

**From:** [Charles J. Lord, PE](#)  
**To:** [r3-sosc@IEEE.ORG](mailto:r3-sosc@IEEE.ORG); [r3-excom2020@ieee.org](mailto:r3-excom2020@ieee.org); [Region 3 Section Chairs](#); [Patrick Donohoe](#)  
**Subject:** IEEE SoutheastCon 2020 Report  
**Date:** Monday, March 30, 2020 6:15:08 PM

---

IEEE SoutheastCon 2020 – Interim Report  
30 March 2020  
Charles Lord

### **Welcome to IEEE SoutheastCon 2020 – Virtual Edition – Part 3 of 3!**

IEEE SoutheastCon 2020 was shut down by order of the governor of NC on 4PM Thursday March 12 due to the spreading pandemic's threat to the state's citizens. The committee was well into the process of preparing for the conference at the Raleigh Convention Center (RCC) and was finishing up the pre-conference tutorials and setting up for Friday when the managers of the RCC and Centerplate (the caterer) took me aside twenty minutes later and informed me that the center was shut down as of midnight Thursday and no further meetings could take place in the building after that.

Our #1 priority was to notify all attendees (including all of you) ASAP via email and the website that the conference was canceled. We also worked to stop work on the AV setup for Friday and start packing up our equipment and supplies and prepare to get people and equipment out.

At the time of cancellation, we were receiving emails at a steady pace requesting cancellation of individual and group registrations, mainly from attendees whose school or company had canceled all interstate travel (or even intrastate for UNC system). Coupled with hotel cancellations earlier that day, we were facing a 30-40% loss of attendees. This was going to put us in default with the hotel (if we occupy less than 80% of our block, we have to pay for the unsold rooms).

One week before the conference, Director Gostin and I talked with the IEEE MCE staff and the conference insurance carrier to determine what the cost of canceling the conference would be (if we initiated it). As force majeure didn't apply (no state of emergency in Raleigh), we could have been liable for the entire \$200K budget. Thus we decided to continue.

### **Introducing the Virtual Conference**

We quickly met after the shutdown to begin planning how we could carry on the elements of SoutheastCon online.

Some elements such as the hardware contest really could not take place virtually which was a huge disappointment after 60+ student teams as well as the local organizers had spent a year preparing. There are some student teams who posted videos of their robots running on their practice tracks and they are AMAZING. We will get some of those posted to the website. NC State's robot, the best one that I have seen, pressed buttons to enter a staggering 20,810 digits of Pi as well as stacking six feet of duplos, also representing digits of pi. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9G\\_bmw837M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9G_bmw837M)

The R3SAC is looking at how other elements can be carried forth virtually.

The Region 3 EXCOM met last Monday (part 1)

The Region 3 Committee is meeting now (part 3)

The technical conference followed IEEE emergency guidelines and allowed the authors to present their papers and posters in an online conference that was held 28-29 March (last Saturday and yesterday) via WebEx Events (the webinar tool in WebEx). I worked with Co-Chair and Program Chair Parag Upadhyay to set up the conference which consisted of three parallel tracks in six sessions over two days. We also held training sessions Wed-Fri evenings for the presenters. This was SoutheastCon 2020 Part 2.

Parts 4-? Will be the training sessions that we will be setting up over the next weeks. The first of these will be this Wednesday, April 1 at 8PM EDT. See my other report for details!

## **Finances**

As stated before, if we had canceled a week before the conference we would have taken a roughly \$200K loss with no insurance to cover. As we have roughly \$80+K in our conference reserves, this was just not possible. At the point we were shut down by the governor, we were facing a roughly \$50K loss, mainly due to the hotel penalty clause. The governor's action changed things greatly.

Our bill for RCC, originally \$16,000 plus Wifi and any setups / equipment is now zero dollars. The \$4300 paid to them is being refunded.

The Marriott released us from the 80% guarantee and offered late cancellation without penalty (although I know some of you were still charged for a day). The catering for the Sunday breakfast was canceled without fee. Although I haven't gotten an official notification from the Marriott, the only charges they billed to our CBA from the master bill were committee restaurant charges. None of the staff rooms that we used have been charged (the 1:40 comps went out the window with all the cancellations)

The catering for the conference (except for the one breakfast mentioned above), prepaid by us for \$128,575.12, was refunded in full.

Our AV with Presentation technologies, expected to be \$16-18K, was settled at \$3K which covers the two days the techs were there plus their travel expenses.

Most of our sponsors have requested a refund and these are being processed.

X-CD costs will not change. We didn't use the on-site module but were not planning to.

All attendees except the authors have received a full refund of their paid registration on their credit card. Authors are being charged a new, lower fee as they are not getting meals and all will be receiving a partial refund this week.

With expenses, costs of materials, and other costs we are looking at somewhere between breaking even and a possible maximum loss of \$10K – which will be covered by the loans we are holding from R3 and the Eastern NC Section. I'm working hard to keep it toward the black. I should have much better numbers soon. IEEE CBA (concentration banking accounts) have not updated our statement in almost two weeks so we are estimating our remaining reserves as we refund people.

## **Kudos**

This committee has – and continues to – work through one of the most challenging conference experiences in our history. And yes, even compared to 2011. There are many heroes who have done a yeoman's effort and I hope to honor them at an appropriate time. THANKS from all of us!

--

Charles J. Lord, PE  
President, Blue Ridge Advanced Design and Automation  
Chair, IEEE WNC Section 2018-2019  
Past Chair, IEEE NC Council  
Chair, IEEE SoutheastCon Steering Committee  
Co-Chair, IEEE SoutheastCon 2020  
[c.j.lord@ieee.org](mailto:c.j.lord@ieee.org)