Welcome to AHS 2.0

By Mike Hirschberg, Executive Director

Being selected as the AHS Executive Director was the most exhilarating event in my career. I became a member of AHS in 1995 and the Managing Editor of Vertiflite in 1999 because I fell in love with the organization, its members and its mission.

My vision is for AHS to be the global resource for information on vertical flight technology. I see four strategic imperatives for AHS: to expand the membership, develop a robust online presence, return more value to the members, and be the leaders of advocacy for vertical flight technology. We have a lot of exciting improvements in store for AHS and I hope that you will help us reach our vision. Together, I believe we can have a tremendous impact on the worldwide vertical flight industry.

Expanding the Membership

Members are the lifeblood of any professional society. Without members, a society cannot exist and has no purpose.

Membership growth is essential to the future of AHS and you are the key to making this a reality. Currently, only 10-15% of the rotorcraft engineers, scientists and managers at some of our largest corporate members are members of the Society. While organizations such as Bell Helicopter Textron and NASA have very high membership rates, we have somehow failed to connect with many of our core constituents. To me, this is unacceptable.

Membership over the past three years has fallen from close to 7,000 in 2009 to just over 6,000 today. While this may be partly due the hard economic times and the financial conservatism that they engender, we must reverse this trend. I’ve set a goal of reaching 10,000 members within the next five years. This will not only allow us to expand our capabilities and benefits, it will also give us more clout in working with the U.S. Congress and federal agencies. I especially want to reach out beyond North America – currently home to 92% of our members. There is no other organization like ours in the world. We can fulfill a critical need for all those working on vertical flight technology, independent of their geographical location.

Organizations are successful in achieving their goals when they can make connections with their constituents. We’ve connected with many of our members who are active in several different aspects of the Society – we also need to connect with members who are not as active, as well as find new members. AHS will set the framework, but we need you to spread the message on the benefits of joining the Society to help AHS to grow. We ask you to take an active role in your Society for the betterment of your career as well as the worldwide vertical flight community. You may not realize that AHS has only six full time staff members; the success of our mission depends upon you.

A key benefit of membership in AHS is the ability to network with other vertical flight experts and one of the best ways to do this is at your local chapter meetings. I’ve asked all of our chapter officers to better engage their members and I encourage you to take an active role in your local chapter. If there is no local chapter near you, contact Liz Malleck, the AHS Director of Membership, for information on how to start one.

In his book, Tribes (Penguin, 2008), entrepreneur and marketing guru Seth Godin states that “A tribe is a group of people connected to one another, connected to a leader, and connected to an idea.” Godin notes that “the tribal connections you can create with leadership grow; they don’t fade. As the organization matures and touches more people, those connections lead to more connections. The tribe thrives; it delivers value and it spreads. Internet folks call this viral activity…. ” In today’s internet age, emails, web postings, and YouTube videos go “viral” when they resonate with recipients enough that they “endorse” forward it to the friends or colleagues in their networks. We hope that AHS resonates with you such that you will endorse the Society among your network. In short, we need you to take AHS viral.

We are kicking off a Fall membership campaign. In addition to the traditional membership contests and awards (see our website for details), we are having a special membership drive where you receive incentive awards for every member that you sponsor! See the pull out card in this issue or go to www.join-AHS.org for more information.

Developing A Robust Online Presence

The AHS staff is working hard to expand our online presence with a new AHS website (including smartphone access), exclusive content available only to members, and expanded Web 2.0 offerings, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, RSS feeds and a wiki. We are providing you with the tools but we need you to take us viral.

New website: We’re building a new website from the ground up. Our previous website was first created in 1995, with a major overhaul in 2000. In order to take advantage of the latest web capabilities, we’ve moved to a new platform. You can still get to us from www.vtol.org, but you’ll find a
totally new online experience. We are in the process of getting online all of the 175,000 pages that are the body of knowledge that we have created over the past 68 years. With real time access you will soon be able to locate, purchase and download Forum Proceedings and other papers, briefings and articles (in addition to our online Journal, which is already available online). It will take a while to reach our desired endstate, but check back frequently to see our progress. Our new site will also make it easier for you to provide suggestions and feedback. Your thoughts are valuable to us – we urge you to let us know how we are doing!

**Mobile site:** On the go and need fast access to the AHS website? Do you use your smartphone for access to social media? Scan this QR (Quick Response) code from your smartphone or go to m.vtol.org for the mobile version of the AHS website. We’ll be providing extra content through QR codes in the future. Look for them in future issues of Vertiflite.

**Facebook:** We’ve had a presence on Facebook since 2009. The American Helicopter Society History Committee fan page features daily posts of “This Day in HeloHistory,” while the American Helicopter Society (AHS) International fan page highlights the latest news and announcements across the industry.

**Linkedin:** Over 120 million professionals use LinkedIn to exchange information, ideas and opportunities. Are you LinkedIn? If so, join the American Helicopter Society (AHS) International group to get updates on the latest Society news, connect with other AHS members, and network.

**Twitter:** Are you a Twitter junkie? Don’t want to wait another second for the latest information? Both of our Facebook pages and Linkedin are linked to Twitter feeds. Choose what kind of tweets you’d like to receive by following @HeloHistory, @HeloNews and/or @HeloSociety!

**RSS:** Aren’t allowed to check social media at work or just don’t belong to any of the above? Don’t worry! Just go to our website and click on the RSS button to subscribe to our RSS feed.

**YouTube:** We’ve got some great historical and AHS-related videos on our YouTube channel, but plan to expand this area in the future. Our channel is HeloSociety.

**Wiki:** The AHS History Committee has started the VTOL Bios Wiki as a “Who’s Who” of the rotorcraft industry, from vertical flight pioneers, to AHS award members and other prominent leaders. We’ve got over 100 biographies already started, but, as with any wiki, the content is provided by volunteers! If you’d like to contribute, go to www.vtol-bios.org to sign up.

**Journal:** AHS has had The Journal of the American Helicopter Society (JAHS) online for the past two years, but we are moving to a new vendor that will be more in line with the Society’s needs and strategic goals. The world’s only vertical flight technical journal, the JAHS has the latest scientific findings and engineering breakthroughs. For only $45 a year, you can receive the articles as they are completed, and have online access to the previous three years of the Journal. Access to all 56 years of the Journal is also available for an additional $20. Go to www.vtol.org/journal for more information.

**Returning More Value**

In addition to the aforementioned Web 2.0 offerings, you’ll soon see other benefits as well. In 1998, AHS changed Vertiflite from a bi-monthly to a quarterly publication and went to full color. In order to provide members with more timely news and more frequent updates, we’re moving back to bi-monthly distribution (and keeping the color). Beginning in January, all AHS members will begin receiving Vertiflite six times a year! The new Vertiflite will feature a new binding and a more streamlined appearance in 2012. To keep our members up to date on a more immediate basis we have been sending out more emails to the membership highlighting some of the opportunities that AHS provides. We hope you find these messages useful, We’re interested in hearing your feedback on how we’re doing.

We have also begun work towards changing our non-profit tax status from a 501(c)(6) “business league” to a 501(c)(3) “scientific organization.” This will reduce some of our expenses, allowing us to provide more “bang” for your membership “bucks.”

As we expand our membership, you will see many more benefits as well. These include online access to Vertiflite for our members, a career center that will show job listings and allow members to post resumes, and improved dissemination of information on chapter events and Specialists’ Meetings.

**Leading Advocacy**

Since taking over AHS on June 1st, I’ve been working with the media, academia, industry and government to get the message out about the critical roles of vertical flight in military, humanitarian and civilian applications, and the untapped potential that investment in vertical flight technology can unleash.

Getting the media to understand rotorcraft better will help to shape the opinions of the public, Capitol Hill, the Pentagon, NASA, and other federal agencies. I’ve contributed to articles in Aviation Week, The Wall Street Journal, Rotor & Wing and AOLDefense.com on the need for more rotorcraft investments. In August, I had a Letter to the Editor published in The Washington Post noting the “lack of adequate investments in rotorcraft technology by the Defense Department over the past 25 years” and arguing that “The Pentagon must recognize the
importance of vertical flight aircraft in achieving our national military strategy objectives and invest accordingly."

Working with corporate and individual members of AHS and the Vertical Lift Consortium (VLC), I am endeavoring to make positive changes for the rotorcraft community within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Congress. I hope that through these efforts major decisions will be made over the next few months that are favorable for the vertical flight industry.

Many members don’t realize how successful AHS has been in the past two decades in championing the development of vertical flight technology. My predecessor, Rhett Flater, spearheaded a number of efforts that resulted in launching the National Rotorcraft Technology Center (NRTC) in 1994, restoring NASA rotorcraft funding in 2002, returning the National Full-Scale Aerodynamics Complex (NFAC) to operational status in 2006, and making necessary reforms to ICAO Annex 6 (Operations) and 14 (Heliports) regulations in 2009, to name just a few (check out the “Advocacy” section of our new AHS website to learn more).

The Society is actively pursuing similar initiatives today, but we need your support to continue to be the leader of advocacy for the vertical flight technical community.

**AHS 2.0**

As your lean headquarters staff works to orchestrate the new strategic direction for AHS, I hope that you will join us as active participants and as leaders of the Society. With your help, we can become the global resource for information on vertical flight technology, and realize our four strategic imperatives. If you aren’t already doing so, participate in local chapter meetings, attend one of our many conferences throughout the year, author a paper, join one of our technical committees, or start a new effort to address a need that you see as important.

We are excited about the future of AHS. If you are as well, encourage your colleagues to join. Help them become active in an organization that has a lot to offer. We have been working to advance vertical flight technology for 67 years and there is much more to come. Together, we can take AHS viral and change the future of vertical flight.

---

**AHS Continues Its Role in Advocating for Helicopter Safety**

The International Helicopter Safety Team, for which AHS is the Secretariat, is planning to hold the Fifth International Helicopter Safety Symposium, November 8 – 9, 2011, at the Worthington Renaissance Hotel, Fort Worth, TX, USA. This is the continuation of a global effort that was launched in 2005, with the goal to reduce worldwide helicopter accident rates by 80 percent by 2016. A key challenge in achieving that goal is addressing the human factors in helicopter safety and fostering a culture in which individual members of the international helicopter community (both organizations and people) take personal responsibility for preventing accidents and enhancing safety. Not surprisingly, the theme of this important conference is “Human Factors: Our Collective Challenge – Our Individual Responsibility.”

The event is a gathering of helicopter operators, manufacturers, service providers, trade associations, academia, government regulators, pilots, mechanics, instructors and other industry participants around the globe who are dedicated to finding ways to drive down the helicopter accident rate. During this important two-day meeting attendees will participate in a wide range of activities, including:

- Presentations by the U.S. FAA (FAA Administrator Randy Babbitt will provide the Keynote Address on Tuesday, November 8, 2011 at 11:40 a.m.), the US National Transportation Safety Board (Vice Chairman Robert Sumwalt will provide his presentation on the “Top Ten Recommendations on Human Factors in Helicopter Accidents” on Wednesday, November 9, 2011 at 8:00 a.m.), the European Aviation Safety Agency, and ICAO.
- Panel discussions by IHST Regional Partners including representatives from India, the Gulf Cooperative Council, Japan, Brazil, Russia, Canada, and Australia, Small Helicopter Operators, Maintenance, New Technologies/Next Generation Helicopter Infrastructure, Training, Corporate Safety Culture, and the IHST Executive Committee
- Presentations by exhibitors/equipment manufacturers on their products that may be most beneficial to operators’ individual safety initiatives.

We encourage anyone with an interest in safety to attend this important meeting. To register, look at a preliminary agenda, find out about exhibiting or sponsoring or to make a hotel reservation please visit [www.ihst.org](http://www.ihst.org). The hotel has room rates of $189.00 with government room rates offered at $138.00 (which will go fast!). The hotel can be reached by calling 1-800-266-9432 and make sure to mention the International Helicopter Safety Symposium when making your reservations. We hope to see you in Fort Worth at this pivotal conference.