

LA/Orange County SMTA Tech Expo a Success

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On November 3, I had the pleasure of attending the LA/OC SMTA Tech Expo in Long Beach, California, and meet with chapter President Kathy Palumbo and Vice President Scott Penin, to learn more about this annual event and the chapter's ongoing activities.

Judy Warner: Kathy, before we get ahead of ourselves, tell us about your company, please.

Kathy Palumbo: Our company is Production Analysis and Learning Services. We're an engineering service provider.

Warner: And you are currently the acting president for the local SMTA chapter, correct?

Palumbo: Yep. I'm here with Scott Penin, our vice president for the local chapter. Scott and I have been part of our LA/OC SMTA board since 2002. He actually joined the board a few years prior to that, so he's been on the board even longer. We trade spots back and forth between president and vice president. I'll be president until the end of 2017 and then he's going to step up and take on the job as president.

Warner: Scott, tell us about the company that you're with and how you got involved with this event and the local SMTA chapter.

Scott Penin: The company that I work for is called Paradigm Contract Manufacturing. We're a CM out of Garden Grove, California. I found out about SMTA basically just through Society of Manufacturing Engineers, or SME. A lot of people that went to SME also went to SMTA, but since SMTA was a newer technology, a lot of people transferred over and did not renew both. That's how I found out about it.

Warner: How long have you been involved with the leadership of this chapter?

Penin: I've been a member since 1996, but I've been on the board since 2001. I kept going against Atul, who kept beating me out for vice president of technical until he decided to retire [laughs], and that's when I finally got in.

Warner: At least it wasn't one of those situations where they told you, "Oh, you went to the bathroom? We voted you to be vice president while you were gone."

Penin: We've actually done that to somebody [laughs].

Palumbo: We did that to Ron Gonzalez, who's our treasurer. I elected him.

Warner: That's true friendship right there! This is my first time attending the SMTA Tech Expo here in Long Beach and I've been very impressed. You've a room full of table top exhibitors in the hall next to us. Tell us about how many exhibitors are here today.

Palumbo: We have 43 exhibitors and we sold 46 tables this year. In the past, when the economy was better, we sold as many as 56 tables. We're trying to grow the attendance level and the number of tables, but our attendance has been pretty good. We had 140 preregistered and about 85–90% of them show up, which is great attendance for a little show like this.

Warner: Right, and in a niche, regional market.

Palumbo: For \$375 for a table, you get a targeted audience. I usually walk away from this show with at least five to eight leads and every one of them pans out into a customer that I still have today.

Penin: Also, the SMTA is the one that sets the price. As far as Southern California with the Orange County shows in and out and with the Del Mar show, this is the least expensive show of any of them.

Warner: Far and away. The Del Mar show is around \$1,000 and that's very low cost, comparatively. So it's absolutely the most affordable.

Penin: If you're a member of SMTA and you pre-sign, it's \$375. It's a really good deal.

Warner: The exhibitors that you have here are showing a variety of offerings. Some are soldering equipment, pick-and-place equipment, services, reps, etc., but there's a very

good smattering of representation out there. You also have some technical sessions. Kathy, can you tell us a little bit about who's presenting and on what topics?

Palumbo: Sure. Our first technical session was actually "Ask the Experts." It was a cleaning panel lead by Barbara Kanegsberg who is known as "The Cleaning Lady." She's an expert in the cleaning industry and she put the panel together. I thought it was a very good session. It actually ran longer than the half hour that was allotted for it because there were so many questions. It was well attended.

Warner: I had a chance to talk to her and she said it kept going for so long she was afraid no one was going to get to eat. She was actually chasing them out of the room by the time it was over. That's good though; it means there was very good engagement.

Palumbo: Cleaning is always a hot topic.

Penin: It is. You would think it would be pretty standard by now.

Palumbo: What I find is that people want a build with no clean because they want an L0 rated flux, but then they have to clean it anyway.

Penin: Because the customer is looking at it from a cosmetic standpoint only.

Palumbo: From a cosmetic standpoint, and even from a functionality standpoint, if you leave that residue behind it can cause functionality issues like current leakage. Even from that standpoint, people want to clean it anyway. I think that's why it's such a popular topic.

Our next session was on IoT and wearables, which was presented by Dr. Bill Cardoso. That was very well attended and very interesting. He had an Apple watch teardown and he went into why Apple took the audio jack out of their phone, and it was a very interesting presentation.

The last presentation is by Julie Ellis of TTM. I know Julie because she went through one of my certified IPC trainer classes for the IPC-610. She's very knowledgeable on the PCB side and she knows enough to be dangerous now on the circuit board assembly side. She does a really fantastic job on presenting. She can rattle off drill bit sizes left and right and hole sizes and aspect ratios. If you have a specific technical question she can answer that right off the top of her head.

Warner: She is very good. I've heard her talk at the IPC Designers Council and her talks are always fabulous. I always want to rip off her slides [laughs].

Palumbo: That's why I convinced her to come and present for us.

Warner: You just mentioned your involvement with IPC. Tell us what you do with them.

Palumbo: Yes, I got involved with the IPC Designers Council back in 2003. Paul Fleming, who was a CID-certified IPC designer with Mentor Graphics, got in touch with me and asked me if I could help him out with that association. They had money and checks that they hadn't been able to deposit because they couldn't figure out how to become incorporated. Joe, my partner, and I went through all the paperwork and got them incorporated as a 501(c)(3), so I do the treasury work for them. I also handle all the bookkeeping and take care of all their website stuff and do any of the website updates. Scott McCurdy took over when Paul had to move to Arizona around 2005, and he's been the president ever since. He pretty much finds the speakers and the location. Terry Kleekamp is our secretary, and she helps with putting invites together and tracking the reservations and then I do all the website and bookkeeping.

Warner: What I really appreciate and enjoyed about this expo is that it's the local market and there's a lot of long-standing relationships here. As I was talking to the exhibitors everyone says they always walk out of here with a few leads, but what's important to them is they get to see their local customers and have that face-to-face networking opportunity. It is impossible to ascribe a measurable ROI to that, but it's so clear that just us getting together and having these kinds of conversations is very beneficial.

Penin: It is, and one thing that we didn't mention is that as long as we've been putting this on, especially here, there's been free parking, free technical sessions, a free lunch, and there's a continental breakfast for the exhibitors that's free. So it doesn't cost anybody a penny to show up.

Warner: That's amazing; is that all funded by the SMTA?

Palumbo: It is funded through selling the table sponsorships. We pay all of our expenses and then split the proceeds with SMTA. At the end of the day, we end up with enough money to support our chapter from this show.

Warner: The sessions seem to be well attended, the sponsors seem happy, and you've got representation from SMTA corporate here. For people who have never been here, why should they attend the SMTA Tech Expo here in Orange County?

Penin: If you want to keep learning about this industry, this is a free chance to get everything from knowledge to food to networking in the LA/Orange County area.

Palumbo: I graduated in '85 with my electronic engineering degree and I am still learning. I am a certified IPC trainer to the IPC-610, the J standard, and the 600 and 620 documents, but even so, I am continuing my education on a regular basis because things change so quickly and it is important to keep up with it.

You can come out and talk to the vendors that are here. They're all experts in the area they're supporting, and you can ask them your tough questions and they'll help you solve your problems. So if you're having problems or you want to keep up with your education, this is a great resource for you. I even had some students show up and they were going

around talking to vendors because they were looking for jobs. So it's a good source for future graduates as well, to get an education as to who the vendors are.

Penin: You bring up a good point. We've been trying to start a student chapter out of the LA-Orange County area but just can't get a mentor to sponsor them. If students decide to join it and can find a professor in one of their classes, it's like \$5 a month to come to any of our meetings. It's very inexpensive. Again, where can you get this kind of knowledge for \$5?

Warner: There's a lot of knowledge and experience represented here today. Another thing is we're all busy. For this event, we don't have to fly anywhere. This is what, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.? We will all linger a bit and probably won't be out of here by three because we all like to see each other and catch up and learn something new. There's no booths, no flying, no hotels, no rental cars. This is truly local.

Palumbo: And it's easy to get here. It's centrally located for Orange County people as well as LA County. That's why we picked this location. Our second year we had moved it back to Irvine and the LA County people really didn't want to make that drive. That's why we relocated it back here. Our goal is to be able to raise our awareness level and get even better attendance so we can sell more tables.

Penin: As the economy gets better, too.

Warner: For our readers in the Southern California area, how can they reach your chapter to get signed up for newsletters and to get meeting information?

Palumbo: It's all on our website at LAOCSMTA.org. We post everything on our homepage for current events and we always have an event calendar. If you go to the event page it'll tell you what our future events are. This is our sixth year of the tech expo and it is always held on the first Thursday of November.

Warner: How often do you hold the meetings?

Palumbo: We used to have around nine meetings a year, but we haven't had as much attendance so now we're down to a March, April, and May. There is a breakfast meeting in June, and then in September, another dinner meeting. We have them at JT Schmid's in Anaheim.

Warner: Congratulations to both of you. I'm sure you've put a lot of time and effort into this and it's been a very successful event. Is there anything else you'd like to let our readers know about your events or how to get involved?

Palumbo: We're always looking for great presenters, so certainly if anybody out there wants to propose a presentation for either this tech expo or one of our dinner meetings they can send us their abstract and bio. The dinner meetings are always on the third Thursday of the month and they're on our event calendar so you can check the dates and

see if that's something that will work for you. We're open to looking at presentations, so if anybody has a great presentation they want to share, we'd love to see it.

Warner: And your contact information is on your website.

Penin: All the officers' names, phone numbers, and email addresses are there on the contact page.

Warner: Scott and Kathy, thank you so much. I've really enjoyed your event today and I'm sure I'll see you at the next meeting.

Penin: Thank you very much.

Palumbo: Thank you.