

President's Message

In recent conversations with some long-standing OSA members (a few of whom joined as early as the 1940s), one question I asked was: How did you interact with OSA in its early days? Although our core mission has remained mostly the same, our approach and effectiveness have changed in fundamental ways. Technology has enabled some of that change—but that's only the easily seen tip of the iceberg.

The more substantial, hidden driver of change is the wonderful OSA staff, now roughly 150 strong. These valued partners of our technical members and volunteers bring extreme professionalism, organizational acumen and fiduciary skill to our activities—with enthusiasm and good cheer. Staff, like our members, wisely embrace and adopt the new practices that are necessary to sustain and grow our society, as well as keep us in a leadership position.

A prime example is OSA's early "experiment" in open-access (OA) publishing, *Optics Express*, which launched in 1997. That journal—the first OA publication in the physical sciences, and clearly a risk when started—was a partnership between members and staff, and has been an archetypal success story throughout the industry. Members and volunteers can dream up all sorts of good ideas, but it is the staff that is the bedrock of implementing them.

And the implementation is outstanding. As I have traveled around the world on OSA business, I have heard multiple times from volunteers about the "high bar" that they experience when engaging with OSA, and how motivated they feel to continue these best practices. Moreover, the OSA staff supports the society's 19,000 members, who are among roughly 270,000 people that interact with OSA services throughout the year.

I've also been inspired personally by the OSA staff. In my own dealings with them I've found that they care deeply about OSA's mission and purpose. Their goal is to support us as volunteers so that we are effective and appreciated, and they succeed admirably. From all levels of the staff organization, I almost always get a hearty "Thank you"—but it is I who should be thanking them for enhancing the effectiveness and enjoyment of my career! I have always felt a deep respect and appreciation for my OSA staff partners. I have learned so much from them, through my various roles as meeting organizer, journal editor, traveling lecturer, member and more. They bring a skill set that complements my own.

I'd like to close by recognizing one staff member in particular, who encapsulates so much that's great about OSA. This month, as in every February issue, *Optics & Photonics News* highlights the distinguished class of new OSA Fellows. Supporting that effort, and the heart and soul of our awards department, has been Belinda Acre, who will be retiring this month after 26 years at OSA. In her work, she takes personal ownership of every nomination package, very often voluntarily following up directly with nominators and references to help fix a deficiency. She was also part of the team that this year rolled out a new online system for nominations. As usual with OSA, the team listened to what members wanted and produced a fantastic new tool (available at www.osa.org/awards).

Belinda, I and numerous volunteers thank you, will miss you, and wish you much happiness.



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Respectfully and warmly submitted,

*Alan Willner,
OSA President*