

New IEEE-USA President Identifies Advancing Viability and Contributions of the Profession as Top Priority for 2010

WASHINGTON (5 February 2010) -- Evelyn H. Hirt, who became IEEE-USA president on 1 January, has identified advancing the viability and contributions of the profession as her top priority in 2010. Her concerns encompass the need for recognition of the significant role played by engineers in powering the U.S. economy, and for science, engineering and technical literacy to fuel the creation of future engineers and technical professionals.

"Engineers create jobs by providing systems, products and services through the application of mathematical and scientific principles to practical ends," Hirt said. "It is this practical application that helps fuel the economy by furthering industrial and commercial objectives in advancing the design, construction and operation of economical and efficient structures, equipment and systems."

Hirt, who lives in Richland, Wash., succeeds Dr. Gordon Day of Boulder, Colo. Day is serving as IEEE-USA's past president in 2010 and Ron Jensen of Rochester, Minn., is the organization's president-elect.

Hirt sees a technically literate workforce, particularly among the young, as being essential to advancing U.S. competitiveness in the 21st century.

"If young people lack recognition of the significant role played by engineers and technical professionals, and without an attractive job market, they will not be motivated to pursue engineering and technical careers," she said. "Similarly, existing engineers and high-tech professionals will be drawn away from their current careers voluntarily or involuntarily. This will be compounded if individuals lack the science, engineering and technical literacy to obtain the required advanced education or deal with changes in technology trends to meet current demands, should their career motivation change.

"However, we need to think beyond the concept that science, engineering and technical literacy is only for those going on for advanced education or planning a technically demanding career. This literacy is an essential part of powering productive sectors of a global economy and strengthening U.S. competitiveness."

IEEE-USA has identified a number of public policy priorities that have job-creating potential and carry the promise of making technical careers more appealing: Universal availability of high-speed broadband, patent reform, electronic health records, cybersecurity and more research into alternative energy resources. <http://www.ieeeusa.org/policy/issues/index.html>

IEEE-USA is also supporting efforts to build the nation's Smart Grid, which has the potential to create jobs similar to the way the Internet did. Smart Grid R&D aims to modernize the electric grid through multi-disciplinary advances in generation, transmission, distribution, storage and control over energy use. Jobs are projected to be created in manufacturing, installation, equipment operation, telecommunications networks, software and controls. Expectations are that homeowners and businesses will be provided the opportunity for greater control over their energy use. <http://smartgrid.ieee.org/>

Engineering job creation is particularly important in light of recent statistics from the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. Job losses across all engineering disciplines, according to the agency,

totaled 76,000 in 2009 vs. the previous year. Among electrical and electronics engineers, employment fell by 36,000.

The number of working computer professionals dropped 198,000 in 2009 vs. 2008. These figures include software engineers, whose job losses totaled 82,000 year over year; and computer scientists and systems analysts, who saw 78,000 jobs disappear.

"Putting engineers and computer professionals back to work will help power the U.S. economy," Hirt said. "They will foster technological breakthroughs and engineering solutions to meet the great challenges facing our country and help create opportunities throughout the workforce."

Meet the New IEEE-USA President

Hirt, who has worked in engineering for more than 37 years, is a principal professional and engineer with Battelle in the Operational Systems Directorate at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, Wash. Her professional experiences bridge the industrial, government and academic communities as both a technical contributor and technical/project manager. She is a subject matter expert in systems (hardware, software and integration) and controls, as well as quality engineering.

Hirt received IEEE-USA's highest honor last year, the Robert S. Walleigh Distinguished Contributions to Engineering Professionalism Award, "for enthusiastic leadership and contributions in a wide range of IEEE-USA professional activities." In 2008 she was presented the IEEE Nanotechnology Council Distinguished Service Award.

As an active IEEE volunteer for more than 35 years, Hirt has held a wide variety of local, regional, technical, national and global leadership positions. She served on the IEEE-USA Board of Directors as Region 6 director in 2003-04 and was on the IEEE Initiative Committee on Nanotechnology for a Wider Audience (www.TryNano.org) in 2008-09. She was founding chair of the IEEE Richland Section Sensors Council Chapter in 2007-08, and was a member of the IEEE Aerospace and Electronic Systems Society Board of Governors from 2003 to 2007.

In addition to her IEEE activities, Hirt actively participates in Eta Kappa Nu and Kiwanis International, and supports the engineering program at Washington State University Tri-Cities.

Born and raised in Detroit, Hirt graduated cum laude with a bachelor of electrical engineering from the University of Detroit. She added a master's in engineering management and a certificate in project management from Washington State University.

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