

# Building a Bridge to the Next Generation

One of the challenges for traditional industries today is attracting and retaining young engineering students who graduate from universities with plans to enter the workforce. In some regions there are not enough candidates to fill available positions and many of those that do graduate choose to pursue advanced degrees or begin their careers in emerging technologies.

The IEEE Pulp and Paper Industry Committee (PPIC), working together with the IEEE Foundation is finding ways to recruit and retain some of the best young engineers to the industry through the James A. Rooks Memorial Grant Fund. The PPIC is one of six technical committees in the Process Industries Department of the IEEE Industry Applications Society. In 2006, members of the committee approached the IEEE Foundation asking for help in establishing an honorarium for one of their past members, Jim Rooks.

**Jim was an IEEE Life Fellow with relentless compassion for young engineers, serving as a mentor by encouraging them to volunteer on the committee and to attend the annual Pulp, Paper and Forest Industries Conference.**

Jim personally sponsored dozens of young and experienced engineers, serving as a reference for them to apply to become IEEE Senior Members. He was active in his local IEEE IAS Chapter and often engaged with local universities to involve students

in chapter activities. A memorial fund was established through the IEEE Foundation that was initially funded by members of Jim's family. A matching fund challenge was approved by the IEEE IAS Board of Directors and this inspired giving from individual members and member companies who wanted to honor Jim. The fund was initially established to support the cost for student engineering interns to attend the annual technical conference. The Foundation account was set-up to reimburse all costs including travel, registration and hotel expense. To qualify for the financial support, the intern needed to apply, and identify a sponsor from the mill where they were working, typically an experienced engineer who would serve as a mentor.

In June of 2007, the James A. Rooks Memorial Intern Fund was active. Student interns from three different paper mills attended the annual conference along with their sponsors. The program was a success. In 2014, the PPIC worked with the IEEE Foundation to expand the scope of the program to also include travel cost and registration reimbursement for young engineering professionals already working in industry. This change in scope resulted in the creation of a new IEEE Foundation James A. Rooks Memorial Grant Fund.

Over the past several years, the IEEE Foundation/James A. Rooks grants have played an important role at the annual conference. Young students and engineers working in the industry, attend the technical sessions

and tutorials, learning about the latest applications to improve electrical workplace safety, productivity and energy efficiency. Many have established relationships with experienced mentors, some who have joined the committee and presented technical papers focused on the value of student interns working in paper mills. This year, two student interns and two young professionals attended the 2019 IEEE IAS Pulp, Paper and Forest Industries Technical Conference held in Jacksonville, FL, US, 23-27 June. Their costs to attend the conference were reimbursed by the active IEEE Foundation funds.

## James A. Rooks Memorial Student Intern Award 2019 Recipients

Rebecca Kobernat attends Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, GA, US and works for International Paper Georgetown Mill in Georgetown, SC, US. Rebecca is planning to graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering in December 2020.

Matthew Shaw attends the University of Wisconsin Madison and works for Verso Corporation at the Wisconsin Rapids, WI, US paper mill. Matthew is a Senior planning to graduate in May 2020 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science.

## James A. Rooks Young Engineering Professionals Program 2019 Recipients

Brian Gronseth is an Electrical Engineer with International Paper Springfield Mill in Springfield, OR, US. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering from Iowa State University, Ames IA, US in May 2017.

Cody Kaus is an Electrical Project Engineer in Training with Domtar at the Dryden Mill in Ontario, Canada. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from Lakehead University, Orillia Ontario, Canada in April 2018. ■



*Pictured, from the left are: PPIC Chair Todd Legette, Rebecca Kobernat, Matthew Shaw, Cody Kaus, Brian Gronseth and PPIC James A. Rooks Program Chair Emily Held.*

*Karen Kaufman is the Senior Communications Manager.*