



# President's Message

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## Dear Friends and Fellow Planetarians

This year brings us to our twenty-first biennial conference. In the first issue of the *Planetarian* (June 1972), President Paul Engle admonished members to "make the first meeting of ISPE<sup>1</sup> in San Francisco a truly outstanding and memorable event." Every two years since that first conference, successive conferences have continued that tradition.

I have no doubt that this year's conference in Baton Rouge will be another outstanding and memorable event. Conference host Jon Elvert, director of the Irene Pennington Planetarium, has emphasized that the conference theme, Bridge to New Beginnings, "will embrace our profession's desire to bridge diversity among our domes, to reach over to potential venues by bringing in related industries worldwide, to bridge alliances between our domes and technologies, and to provide a virtual bridge, connecting non-attending members to online conference sessions."

Members who may not be able to attend the conference personally will still be able to have a virtual presence at the opening ceremony, the business meeting, and the paper sessions. By this time you should have re-

ceived details of the conference in the mail. You may also check the IPS website for a link to the conference website.

## Meeting with friends in Brazil

I was invited to attend the annual meeting of the Association of Brazilian Planetariums this past November. The conference was quite unique in that it was held in two cities separated by 194 km (121 miles).

After gathering in Fortaleza, the entire group traveled by bus to Sobral for the first part of the conference. A new planetarium is being constructed in Sobral near the Museum of the Eclipse, which is located at the site of the astronomical observations of the 1919 solar eclipse which confirmed Einstein's theory of general relativity.

We had a welcoming ceremony and a day of papers and educational presentations before traveling back to Fortaleza for the final two days of the conference. Paper and poster sessions continued and a public lecture by a famous Brazilian astronomer and a business meeting were also held.

A number of local high school students were invited to the conference. I enjoyed meeting some of them and hearing their plans for astronomy-related careers.

Planetarians are an innovative group. During the conference I had the opportunity to

visit with Amauri Pereira, who has developed his own "homemade" lens to convert a video projector into a full-dome planetarium system. He hopes to use his system to bring inexpensive digital planetariums to Brazil and other countries.

## Officers meet in Northern Ireland

In early January, the IPS officers gathered at the Armagh Planetarium in



The Museum of the Eclipse in Sobral, Brazil

Northern Ireland, United Kingdom for an officers' meeting, hosted by Past-President Tom Mason. Most of our IPS business is conducted by email and occasional Skype sessions, but we also find it very valuable to get together for face-to-face meetings. We try to schedule an officers' meeting once a year.

This year we spent time discussing the upcoming conference, possible conference sites for 2016, the IPS website, and other business. We are especially excited to announce a new IPS website. This update will greatly enhance the functionality of our website. Some of the changes will include the opportunity for members to update their membership records directly, built in social media for groups and committees, and a very easy to use content management system.

At the end of my last President's Message I discussed the state of IPS in 2011 compared to the state of IPS that President Dale Smith's Message wrote about in the December 2000 *Planetarian*.

At the turn of the millennium, there were only six planetariums spread across the vast expanse of sub-Saharan Africa and there was no reason to even speculate about an African affiliate. Two of the six planetariums listed in 2000 no longer exist, but the number of African planetariums is increasing and includes several portable domes. Perhaps in the future, we will have an African affiliate.

The planetarium community has changed in ways that we probably didn't anticipate in 2000. Who could have predicted the large number of digital systems that are found in many fixed and portable planetariums today? The digital world presents many opportunities and challenges. Do we still call our theaters planetariums? What is a planetarium?

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<sup>1</sup> The ISPE, the International Society of Planetarium Educators, was the forerunner of the International Planetarium Society.



From Left: Amauri Pereira, Dennis Weaver and Samuel Rayne with Amauri's "homemade" video projector. Photos by author.

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### **Going digital in Minnesota**

Speaking of digital projectors, as I finish writing this column, my planetarium at Minnesota State University-Moorhead has just installed a digital system. It looks wonderful and I am looking forward to using it to further educate our audiences about the wonders of the universe and the world that we live in. After 40 years in the planetarium field, I feel like I'm starting all over. I have a lot to learn. I am looking forward to it!

I reflected recently on the fact that I am half way through my two-year term as president and also at the midpoint of the six-year cycle of president elect, president and past president. When I was elected in 2008, six years seemed a long time, but now, looking back, the past three years have passed so quickly! It is a privilege to serve you all. You are the reason that IPS exists. It's your Society and I encourage each of you to get involved.

Give something back to the profession. Why not do a poster or a paper at this year's conference in Baton Rouge? Consider the possibility of volunteering to serve on a committee or to run for an office.

For some of our international members, this is the last issue of the *Planetarian* that you will receive before IPS 2012. I look forward to meeting many of you personally in Baton Rouge. ☆