

**VES Board Meeting Minutes
September 9, 2020 – 7:00pm
Via Zoom Conference**

Board members present:

Neishaw Ali, Laurie Blavin, Brooke Breton, Kathryn Brillhart, Rita Cahill, Colin Campbell, Mike Chambers, Emma Clifton Perry, Bob Coleman, Lisa Cooke, Kim Davidson, Rose Duignan, Camille Eden, Mike Fink, Gavin Graham (*alternate*), Bryan Grill (*alternate*), Dennis Hoffman, Kim Lavery, Arnon Manor (*alternate*), Andres Martinez (*alternate*), Tim McGovern, Karen Murphy, Jeff Okun, Susan O'Neal, Dan Schrecker (*alternate*), Lisa Sepp-Wilson, David Tanaka, David Valentin (*alternate*), Bill Villarreal, Joe Weidenbach

Board members absent:

Jeff Kleiser, Jim Rygiel, Dan Schrecker (*alternate*), Katie Stetson, Richard Winn Taylor II, Cat Thelia, Susan Zwerman

Guests:

John Kalaigan, Co-Chair, New York Section; Frederick Lissau, Co-Chair, Los Angeles Section; Sarah McGrail, Co-Chair, Los Angeles Section; Justin Porter, Co-Chair, Australia Section; Stephen Wagner, Chair, Toronto Section; Philipp Wolf, Chair, Montreal Section; Rob Wright, Co-Chair, Georgia Section

VES Staff present:

Eric Roth, Jeff Casper, Naomi Goldman, Debbie McBeth, Chris McKittrick, Ben Schneider, Nancy Ward

Minutes:

Lori Bowman

Call to Order – Mike Chambers

- Mike called the meeting to order.
- Announced that the minutes from the May 2020 Board meeting were approved online.
- Reviewed the virtual meeting protocol and the process for voting on motions. He clarified that Section guests do not vote.

Executive Director's Report – Eric Roth

- Eric shared there was initial concern over the past few months about a potential loss of 25% of our membership due to financial situations stemming from Covid-19. The membership payment cycle was extended to give members more time to pay their dues. Per VES Bylaws, a letter was sent by snail mail on September 1 to members who have outstanding dues notifying them that they have 30 days to pay. There are currently 500 members with outstanding dues which is significantly lower than the expected loss of 1,000+ members.
- Eric thanked the VES staff for all their hard work over the past few months. Staff and Section members have been working diligently from home during the pandemic. The VES office has created 25 VFX Pros At Home Edition Webinars and the Sections have put on 28 of their own virtual events including online pub events and VFX Pros Webinars. Eric thanked Debbie McBeth for all her work with the Sections. He noted that events provide real value to the VES membership with the purpose of ensuring a sense of community for members.
- The Awards Ceremony was originally scheduled for next February 2021 at the Beverly Hilton Hotel but the date has been changed to April 6, 2021. There's a 50/50 chance that the ceremony will be a virtual event due to Covid. If it is a virtual event, the show will have to be redesigned and the VES could take a financial loss that's equivalent to losing half of the membership. Eric assured the Board that the VES can weather that loss because the Society is in a good financial position.
- Announced that the VES comptroller, PJ Schumacher, applied for PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) funds from the government and the VES application was approved.
- Eric acknowledged Nancy Ward for all her work with sponsorships. The Autodesk "Ask Me Anything Diversity Inclusion" program with VES has been renewed. Nancy has also spearheaded programs from ESRI, Unreal Engine, Super Micro, and AMD. Additionally, the VES is about to close another sponsorship deal with Netflix on virtual production.

- Eric also thanked Ben Schneider for all his work regarding the Emmy Awards FYC (For your Consideration) ads.
- VES Board Elections are coming up in October. The nomination period will take place during the first two weeks of the month and the election will occur during the last two weeks of the month.
 - The following Board members are terming out after being on the Board for 6 years and they have to wait a year before they can run again: Brooke Breton, Rita Cahill, Mike Chambers, Dan Schrecker (*alternate*) and Richard Winn Taylor.
 - The following Board members have reached the end of their current 2-year term and need to run again next month to get back on the Board: Colin Campbell, Emma Clifton Perry, Bob Coleman, Rose Duignan, Gavin Graham (*alternate*), Dennis Hoffman, Jeff Kleiser, Kim Lavery, Andres Martinez (*alternate*), Tim McGovern, Jim Rygiel, Katie Stetson and Cat Thelia.
 - Eric reminded Board members that they have to nominate themselves; staff do not assist with this process.
- The VES Honors event in October will be virtual this year. Eric noted that Mike will provide more details.

Treasurer's Report – Laurie Blavin

- Laurie reported that the VES financial picture and budget is strong, particularly during the pandemic. She acknowledged the VES staff for all of the amazing work they have been doing remotely to keep VES operating.

Statement from the Chair – Mike Chambers

- Mike announced that the VES Honors event in October would not be at the Beverly Hilton as originally planned and was changed to a virtual event. Mike acknowledged and thanked Jeff Okun who is spearheading the program for the event. Honorary and Lifetime Member honors will be bestowed at the virtual event which includes recipients of the Founders Award, the VES Fellows and the VES Hall of Fame inductees. The October date has not been confirmed yet but will be announced in a few weeks. All members will be given information to view an online version of the event in the coming weeks.
- Mike reminded Board members about the upcoming Board Election and encouraged members to run again if their term is up and they are eligible to run again. He also thanked Board members who are terming out this year for their contributions over the past 6 years. He asked everyone to encourage people who are not on the Board to consider running.
- Mike noted that the deadline to submit applications for the Fall Membership cycle is September 15. He encouraged Board members to offer to give endorsements for applicants.
- Mike also announced that in addition to terming out of the Board and stepping down as Chair of the Board he is also stepping down as Co-Chair of the Membership Committee.

Membership Committee – Susan O'Neal

- Susan acknowledged and thanked Mike Chambers for his valuable contributions as Co-Chair of the Membership Committee.
- **Motion: Approve Joe Weidenbach as the new Co-Chair of the Membership Committee. Seconded. Vote taken. All in favor. Motion passed.**
- **Motion: Approve Chris Downs as a member of the Membership Committee. Seconded. Vote taken. All in favor. Motion passed.**

Update on the Archival Committee Initiative – Lisa Cooke

- Lisa noted that despite the limitations of Covid-19, the Committee has made great progress and have posted some luminary videos on the VES website in the temporary archive section. The postings are precursors to the future VES Digital Museum. This is a starting place to build the foundation for creating an amazing legacy to the VFX industry.
- The following edited videos have been posted:
 - Luminaries Jonathan Erland, Harrison Ellenshaw, John Dkystra, Linda Ellenshaw and Roger Corman
 - "Ask a Luminary" and "At Home with Super Collector Gene Kozicki" videos
 - The Star Wars 40 Interviews and Reunion Video (thanked Rose Duignan for putting together)
 - VFX Luminaries Dennis Muren and Harrison Ellenshaw discussing selected films on the VES 70 list

- “A Night with Sid Ganis and Hawk Koch” at Pixar Studios (thanked David Valentin for putting together)
- There are also a number of luminary videos in the final editing stages that will be posted soon.
- Had an enthusiastic response from the Sections who are going through the early application process and planning their participation as soon as it is safe and possible. Thanked Kim Lavery and Debbie McBeth for their outreach efforts with the Sections.
- The Digital Museum website is in the early stages of development with the assistance of Whirl-i-gig and members of the VES staff. Thanked Arnon Manor for his help finding an editor. Thanked David Tanaka who helped create a whole package/tool box for the editors.
- As the project moves forward in the next 12 months and limitations start to lift, there will be new opportunities for VES Board participation in R&D, planning, partnership outreach, volunteer recruitment (especially editors), resource development and more content creation.
- Lisa thanked Eric Roth and VES staff members Jeff Casper, Debbie McBeth, Chris McKittrick and Nancy Ward for all their hard work and contributions to the process. Also thanked Archival Committee Co-Chair Kim Lavery and Gentle Giant for their support.

Update on the VES Education Committee – Arnon Manor

- Arnon thanked the members of the Education Committee for their hard work and enthusiasm. Also thanked Debbie McBeth for her work with the Committee.
- The Committee reconvened recently and discussed the importance of focusing on diversity and inclusion. An important component of the Education Initiative is bringing people of color, women and people with disabilities into the field and making opportunities accessible to them. Instead of creating new initiatives in the immediate future, the Committee’s focus is to connect people within the VFX community on a local and global level.
- Mentorship is an immediate goal and is an effective way to connect people. Looking to connect mentees and mentors. He noted that Rose Duignan has been very involved with the mentorship piece and will speak more on the subject. The Committee would like to conduct a survey to get feedback from VES members. They also hope to create a scholarship fund by establishing an initiative with companies that can donate software and hardware or funds for a scholarship. Phillip Wolf, Lisa Sepp-Wilson and Katie Stetson-Osuky have been working on this project.
- Susie Zwerman and Camille Eden are working on a very comprehensive list of resources, organizations and online contacts for the VES website.
- Bryan Grill has been involved with the Veteran Initiative with the goal of bringing under represented people into the industry.
- Rose Duignan noted that the film industry lacks diversity and people of color, women and the physically disabled are underrepresented. The first step is to join forces with existing mentorship programs as well as create a curated mentorship program for VES members to mentor each other. The Committee is suggesting that a short nine-question survey be sent to all current members to gain pertinent data: 1) determine interest level, 2) what type of mentorship programs are of interest and 3) collect data on skill sets and experience. Neishaw Ali spoke with a number of Section leaders and they support this initiative. Rose asked for support from the Board to conduct the survey with the membership via email. She offered to donate 15 hours per week to assist with the project.
- Mike Chambers clarified that the next step would be to have the Committee present a concrete proposal with more specific details about the Mentorship Initiative to the Board. To proceed with the survey he suggested that they have an off-line conversation with the Executive Committee to make sure the questions on the survey are posed correctly and that data can be aggregated properly. Will also need to determine if there is any additional data that needs to be acquired. Eric Roth acknowledged the great work that has been done by the Committee.
- Neishaw Ali thanked all the Section heads for their participation in providing feedback about the mentorship program initiative. This will help ensure that this is an achievable global initiative.
- Brooke Breton noted that she has participated in mentorship programs. She reported there are not enough organizations who are selecting mentors who are fully committed and will guide their mentees to the finish line. She offered to help with this initiative.
- Mike thanked Arnon, Rose and the Education Committee members for all their hard work.

Approval of new VES Fellows – Jeffrey A. Okun, VES

- The Ad Hoc Fellows Steering Committee convened with the purpose of vetting the candidates submitted for the VES Fellows honor and making recommendations to the Board. Each Committee member did their own external interviews and internal research and there was vigorous debate on all five nominees.
- **Motion: The Committee recommends the approval of the following four candidates for VES Fellow: David Johnson, Janet Muswell Hamilton, Sebastian Sylwan and Warren Franklin. Seconded.** It was noted that a two-thirds majority is required to pass the motion. **Vote taken. Motion passed by two-thirds majority vote.**
- Ken Ralston was the fifth nominee, but the Committee did not recommend that he be accepted as a Fellow. Though many felt he was otherwise deserving, the Committee is charged to follow the published policies, and the policy was revised several years ago to place an emphasis on active VES participation when considering candidates for this honor. The Committee did not feel that Ken met this qualification. Jeff noted that Ken Ralston is a luminary in the industry who helped birth the VES. He has been a mentor to many people and has a great reputation in the industry.
- Mike Chambers noted that he had personally endorsed Ken Ralston's nomination, and he stressed the importance of growing the number of Fellows. The program started 10 years ago and there are currently 28 Fellows, which averages out to growth of less than 3 Fellows per year. The policy allows for up to 10 inductees per year. VES Fellows are an elite group, but there are many members who are worthy of this honor. He noted that the policy change requiring service to the VES is an important aspect of qualification for candidates, but the purpose was to make sure that members who have contributed significant time and energy to the Society also be eligible to receive the honor, in addition to just the "superstars" of the visual effects industry. He added that while Ken may not have participated in the workings of the VES as much as other candidates, he is a well-respected luminary in the field and deserves the honor. As well, the BOD is empowered to accept or deny any candidate, regardless of committee recommendation
- **Motion: The BOD shall approve Ken Ralston as a VES Fellow.**
- Lisa Cooke, as First Vice-Chair of the Board, took the gavel for the vote and asked for a second to the motion. **Motion seconded.** Discussion on the motion followed.
- Bob Coleman asked if there are any flaws in the process of approving VES Fellows. Mike responded that the biggest issue is getting nominations for the honor.
- Arnon Manor asked if any VES member can submit a nomination and Mike confirmed that any member can submit candidate names. Mike noted that only a small percentage of members are using their endorsement privileges.
- Gavin Graham asked if it is problematic that active Board members cannot be nominated for this honor while they serve on the Board. He added that when members leave the Board and become eligible as a VES Fellow, their Board contributions might be overlooked. Mike Fink responded that it is important to review the broad scope of a candidate's career and achievements during the vetting process so all experience and service is considered.
- It was noted that Fellows candidates do not have to be "superstars" with Academy awards and a renowned presence in the field. Candidates with many years of experience who have made significant and sustained contributions to the industry are also qualified for this honor.
- **Vote taken. Motion to accept Ken Ralston as VES Fellow was passed by two-thirds majority vote.**

New Business

- Arnon Manor asked if a process could be put in place that allows members to sponsor members who cannot afford to pay their membership dues. There was much support for this recommendation. Eric suggested that any Board members who want to help members pay their dues can contact staff member Colleen Kelly at colleen@visualeffectssociety.com.
- Rita Cahill reminded everyone to keep the new Fellows names confidential until the honorees are notified and a public announcement is made. Mike added that all discussions in the meeting are confidential.

Mike adjourned the meeting at 8:15pm

Upcoming Dates:

Next Board meeting on November 11, 2020

Submitted by Lori Bowman

*Submitted by Rita Cahill
VES Board Secretary*