



## **Our History – From our *SPE TPO 20 Years of Innovation Conference (2018)***

### LEADERS IN PLASTICS COLLABORATING TO PROMOTE TPO TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATIONS

It was over 20 years ago that several board members of the Detroit Section of Society of Plastics Engineers recognized the importance of the TPO resin in the automotive industry and decided to put together a technical conference in the Detroit, MI area.

The year was 1998 and the key members were the late Ron Price from Exxon Corporation, Dr. Norm Kakarala from Delphi Corporation, Larry Kushkin from A. Schulman, Dr. Rose Ryntz from Ford Motor Company, Don Root from Uniplas, Inc., Bob Eller from Eller Associates, the late Nippani Rao from Chrysler Corporation and Bill Windscheif from Basell.

The “secret sauce” for the great success of the SPE Global Automotive TPO Conference was introduced by late Larry Kushkin of A. Schulman Inc., one of the original five Charter Sponsors of the conference. In our first planning meeting Mr. Kushkin proposed a brilliant proposal that each of the charter sponsors pre-pay \$5000 towards receiving 10 pre-registrations to the conference which they will use to bring their direct customers as their guests to the conference. With that proposal the SPE has no upfront costs, the conference will have 50 pre-registrations and have volunteers from the sponsor companies to support running the conference. No technical conference at that time had such privileges of industry sponsor support. That pre-registration concept was adapted by other similar conferences. Based on Larry Kushkin’s idea, \$50K funding support from their respective companies and backing of the SPE Detroit Section and SPE headquarter the very first TPO conference was planned for the October 1999 at Best Western Sterling Inn in Sterling Heights, about ½ hour north of Detroit.

The Monthly planning meeting started immediately for the second Thursday of the month and Bill Windscheif was appointed to find a location for the conference to be held. His search resulted in Best Western Sterling Inn to be chosen as the 1999 TPO Conference location.

Next, the TPO Committee selected Dr. Kakarala as the Conference Technical Chair and Ron Price as the Conference Operation Chair. Within a few months Dr. Kakarala planned the sessions for the conference and selected his Session Chairs to run each session. Simultaneously, Ron Price, Bill Windscheif and others in the committee reached out to the automotive industry leaders and selected the keynote speakers and panel of experts for the panel discussion portion of the conference.

The 1999 TPO Conference started on October 4th with, 3 keynote speakers and 30 technical papers on 4 session tracks. The first TPO Conference was well received! There were over 200 attendees, 15 exhibitors and a break even financial. It was a success! The TPO conference was

born. It was this *Spirit of Innovation* that still exists in every TPO Committee member and drives them to excellence.

After completion of the first conference, the planning committee started immediately to plan for the second year. Recruiting volunteer was important, therefore, the original ten committee members started recruiting new members from OEM, Tier-I and the Resin Suppliers to attend the Monthly committee meeting and take on responsibilities for various tasks. Organization chart was developed to provide solid leadership structure for the TPO committee and to determine the open spots and recruit volunteers for those positions. *Volunteerism* is still a key success of this conference.

The conference is grateful to the industry sponsors for not only providing funding but also offering volunteers to run the event and submitting valued papers for the technical sessions. When similar TPO conference was run by a for profit company the presenters have very few of their customers and the audience was mostly the staff from their competitors. The SPE Detroit Section TPO conference is completely managed by the industry volunteers with over 20 session co-chairs (about half of them from OEMs or Tiers) of the technical sessions covering many aspects of the TPO technology developments. More importantly many of the talks in the program are presented by involved OEMs and Tiers. That is highly significant for faster implementation of the new technical developments with heavy upfront engagement of the end customers. No other technical conference has such a unique privilege.

With great generosity of our platinum sponsors doing the heavy lifting for sponsoring all Lunches and Receptions and rest of the sponsors championing the Breakfast and Breaks, The SPE Detroit Section has been able to provide many annual scholarship and educational assistance including an annual \$5,000 TPO scholarship for an undergraduate or graduate student with TPO as their area of their research.

From the early years, the TPO Conference committee recognized key conference position should have two committee members. A lead member and a co-chair who would eventually take the lead in few years. The top leadership positions are appointed by a select members of the committee and requires at least 2-3 year commitment and service to the TPO Conference. Commitment to the TPO Conference and the conference success has been the key characteristic of every TPO Conference committee member.

The TPO committee decided to always hold this conference on the first complete week of October and start it on the Monday morning and conclude it on Wednesday 12:00 PM. This would allow Sunday afternoon for exhibitor set-up and the Wednesday afternoon for the attendees to return home and back at work on Thursday morning. This tradition still continues today and it is highly appreciated by the conference attendees.

TPO growth in the automotive sectors expanded very quickly beyond exterior fascia and claddings. When the SPE TPO Conference was started in 1999, most of the TPO applications were for bumper fascia with greater concerns on paint adhesion. New sessions such as TPOs in Interior, Under the Hood, Skins and Adhesives and NVH were introduced to keep the conference on the cutting edge of the technology. Dr. Kakarala has been the Chairing or Co-Chairing the Technical Program for all 20 years of the conference. The conference was started with only four generic sessions on

Materials, Processing, Painting, and Applications with fewer than 30 presentations in a single track covered in two and half days. Few special sessions are added each year to provide a path to introduce new topics and to continually expand the scope of the conference. By slicing and dicing these topics, the conference program last year had 10 sessions, 22 session co-chairs, and 81 talks presented in three concurrent sessions on all two and half days of the conference. Under guidance Dr. Kakarala, every year new sessions are added to insure the most relevant technologies are offered to the attendees.

The session co-chairs who do all the hard lifting for delivering greater value to the attendees deserve all the accolades for the success of the conference. Highly effective session co-chairs have the following attributes:

- Great passion volunteering and delivering service to the industry and to the profession
- Actively involved in technology developments
- Vast network of contacts in the profession
- Reputation for mentoring and supporting new colleagues

Dr. Rose Ryntz, Bob Eller, Mike Balow and Dr. Suresh Shah excel on all these attributes and are great role models for other co-chairs to emulate. The conference committee appreciates their contributions over the years leading to the great success of the conference.

Now in its 20th year, the SPE Detroit Section TPO Conference has grown to be the world's leading automotive polyolefins forum which draws close to 1000 key decision makers and the world's foremost authorities on transportation polyolefin applications.

Our entire committee is excited and honored to be part of the 20th anniversary and working hard to continue another 20 year journey of excellence.