



# NEWSLETTER

*Malayalee Engineers' Association,  
Houston, Texas*

**Volume 7, Issue 2**

**July 2006**



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- Scholarship program
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## *Inviting Volunteers For MEA*

The MEA executive committee is inviting chairpersons for various clubs to promote extramural activities among its members. Please contact Uday Salian or N.K Balachandran for more information

- 56 card club
- Music club
- Sports & Games Club
- Happy hour/Ladies Night Out
- Outdoor Activities
- Math & Science Club
- Community Service

## *Upcomming Events*

- Two dinner talks are being currently scheduled. One talk will be on "Networking" and will be towards last week of August. Exact dates & location will be notified soon through e-mail.
- We are also soliciting members to join this year's (2006-2007) scholarship evaluation committee. Please contact any one of the committee members if you are interested in being part of this team by August 31<sup>st</sup>.
- The fall picnic is scheduled for November 2006, will include a boat cruise and visit to Battleship Texas. Scheduled date and relevant information to follow shortly.
- The MEA Annual Scholarship Fundraiser Event is being planned. Event Information will be announced shortly.

### **MEA Committee members for 2006:**

|                                      |  |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| S Vidyasagar (281) 480-5434          | Uday Damodar Salian (281) 265-5037                             | N.K.Balachandran (281) 345-6277                                    |
| Anil Nair (281) 477-0231             | Shoba Eason (832) 453-1848                                     | Ramjith Ali (832) 858-0517   |
| All e-mails to the MEA committee to: | <a href="mailto:meahouston@yahoo.com">meahouston@yahoo.com</a> | Online: <a href="http://www.meahouston.org">www.meahouston.org</a> |

# Sum Fun N' the Sun MEA Spring Picnic 2006

(NK Balachandran)



We are half way through this year and we have had quite an active session so far and hope to continue MEA activities with the enthusiasm, the drive and the support shown by our members. The year started with the Spring Picnic on March 11th at the George Bush Park near Alief. The picnic was dubbed a Family Fun Affair, and indeed all the MEA family members had a great time including the little ones. The picnic organizers that included the committee members, their spouses and volunteer members, put together some excellent decorations, planned the activities round the clock and kept everyone engaged. There were activities for everyone and there was never a dull moment. We also had BINGO and a few lucky members came away with a few extra bucks in their pockets. I was

told that the event was one of the best attended picnics in recent years with almost a 100 people in attendance. It was heartening to note that we had several new MEA members attend and participate. We put the turf to test at the park the whole day, with a game of cricket, volley-ball, tug-of-war, Piñata and Twister - for the little ones and a few imaginative events that saw pairs hopping with their limbs-tied, or thrashing around with a stick, blind-folded, in an effort to locate and break a pot, needless to say that it was a day well spent with people on the verge of a hysterical appreciation of unbridled fun.

The event pictures can be viewed on the website and few of them are reproduced here.

## *MEA Nite - ShowBiz 2006* (NK Balachandran)



*MEA* Cultural Nite or ShowBiz 2006 as it was dubbed was indeed a memorable event. The event was a grand success in terms of participation and enjoyment and drew a very good audience of about 250, at the Durga Bari Auditorium on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006. We had an evening of great entertainment that showcased talents from MEA- members and their families.

The program was colorful, beginning from the event decorations to the colorful costumes of the performers. The decoration committee did an excellent job in putting together a grand display of rich color, consisting of elegant swags & beautiful flower and lamp arrangements pleasing to the eye and setting the tone for the event.

We were fortunate to get a willing hand in providing some excellent cut-outs as stage decorations. Hats off to Shaji, who spent several late nights, for coming up with an excellent theme, ideal to suit the MEA organization & culture.

The event was unique in several respects in comparison to the previous events, as there were several firsts. The 2006 executive committee decided to try several new initiatives

this year and with the total support & cooperation of our members, these efforts indeed paid off and helped make the event a really memorable one, some of which were:

- Registration for event participation was done entirely online
- Event participation guidelines were posted on the website
- Unique Hall & Stage decorations
- Baby-sitting facilities provided at the venue
- Portrait Studio at the event venue for Member & family portrait pictures
- Door prizes for lucky members
- Soliciting advertisements to underwrite some of the event expenses

The program began with a social hour followed by the cultural program for about three hours filled with a grand display of rich colors, soothing music and breathtaking dances. We were honored by the presence of the Deputy Consul General of India Mr. Prasannan Pillai, as our Distinguished guest, for the event. The events included Indian classical dances, cinematic dances, instrumental music and melodious songs both solos & groups. The MCs, enacting the “Achuvinte Amma” theme, stole the show with their excellent performance

and kept the program rolling with excellent support from the stage management team. We also treated to an excellent Indian classical dance performance by our guest artiste, Ms. Sunanda Nair. The evening was filled with a pleasing display of talent from our youngsters in the various styles of classical, cinematic and fusion dances and the melodious rendering of Malayalam and Hindi songs by our members. The icing on the cake that brought the curtains and the house down was the hilarious skit, "A GEOLOGIST" the last item of the evening, by Johnny Alex and troupe. The dances brought out the wonderful talent among our members and family, the songs made the evening melodious and the skit provided a spicy twist of engineer satire. As is usually the case, the evening did have a few glitches- the audio system monitor on the stage did not work very well and the singers found it hard to hear the background music, but in spite of the same, they performed very well. The Dinner was excellent and was catered by Gourmet India.

Many of our members helped out in many ways, from coordinating the event presentations, the food, the decorations, audio & lighting at the hall, to soliciting advertisements and selling tickets. This was truly a remarkable team-effort that we can be proud of. Kindly thank the local businesses that have helped us with advertisement revenue for this event, when possible.

The MEA committee would like to take this opportunity to thank all our members, especially those members and their spouses, who volunteered and helped in ensuring the success of this event. It is relevant to mention here that we have the same members who volunteer time & time again, ceaselessly over the years for these events. Hats off to them once again. The MEA committee would like to take this opportunity to request other members to come forward and volunteer for any future events and help making those a success.

Many thanks to all who worked hard to make the evening a pleasant experience!

## CHILDREN'S CORNER

### Did "U" Know This? (Annirudh Balachandran)

- The fastest dog, the greyhound, can reach speeds of up to 41.7 miles per hour. The breed was known to exist in ancient Egypt 6,000 years ago

-A cat sees about six times better than a human at night because of the tapetum lucidum , a layer of extra reflecting cells which absorb light.

-The grizzly bear can run as fast as the average horse!!

- A jellyfish is 95 percent water!

- At birth, a panda is smaller than a mouse and weighs about four ounces.

-Fingernails grow nearly 4 times faster than toenails!

-You blink over 10,000,000 times a year!

- Of all the words in the English language, the word ' set ' has the most definitions!

- The sun is 330,330 times larger than the earth!

- A giraffe can clean its ears with its 21-inch tongue!

- A crocodile cannot stick its tongue out.

-A cat's jaws cannot move sideways.

The vocabulary of the average person consists of 5,000 to 6,000 words.

- No word in the English language rhymes with "month".

- An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain.

The average person walks the equivalent of twice around the world in a lifetime.

- All polar bears are left handed.

-More people are killed annually by donkeys than die in air crashes.

-Ants don't sleep

## Opportunities to make a difference

(Vijay Kayath)

As we had informed our members and scholarship donors earlier, seven scholarships were awarded in 2005 to students in engineering colleges in Kerala. A total of 20 students are now being supported by MEA scholarships. All scholarship recipients from the 2000 and 2001 batches are now employed. They all have thanked MEA members for the generous financial support as well as guidance in their educational and career pursuits.

We had close to 140 applications, many of them from very deserving candidates. Therefore, it was a very difficult task to select the winners. Many of our MEA members who had not participated in the application evaluation process may be curious about how the evaluations and selection take place. So, here is a brief description of the process that was followed:

We first prepared a spreadsheet with relevant data from each application, e.g. marks from 10<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade examinations; Engineering Entrance examinations marks and rank, no. of attempts in writing entrance examinations, annual income from all sources, number of dependents in the family etc.

Next, points are assigned to each applicant based on predetermined scales for each category of data. Points are also given for financial needs and number of dependents in the family.

The spreadsheet is sorted several different ways and with different weightings for comparison. These spreadsheets are then discussed by the selection committee which selected 15 candidates for serious consideration. Questionnaires requesting additional information and clarifications were sent to these candidates.

After we got the responses to the questionnaire, the committee inquired into the truth of the statements made by the applicants. This was done by calling the candidates by phone as well as talking to some contacts in Kerala whom the previous committees had established. Some of these contacts were professors in Engineering

colleges, some others friends and relatives of MEA members. These contacts some times visited the candidates' homes or went to their neighborhoods to inquire and verify the truth about their financial needs.

Based on the feedback from our contacts in Kerala, the selection committee discussed the qualifications and financial needs of the short-listed applicants and selected the winners.

As one can see, this is a time consuming and difficult process which has to be completed in about 3-1/2 to 4 months. However, our members who have undertaken this responsibility in past years will attest that they all had a very rewarding experience doing so. Now that we have an established scholarship program, there are several ways MEA members can contribute to its success. To list a few:

- Be a member of the application evaluation committee and participate in the selection process
- Assist in developing a list of persons in Kerala who can be contacted to verify financial status of the selected applicants
- Some of the students request guidance and advice in their choice of projects and career planning. We need volunteers (mostly from the field of IT, computer science and electronics) who can communicate with them and act as mentors.
- Help organize a list of names and addresses of college principals of major engineering colleges in Kerala for sending application material.

These are wonderful opportunities to do some simple deeds which ultimately brighten someone's life. I hope MEA members seize them and enjoy the intangible rewards. If you wish to pursue these opportunities to help, please contact Uday (281 265 5037), or Balachandran (281 345 6277) or Vijay Kayath (281 242 5936) for more information. Currently we are soliciting members to join this year's scholarship evaluation committee. Please contact any one of the executive committee members.

## Relevance of MEA Today

(Raghu Damodaran)

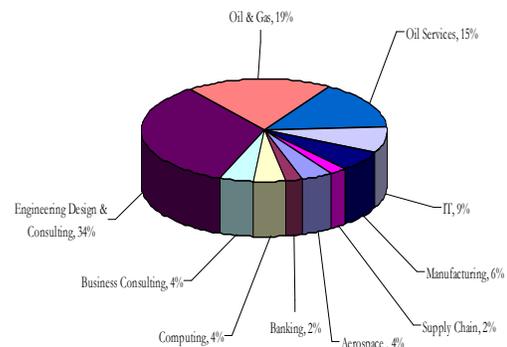
Over my five plus years of association with MEA, I have met a wide range of people sharing contrasting opinions of the relevance of an organization like MEA. Opinions varied-most were of the opinion that MEA is a very well run and relevant endeavor; there was however a subset, notwithstanding small, that thought of MEA as parochial and restrictive that promotes no diversity of thoughts. I have also heard my share of criticisms on the various programs that MEA conducts and administers. This has prompted me oftentimes to reflect on this organization, and try to try to put us as MEA in perspective and how best we can boost our relevance as an organization.

**Who are we?** MEA members share common cultural and educational background, albeit in different professional arenas. The result is a group of like minded individuals who incidentally also share a relatively common thought process. This by far, is a unique and powerful combination, the leveraging of which can benefit the community and us as members immensely.- Having stated the obvious, it would be worthwhile trying to state and understand the expectations from and objectives of, MEA. I do not mean our goal or mission statement stated in the MEA charter. It's what we as members want MEA to demonstrate and deliver, in more practical terms. The better these are defined, the more participative we would be (this does not mean we are not participative at present), and this will enable MEA increase its significance and relevance in the current socio-economic climate. So in my opinion, we could potentially subdivide our objectives to (1) helping each other and families professionally (2) do good for the community, philanthropy (3) encourage the youth (4) have fun. The accomplishment of these simple goals could be an excellent measure of our success as an organization.

At this stage, let's indulge in some serious introspection, to see where we stand.

**Networking:** Anyone who has been in the job market lately will vouch for the power of networking. Good and desirable jobs are almost always had by fostering efficient networks. Demographically, our members represent a wide range of industry segments (see graph), with professional experience spanning from less than 5 to over 30 years. Here we have a ready-made group that now can effectively and efficiently promote networking and foster mentoring among its members. Informal networking of this sort is very much the norm ; We can potentially make these synergies work even better by setting up conduits for disseminating information pertinent to the members like- new job opportunities, job changes, changes in any given industry sector, scholarship opportunities and so on – this newsletter or our website can function as potential tools. It's imperative that we leverage our collective resources efficiently to attain this goal

MEA Member Demographics



**Philanthropy:** One of the overarching objectives of organizations like MEA is philanthropy. MEA's relevance in fostering engineering education in India cannot be overemphasized. In our little way, we have enabled engineering education for numerous students in Kerala who otherwise would not have a means to do so. I believe this is a noble effort that we, as MEA, have embarked on. With the current scholarship program-to which our members contribute very

generously-we are able to make each dollar work a lot harder whereby multiple students in Kerala are assisted every year. Giving and sharing resources that will benefit the community or in this case our native land, at large, instills a sense of satisfaction and happiness almost all of us.

### **Expanding programs**

How best can we do with what we have-and this brings back the question of “relevance” again. Here we have a captive membership with inherent skills in math and science-waiting to be harnessed! Stimulating our children (lets start with MEA members) to pursue quantitative sciences can be addressed and enabled by various potential programs organized under the aegis of MEA. Math Olympiads, quizzes, purpose based visits to museums/ where members with relevant experience can chaperone interested groups, can greatly enhance our efficacy as an organization that fosters learning.

The question of relevance also rests primarily on us members. Participation, membership and development & sustenance of programs that are germane to the members and the community around us, will make us increasingly relevant. Honestly, we have all at some point in time, asked ourselves the question “what’s in for me?-The key is to develop programs that, in addition to the objective of achieving the “greater good”, will attract member interest, whereby stimulating greater participation, volunteering and leadership. The committee has plans afoot to address this. The committee is soliciting volunteers to champion clubs like 56 Card club, Music club, Sports & Games Club, Happy hour/Ladies Night Out, Outdoor Activities, Math & Science Club and Community Services.

**Involving the Youth;** MEA has a sizable youth population which encompasses member children and young engineers. They bring great enthusiasm and interest into whatever they do. Our programs must actively engage these youngsters as volunteers, coordinators and developers for various programs like cultural nites, scholarship

programs, community service projects and so on. Let us strive to harness this immense potential – apart from the fun they will have doing this, this will also foster leadership and responsibility, qualities that would stand them in good stead, in the days ahead.

**Community Programs:** We as an organization could do better as champions of the community we live in. Community activities like collective volunteering (as MEA) in a food bank, recycling centers, adopting a road, can be a potential means to get there- I do think such endeavors are of great value. It elevates the overall mission of an organization like ours, increases our sense of giving, and enables (and often unstated) increased exposure and visibility of MEAs activities in the community.

All this may sound like grandstanding, the talk of what we “should” be doing, and grandiose plans for new programs and so on. But Rome (MEA) was not built in a day. We have to constantly dream of achieving these “grandiose” objectives, and dream we shall. Achievement is attained in small but consistent and continuous baby steps- many of which have already happened. Achievement is attained despite meager resources, by tireless striving-and this has commenced as well. Our members are participating and volunteering in greater numbers, as the last few years of activities would attest. The march to greater relevance has started and there is no stopping now!!

## Member's Corner

This section is reserved for members to communicate job opportunities, job changes, promotions, major industry changes, childrens' achievements (awards, college admissions etc). Members are encouraged to contribute to this section in future issues of this newsletter.

### A flavor of Engineering Humour

#### *Contributions from Ramjith Ali & Raghu Damodaran*

Overheard in the finance department; "Arguing with an engineer is like wrestling with a pig- everyone gets dirty but the pig loves it".....

Three engineering students were gathered together discussing the possible designers of the human body.

One said, "It was a mechanical engineer. Just look at all the joints."

Another said, "No, it was an electrical engineer. The nervous system has many thousands of electrical connections."

The last said, "Actually it was a civil engineer. Who else would run a toxic waste pipeline through a recreational area?"

A priest, a lawyer and an engineer are about to be guillotined. The priest puts his head on the block, they pull the rope and nothing happens--he declares that he has been saved by divine intervention--so he is let go.

The lawyer is put on the block, and again the rope doesn't release the blade; he claims he can't be executed twice for the same crime and he is set free too.

They grab the engineer and shove his head into the guillotine, he looks up at the release mechanism and says, "Wait a minute, I see your problem...!"

Two Engineering students miss a test because they were partying the previous night & were not well prepared for the test....

The professor asks them the reason for missing the test...

The students lie & say that they went to attend one of their friends wedding and on the way back they had a flat tire & so couldn't make it on time for the test...

The professor agrees for a retest request & asks them to prepare & come the next day...

The next day the professor places the students in 2 different corners of the class & hands the paper...

The students open the paper & find just 1 question...

"Which tire?"

### Funny or is it Fuzzy Math?

#### *Contributions from S.Vidyasagar & Jose Pullokararan*

**After explaining to a student through various lessons and examples that:**

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow 8} \frac{1}{x-8} = \infty$$

**I tried to check if she really understood that, so I gave her a different example. This was the result:**

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow 5} \frac{1}{x-5} = \infty$$

A hand-drawn mathematical equation:  $\frac{\sqrt{2}}{2} = \sqrt{\quad}$ . The square root symbol on the right is incomplete, with a horizontal line extending to the right, suggesting a missing value or a joke about the result.

**MEA Houston: 2006 Membership Form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tel# (home): \_\_\_\_\_ (work / cell): \_\_\_\_\_

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

Hometown in Kerala: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you wish to block your contact information from being published and distributed? (Check) Yes\_\_ No\_\_

**Annual Membership Fee: \$30**

**Student Membership Fee: \$10**

Please mail with check (\$30 payable to MEA Houston) to: N.K.Balachandran, 7910 Scenic Canyon Ln, Houdton, TX-77095.

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