



Learning and Leading into the Future

By Joseph G. DiPompeo, P.E., F.SEI, F.ASCE

Wow! COVID-19 and the challenges of 2020 have come out for an encore at the start of 2021. (I am writing this in January for publication in March.) Hopefully, this will be the only encore, and we will soon realize widespread vaccination against COVID-19 for movement toward a new normal for our businesses and livelihoods.

Throughout this last year, we have seen stunning examples of leadership, both good and bad, including our leaders at all levels of government – local, state, national – as they struggled with the crises of 2020. We have seen countless problems related to the pandemic, economy, civil unrest, business disruption, and people unable to work.

So, where am I going with this in a Structural Engineering magazine? Remember all those math and science problems, all those classes you took that did not have much to do with anything, but you spent hours solving math, science, and logic problems? After 4-7 years of that and practicing as a structural engineer, I will assume that almost everyone reading this is an experienced and trained problem solver.

That is what we do. We build things, we fix things, we solve problems.

While this is a challenging time for all of us, it is a great time to be a problem solver and a Civil/Structural Engineer. We have already shined during the COVID crisis. The widely used and referenced COVID-19 map produced by Johns Hopkins University Department of Civil and Systems Engineering has played an invaluable role in tracking the COVID-19 pandemic. The world is awash in problems that need solving. I encourage all of you to brush off your leadership and problem-solving skills, get out of your cubicles, and help! Be leaders at your jobs and in your careers. Get involved in your community. Join local boards and commissions where you can put your talents to use. Volunteer. Let the world know you are a structural engineer, and show your community what you can do.

Developing structural engineers as leaders is a key strategic vision initiative and one of the goals of my year as SEI President. While many things have not gone as planned for my term, this goal remains. SEI is actively working on several initiatives to develop leadership and soft skills among structural engineers. While the announcement and rollout of some of these programs has been delayed by the past year's events, we are working to bring them to you as soon as possible. In the meantime, I urge you to use the skills you already have to do something greater than yourself or your career and show the world what we can do!

In addition to leadership development, SEI is also reviewing our organizational structure to optimize it to best serve and advance structural engineering. SEI is 25 years old, and we are still operating under the system set up at our founding. With the growth of the past 25 years and

the significant changes and challenges of the past year, many trends that were already happening were tremendously accelerated by the pandemic and the shift to virtual. We live and work in a vastly different world and in vastly different ways than 25 years ago and are exploring how best to position SEI for the next 25 years and beyond.

Civil and Structural Engineers also have a tremendous opportunity to contribute to fixing and rebuilding our infrastructure. While we are good at solving all kinds of problems, infrastructure is literally what we do. With a changing political climate on infrastructure spending

and climate issues, it is looking like we will be in great demand. Let's get out there and build and fix things and let the world know we are the ones doing it!

The events of 2020 also sparked a discussion on diversity within our profession. I heard stories of things that I did not think happened anymore from our members. We have a new Board-level Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with a passionate leader and team. We also have a newly formed Board-

level committee on Resilience. This is also an energized group, and I am confident both will make great strides.

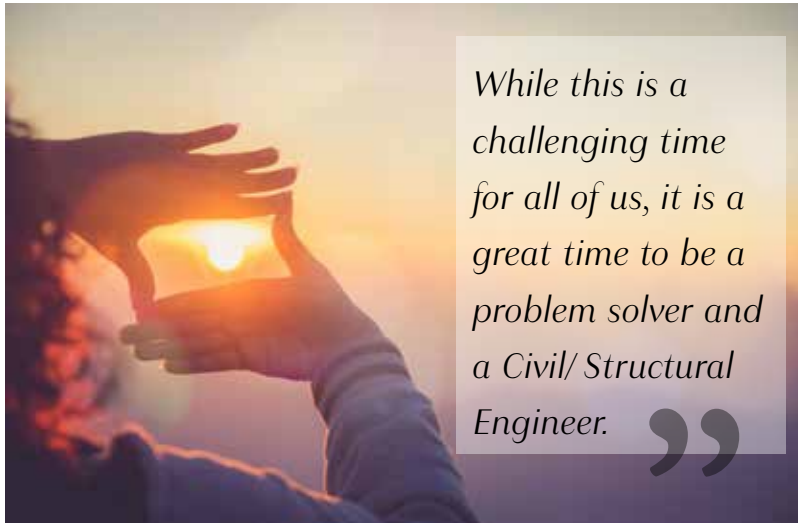
Many thanks to SEI's past president Glenn Bell and other leaders for their work on Confidential Reporting on Structural Safety – CROSS-US. This is the U.S. version of a program that was started in the UK and has grown to Australasia, Southern Africa, and Germany (coming soon). CROSS-US is a confidential database sharing failures, near misses, and incidents to learn from and not repeat them, improving structural safety. Submit and review reports at www.cross-us.org. We can all learn from each other and make a better, safer future.

I invite you to share what we can do to make your membership more valuable to you. Please email me or SEI Managing Director, Laura Champion at sei@asce.org with any thoughts or ideas you have. Lastly, I also encourage you to give to the SEI Futures Fund to support programs that invest in the future of structural engineering www.asce.org/SEIFuturesFund.

I am honored to be SEI President this year. While my term will look very different than expected, we have much to do to solve problems and learn and lead into the future. I will do my best to keep moving SEI forward through the aftermath of 2020 and a hopefully much brighter and better 2021!•



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