

SPE Town Hall, February 18, 2021

Notes by Deborah Hollis

As the new chair of the SPE Board, Scott Hilton opened the meeting by explaining that the board wanted to update everyone, have a Q&A to listen to concerns, and to learn about new ideas regarding operating as a new organization.

Last year was challenging. As educators, we had to adapt rapidly in order to do what we are doing. COVID changed the world academically and financially. All of this affected SPE. The board takes its responsibility seriously and we understand that SPE is dear to the hearts of many. The board is committed to finding new ways of doing things such as looking at the organization from top to bottom, at what we do, and how we do things. Today's Town Hall is to talk about the changes.

The update is that there will be no in-person conference in 2021. It was quite a process to reach an effective conclusion with the Denver conference hotel resulting in a two-year postponement to 2023. The new dates are March 16 – 19, 2023. It takes a year or two to plan a conference and keep in mind, uncertainties have not disappeared. We opted to not hold an in-person conference in 2022; however, much is in the planning.

Scott turned to Rafael Soldi who provided an update about this year's virtual program.

Rafael explained the Call For Proposals resulted in a high number of submissions and were exceptional in quality. As a result, the Conference Planning Committee decided to spread out the programming over the entire year, rather than an intense three-day conference period. This will be an opportunity to engage our membership in different ways. We selected twenty-four programs to be presented throughout the year, which is one every other week. We realize that twenty-four is far less than what a weekend conference would offer, and chapters and caucuses are invited to co-host. The pdf list will be available on the SPE events page on the website and in the weekly newsletter to share with students.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MU748Xbfa9RsS6f-1-lea8JigjxCrVor/view?usp=sharing>

Rafael highlighted the February 27th Portfolio Throwdown. It's our attempt to replicate conference conversations that happen in the hallway. There will be free registration. Everyone will be able to share and speak about their work for no more than five minutes. He explained that they have heard from MFA programs to find ways to participate in the recruitment process in the fall.

Rafael turned to Micah Cash for an administrative staff update.

Micah explained that several board members formed a Strategic Planning Committee in November. Coming out of the pandemic, the board needed to reevaluate where we want to be in two, three and five years. Once the hotel issue was resolved, some board members went into a strategic planning process. The Strategic Planning Committee's recommendations included postponing the conference until 2023, downsizing the administrative staff, and adopting a year-round programming model for

2021-2022. It was decided that in light of the current financial situation, hiring an Executive Director was unfeasible. When the revised contract with the Denver hotel was signed, the Board was able to begin implementing the new strategic plan. Executive Committee members met with staff, who received a compensation package. All staff responsibilities were reviewed and consolidated into one new position of Administrative Director. The posting has been placed on the SPE website and will be open until March 1. The Board and the Executive Committee will continue to serve as the de facto Executive Director. Interviews will be scheduled in the coming weeks and Micah emphasized that the candidate pool is diverse and rich in experience. Micah Cash and Lauren Greenwald will conduct interviews and hope to have someone in place by the end of March. Currently the Executive Board is handling the SPE email and all responsibilities. Micah expressed gratitude to the incredible staff who have worked with the organization over the past years: Nina, Ginenne, and Jennifer.

Micah turned the meeting over to John Freyer.

John Freyer explained that FotoFika began on March 18, 2020, and has run weekly workshops helping membership adapt to online teaching. Run by John and former Board members Betsy Schneider and Anne Massoni, they have conducted regular programming and their site has an archive of their programming, as well as are developing a robust teaching resource. Last year, students were faced with cancelled exhibitions, so the FotoFika Allstars was begun, which is loosely based on Mike Mandell's baseball card project. Anne Massoni from ICP and Becky Senf from CCP solicited reviewers. Those who were graduating with an associate, BFA or MFA degree in the medium of photography were eligible for the project, as this was a way to build a connection since students did not have an opportunity to have a physical exhibit. John previewed the FotoFika trading cards, explaining that reviewers have a black and white card, and students are in color. The All Stars are highlighted. He also shared the Kickstarter site which will go live soon, with SPE as the fiscal sponsor of this publishing project. They are working on a way for libraries to purchase copies. Since public college and university libraries have to follow state accounting procedures, a monograph or artwork must be received in order to make payment.

Scott explained that the board has been communicating with Chapters and Caucus leaders and reemphasized that shifting to a virtual setting allows SPE and its members to come up with new ideas, with FotoFika being a great example. If folks have ideas, or something you would like to do, please approach the Board, Chapter or Caucus leaders.

Additional announcements:

Rafael Soldi: If someone hasn't renewed membership, think about doing so.

Micah Cash: We are working on engaging with industry partners – we want to hear from you.

Q&A:

Liz Allen: Asked about the donation button on the website, and how those who still receive travel funding might be invoiced to pay for the whole year's programming. Scott Hilton will work on this with

Liz. Liz also asked about making the virtual panels and presentation available to SPE members, or institutional members.

Discussion: Institutional membership may be sweetened with a deck of FotoFika cards. Micah Cash and Lauren Greenwald are revising institutional memberships and what these may look like moving forward. Perhaps more faculty and student memberships? Information about basic institutional packages is forthcoming. It was observed that some members don't know what their membership includes, and SPE is working to change that.

Scott Hilton announced the weekly SPE newsletter. A member asked about promoting events, e.g., the upcoming Media Festival, and he suggested any member could submit events to be included in the newsletter through the [SPE Events Calendar submission page](#).

John Freyer thanked Rafael Soldi for his work these past few months on the SPE social media component.

A member asked how libraries can acquire a deck of FotoFika card. Email: fotofika2020@gmail.com and Ann and John will strategize a procedure for libraries.

Liz Allen: What are the chapters/caucuses doing? Is there consensus? Scott responded that Chapters can come forward and reserve dates for their conferences. One chapter is doing an in-person fall conference. Options may include something like local gatherings. John responded that after the Chapter Conferences this past fall, feedback noted that it was hard to attend in the same way it is to attend in person, so a dense multi-day event may not be the most effective option.

Michael Borowski (Co-Chair, LGBTQ Caucus) asked whether any consideration had been given to reaching out to photographers who are in the commercial fields? He has students who are interested in commercial work e.g., fashion photography. Micah responded that the Strategic Planning Committee brought up that idea and sees the opportunities. The initial goal of the Committee was to avoid bankruptcy and then strategize how to sustain the SPE community.

Connecting with ASMP was proposed. Scott could see joint programming. Constance Halporn volunteered to reach out to her NY chapter.

Lynn Estomin promoted the Media Festival, and as soon as the website is up, she will share detail for the newsletter and social media.

Sant Khalsa asked about Honored Educator and student awards. Mark Malloy confirmed that awards will still happen and asked members to keep an eye on the newsletter and emails for more information.

The meeting ended with Scott stating that it is important that the general membership sees the Board as a collaborative group who are working to ensure the success and vitality of the organization. The Board is open to new ideas, and welcomes critical feedback.

Thanks to everyone for your hard work and dedication!