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WHAT DO ENGINEERS DO IN THEIR SPARE TIME?

By: Ir. Chee Meng Sang

When the editors decided to scout for contributions from engineers about their leisure activities, they did not expect to find something unusual. They knew that a few prominent engineers were keen aviators, and they must be able to share fascinating stories about their adventures, or even misadventures. But, for the most part, your editors believed engineers would start thinking of their hobbies only when they approached retirement age. They were wrong.

In a new series on what engineers do in their spare time, Ir. Chin Mee Poon takes us for a drive to Sri Damansara and into the home of an avid model ship builder. (Page 10-11.) Ir Chin sets out to prove that engineers do have great hobbies, and that they pursue their non-work related interests in the prime of their engineering careers too. If you know of friends who are like them, or if you have always wanted to show off your priceless antique collection, now is the time to write to us.

The cover story (page 6-8) brings engineering to the fore in the construction of theme parks. These "edutainment" centres are mushrooming in Malaysia and the latest ones, besides being big, come with sophisticated electronic wizardry that is designed by engineers. Safety in design and construction is a must but we cannot just rely on one-off safety inspections and certification to avoid failures and accidents. Continuous monitoring for defects, and tip-top maintenance, must be conducted. Tragedies have occurred in the most well known theme parks. Engineers have a duty to ensure that operators of these popular entertainment venues do not take short cuts to maximize revenues.

In his own frank assessment of the engineering fraternity, the President describes some engineers as "troubleshooters" (President's Corner, page 2). He laments that IEM members are not encouraging enough positive contributions. As a start, members are not supporting fellow engineers to get national and international awards of recognition, and they are not looking at lifting the status of profession. Whether or not you agree with these views, read on to find out more.

This brings me, finally, to the subject of censorship. Does IEM have a strong censorship policy? One Past President thought so. This is not true: IEM does not censor articles. Decisions on whether a material can be published are made by consensus in the monthly Editorial Board meetings. Good quality articles come to us once in a while, but most in-coming material is not up to the mark. The editors' task, in providing feedback to contributors, is to find a balance between criticizing and cultivating the writers. The editors already spend a lot of time fixing, with less time for improving things, never mind that they are volunteers. The greater amount of unsolicited material means more work. This has never been a source of complaint; rather, it shows that readers are responding to calls for contributions and that more issues, some of them controversial, are being discussed. Situations arise where there are no clear-cut or easy solutions, but still, the editors have to complete their job.

It is inevitable that in such circumstances, the editors carry out their tasks without fear or favour. They cannot hope to please everyone. They can only hope for an understanding audience.

(Readers are invited to visit the IEM web site for guidelines on writing for Jurutera.)