



President's Column

Volunteering for a Professional Society

■ Madhu Gupta

I live in Southern California close to the Pacific Ocean where, in addition to the picture-perfect sandy beaches, the coastal region has a number of marshy beaches, tide pools, and protected wetlands. Each day, the high tide brings in a fresh supply of ocean water and, along with it, the nutrients that sustain the fragile ecosystems in those areas. As I watch this timeless daily cycle, I see some similarities with the way the volunteer culture in IEEE Microwave Theory and Techniques Society (MTT-S) is sustained.

For the MTT-S, the role of the tides is played by the technical activities that the various entities within the Society periodically organize—technical talks in the local Chapters of the Society, workshops and meetings at the regional and national level, and major international conferences sponsored by the MTT-S. While the speakers, attendees, and exhibitors clearly benefit from these activities, what may not be as apparent is that the entity that arranges the activity benefits greatly as well; what is even less evident is the fact that the most important benefit generated by those activities is not the obvious things like revenue, recognition, or experience for the organizing entity but rather the heightened



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interest level among the attendees, leading to the recruitment of a fresh supply of volunteers to serve that entity. The importance of this periodic infusion of new volunteers can hardly be overemphasized: it is the life and blood of the Society that is essential to its continued long-term survival.

Why the Volunteers

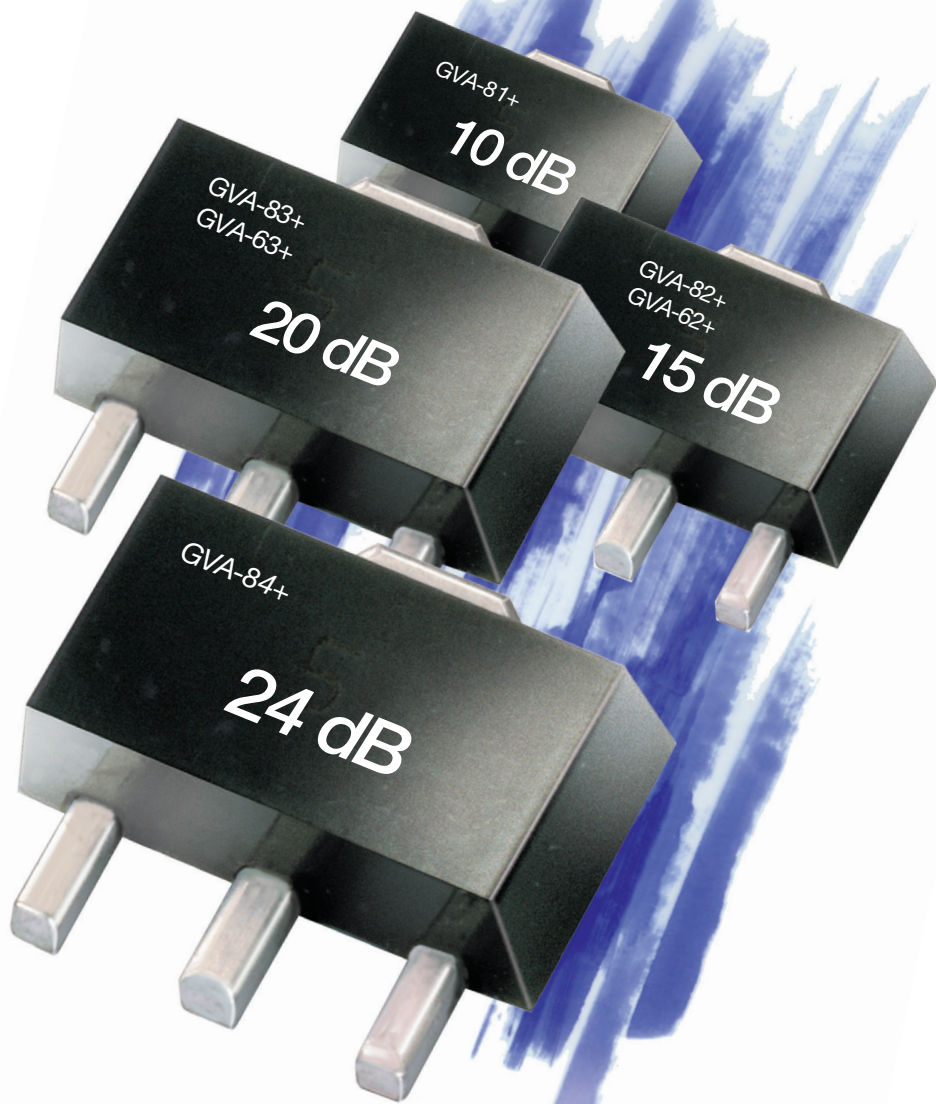
Many types of organizations depend heavily, or even entirely, on volunteers, including charitable institutions, political parties, community service

clubs, interest groups, and of course the learned societies and the scientific and professional associations. A volunteer is an individual who helps pursue the mission or advance the cause of the



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organization by contributing time and effort to its activities but is neither paid nor conscripted or coerced into service. In the course of their service, volunteers may contribute their knowledge and skills (technical, organizational), time (whether in person or online), use of equipment (vehicles, computers, tools), financial resources (personal or employer's), and people resources (their contacts

and connections) to the organization. Volunteers conceive ideas and projects, carry out the work, and enable the operation of the organization by reducing the labor cost or the need for paid staff. Moreover, in the case of MTT-S, because the volunteers are themselves a cross section of the Society members, they also bring with them a personal knowledge of what the ultimate beneficiary of

the Society—its members—need, and how the Society can best serve them.

The IEEE MTT-S is served by hundreds of volunteers at every level and in every activity of the Society. Obviously, our journal editorial teams, manuscript reviewers, conference steering committees, paper review committees, standards committees, and administrative committees (AdComs) are all composed of volunteers, as is the leadership of the local Chapters of the Society and their regional hierarchy (subsections, sections, and councils). The names of these dedicated groups of volunteers can be found in the rosters of the respective groups, e.g., reviewers lists published in our journals, the membership of the Steering Committee of conferences sponsored by the Society, the membership roster of technical paper review committee of conferences, and the AdCom directory available on the Society Web site, www.mtt.org.

Volunteers' Motivations

The volunteers can get involved in and offer their services to an organization for a variety of reasons: they may believe in the cause of the organization, benefit from the available opportunities for professional growth, or find volunteering to be personally rewarding. Examples of benefits leading to professional growth include an opportunity to learn new skills, leadership training and experience, broadening of the background and professional network, and the chance to meet and work with outstanding people in the field. Examples of personally rewarding experience valued by the volunteers include the interaction with other people having similar interests, professional recognition, the admiration of their fellow volunteers, opportunity for advancement within the organization, influencing the development and changes in the Society, and the satisfaction one derives from seeing their ideas flourish and contribute to the profession.

Many of the volunteers serving the MTT-S are encouraged and supported in their volunteerism by their employers. Occasionally it may be because the employee's supervisors themselves are (or have been) volunteers who are sympathetic toward the Society that serves

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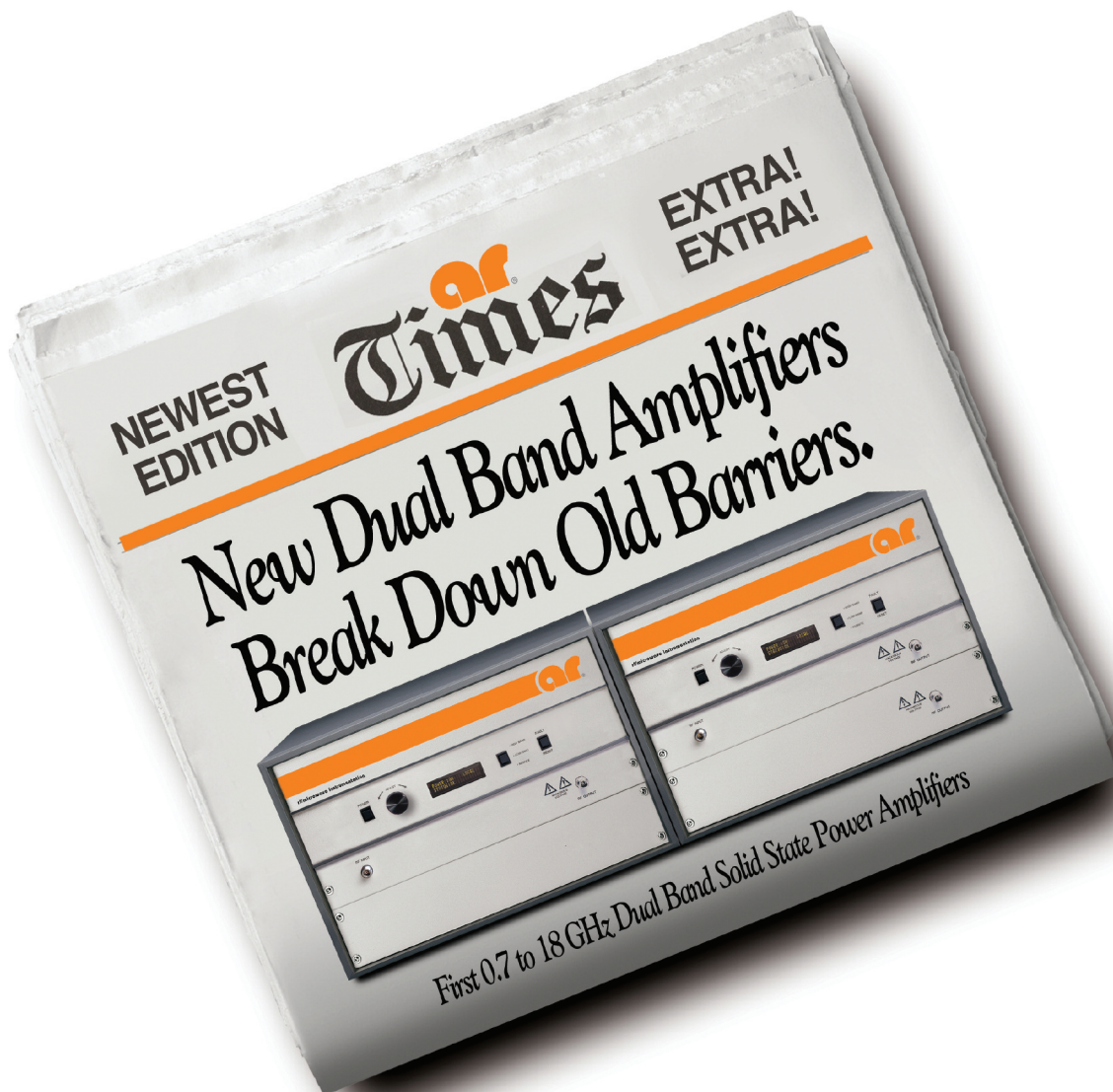


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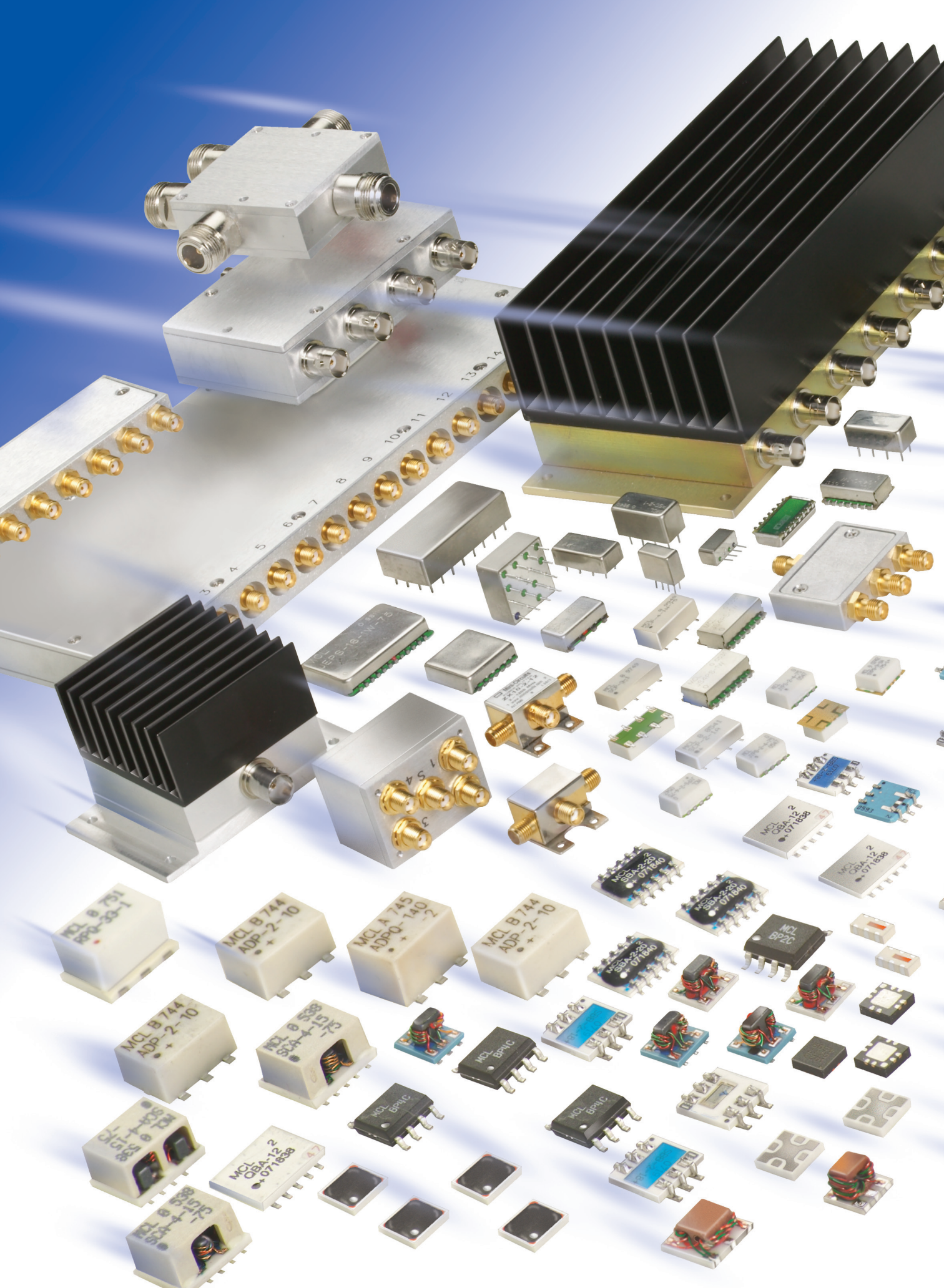
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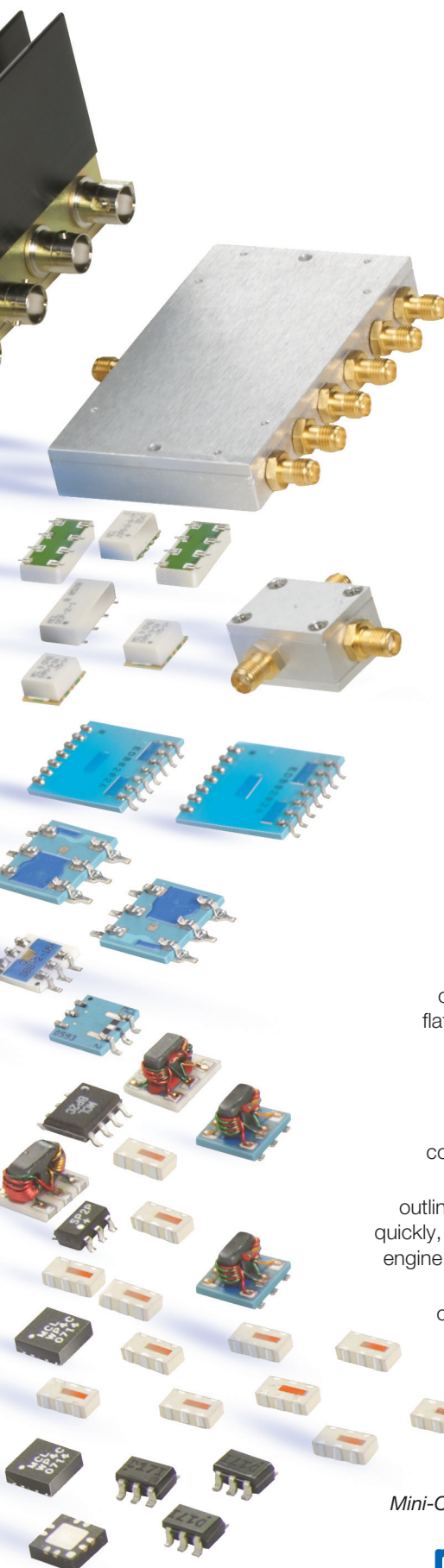
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the technology in their field of business or due to the enlightened self-interest, as in supporting participation in the committees engaged in the development of standards related to a technology that is pertinent to the company's work. More commonly, their motivations are more nebulous and include considerations such as corporate image; employee satisfaction, retention and loyalty; sense of responsibility toward the professional field or technology underlying

the corporation's business; and indirect benefits such as visibility and contact with customers. In the case of universities, professorial involvement in learned societies and professional associations is a long-standing tradition, and service to the profession is formally recognized as a part of the evaluation criteria for career advancement; this is likely a major reason for the apparent over-representation of the academics in society membership and administration.

Society's Support to Volunteers

The MTT-S attempts to provide both a supportive environment and a rewarding experience to its volunteers. In many cases, a volunteer works with a mentor who is a talented and experienced fellow volunteer and receives guidance as well as feedback from colleagues. There are also opportunities for receiving instruction and training to perform their task from MTT-S volunteers who are experienced and well-established experts, as well as from IEEE professionals at the panel meetings (e.g., Panel of Editors, Panel of Conference Organizers). The IEEE also carries an umbrella insurance policy to protect the volunteers in the conduct of their assigned Society work.

The Society relies on the volunteers for the creative sparks as well. In looking for new ways to serve its members, the Society is constantly experimenting with new initiatives and activities, and there is entrepreneurial opportunity for volunteers to conceive of a new project, develop a plan, champion it among the colleagues, justify and obtain the required funding, work on the task, and involve fellow volunteers as needed. The Society provides both the resources to carry out the approved projects and the continued interest to sponsor the activity over the long term. Equally significant, there are fellow volunteers and helpers available to form teams so as to make the tasks manageable.

Perhaps the most gratifying aspect of serving the Society is the realization that the volunteer activity is purposeful and valuable for professionals in the RF and microwave engineering field. The Society tries to acknowledge and recognize the contributions of the volunteers in several ways: there are reviewers' receptions at our conferences, service awards for dedicated service by volunteers, and the opportunity for advancement within the administrative structure of the Society. What the Society does not offer to our volunteers is any perks: for example, the only way I as the president of the Society can receive an MTT-S journal or attend

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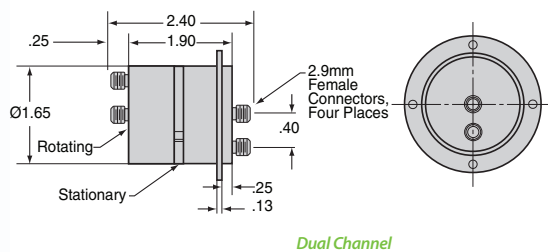
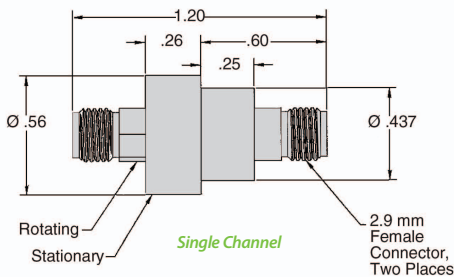
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An Invitation to Volunteers

New volunteers are needed because earlier volunteers may move up the hierarchy to take on other responsibilities or move from one project to another as their interests evolve; sometimes the conflicting demands of job, personal, or family commitments pre-

clude their continuing with the volunteer activity. For the sake of continuity, one of the important duties of a volunteer is to identify, interest, train, and groom other volunteers for the Society, in particular a replacement for himself or herself.

Since the Society depends on volunteers' ingenuity, professional interest, and enthusiasm—both to carry on its current activities and to initiate new products and services—it is always

looking for additional volunteers and invites its members to consider taking on volunteer responsibilities. We do try to widely publicize among our entire membership the opportunity for major volunteer positions, for example, searches for journal editors and nominations for the election of members of the Society AdCom. But for the very large number of all other volunteer positions, new volunteers are recruited through two major avenues: by self-identification and by recommendation.

Many of our current volunteers were found only because they took the initiative to come forward, initiate a contact, or self-nominate themselves. For members desirous of serving the Society, the most effective route would be to 1) review the Web pages of the Society, its conferences, and its committees to identify the kind of MTT-S activities that can benefit from their background and interest, 2) decide what is it that they are passionate about, would enjoy doing, and can find the time for, and 3) initiate contact with a volunteer currently engaged in that activity to discuss how they could help.

Many of the MTT-S volunteers serve as role models and recruiting sergeants and attract others to volunteerism. In carrying out their on-going tasks, our volunteers often come across others who have a flair for those tasks and may recommend them for volunteer positions provided they are able and willing to undertake such responsibility. If you have not been asked by an existing volunteer, it might only reflect our ignorance about your willingness and desire to serve the Society as a volunteer. The simplest way of getting introduced to the Society is to offer to help in organizing a local Chapter activity.

Every time an MTT-S conference comes to my neighborhood in Southern California, it creates the need for more helpers, brings out new volunteers who are willing to assist, energizes and binds together the cadre of local volunteers of the Society into accomplishing a common goal, and sustains the ecosystem of the local MTT-S volunteers. Just like the tides.

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