effective, but we have to do our best with what is possible.

Ricardo: Most ComSoc products and services are excellent offerings that fulfill general technical, educational or professional needs. Additionally we need to develop products and services that are intended to fulfill local or geographic needs.

Usually, Chapter Chairs represent the "front line managers" of ComSoc. They are ComSoc's driving engines in every Section. There are also other chapter volunteers who are ComSoc's potential new leaders, including those in ComSoc Student Branch Chapters. All of them represent the capillary vessels of ComSoc all over the world, and also the sense of local community. So they are key people for the proper design of products and services that will be valuable for those communications engineers who are local members or potential members.

In order to accomplish this, we have proposed a Membership Value Research Congress with a program of virtual and in-presence activities, and a pre-work with Chapter Leaders to be done through virtual meetings before this event. These meetings will include ComSoc global and local leaders, including women, students and young professionals, who will become the new leaders of the Society.

Stefano: Excellent! A final remark to conclude this interview?

Ricardo: Communications were central during the new situation, allowing us to be working from home, as well as studying, teaching, selling, purchasing, etc. So this industry has been suddenly pushed to help the people to get into a full digital environment. ComSoc has led this through virtual conferences, publications, educational and other new services.

Thank you Stefano for helping us to share our work and ideas, and also thanks to the VP-MGA, Nei Kato, and the President, Vincent Chan, for their continuous support.

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