



For this President's Corner, the Editor reminded me that this is the December edition of the *Journal*. For most of our members, December represents the time of year that celebrates the birth of Christ in the Christian calendar. Certainly, for many it is characterized by the opportunity to spend some quality time with family and friends in a spirit of comradeship and goodwill. Therefore, I would like to talk about two different things that this has brought to my mind.

Firstly, my thoughts turn to the families of the people that (hopefully) are reading these leading pages of the *Journal*. So, if you, the reader, happen to be the 'breadwinner' of the family, please make a point of passing on my words to your partners and children. It is with great sincerity that I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the sacrifices, commitment, and support that exists in the hearts of the families across the Southern African mining community. For their spouses and siblings, mothers and fathers, and friends and relatives who support their lives and careers in this fascinating industry. While many people say that work and home should never be mixed, I think that this is a very naive perspective on reality. The work environment and our family lives are inextricably linked at many levels. Successes and stresses at work are carried home in triumph or despair. Family milestones are celebrated at work with colleagues. This is brought into stark perspective when people are injured in the work environment or economic pressures result in mine closures and job losses.

One can look to any mining community anywhere in the world and see that it is the capacity, tenacity, and strength within the local community that fundamentally underpins the success of the mines (and in fact of all industry). So my thoughts and prayers, and those of Sandy my wife, are with you during December and January. We wish that you are able to enjoy that quality time without getting too caught up in the consumerism that tends to overtake more important values during these holidays. If you have to drive, please remember to take rest stops, be patient, and arrive at your destination safely.

My second thought is somewhat different. You are probably aware that there is a structure within the SAIMM called the Technical Programme Committees (TPCs – one for Mining and one for Metallurgy). Their function is the planning and organizing of the conferences, colloquia, and schools hosted under the banner of the Institute. Their membership changes over time, and occasionally senior members of the SAIMM are required to refresh the organizational memory within the TPCs, i.e. to explain their purpose and mandate. In addition to ongoing professional development, one critical purpose that the TPCs have is the generation of income that, in addition to membership fees, represents the leading source of funding that sustains the Institute. So, I was called upon to explain why conferences were expected to make a profit. Well, the simple answer to that question is that if they did not, (a) we would not be able to fund many of the developmental projects such as our regional branch offices or educational initiatives, and (b) all of our membership fees would increase substantially. However, some additional interesting information came out of my preparations to answer the above question for the TPCs.

Increase/decrease in conference fees over the past 5 years

Conference	Members	Non-Members
1-day	-32%	-23%
2-day	-11%	-15%
3-day	-1%	-14%

The table shows the cost of attending conferences over the past five years (2010 to 2014) for SAIMM Members and non-Members. The data represents the percentage change in cost relative to 2010. It is clear that in real terms, attendees at our one-, two-, and three-day conferences are in most cases paying substantially less in 2014 than in 2010! This is a remarkable achievement given that the quality of conferencing has improved, along with attendance, over the same period. Furthermore, on average our two-day conferences are one-third of the cost of the commercial, competitive market; and our three-day conferences are on average half the cost. This represents considerable value to our members and their employers through the ongoing professional development and networking opportunities that these events provide.

So, Happy Christmas to one and all, and enjoy your SAIMM Christmas present of many more high-value and low-cost conferences in 2015.

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