

Introducing the 2020 SAE President: Todd Zarfos



Todd Zarfos started with Boeing as an engineer in 1985 and currently serves as Vice President for Engineering Functions and the Washington State Design Center, and Senior Chief Engineer of Airplane Systems within Boeing Commercial Airplanes.

The Boeing executive is all about tackling today's challenges with a team mindset.

The SAE President resides at the top of SAE International's leadership org chart, but for Todd Zarfos, it's all about being a team player. There is no "i" in "team."

That was one of the main points the Boeing executive made clear during an interview with *Update* on December 6 at SAE world headquarters near Pittsburgh. As a member of the SAE Board of Directors for the past five years, he'd been to headquarters before.

"My experience on the board has been one of mutual collaboration," he said. "We work together as a team. Now as SAE President, I will work collectively with the board to make sure we bring the best of SAE International into the marketplace."

Zarfos began his one-year term as 2020 SAE International President on January 15.

As has been proven since SAE International's founding in 1905, its presidents understand the importance of tending to industry sectors beyond automotive. That broad understanding comes from a development pipeline that typically has SAE Presidents come up through the Board of Directors.

"I think there's so much commonality in terms of what engineers are trying to achieve that, to me, the sector is not what's important," Zarfos said. "It's about what we are trying to do together to advance the mobility space."

Update's interview with him took place in the orientation period during which presidents, among other things, visit SAE headquarters to meet with various SAE staff representatives. The presidency involves responsibilities that require additional meetings with other players, including previous SAE presidents, to review the overall strategy and to look at the coming year in terms of activities and tactics to advance the strategy. Zarfos had not yet had those meetings as of the date of the *Update* interview, and so could provide only some general insights into what's in store. A continued emphasis on standards is among those things.

"SAE is important to all of the mobility sectors—automotive, commercial vehicle, and aerospace—and standards underpin them all," Zarfos said. "They're essential to all of us. The only way that our industries are going to continue to advance in terms of technology insertion and adapting to our customers' needs is to continue to support standards development. That's why I've put so much of my time and effort into this focus area."

"I've been active in the standards space on the aerospace side for over 30 years, serving in various capacities and in different organizations," he continued. "I have a greater appreciation for the value of SAE because I've

Todd Zarfos bio

Eight-year SAE Member Todd Zarfos is the 113th individual to serve as SAE International President since the organization's founding in 1905.

He started his career with Boeing in 1985, spending his early years supporting various avionics development programs. He currently serves as Vice President for Engineering Functions and the Washington State Design Center, and Senior Chief Engineer of Airplane Systems within Boeing Commercial Airplanes. He is responsible for engineering functional organizations and the Washington State design centers for all commercial airplanes, as well as the continuous improvement and utilization of the technical workforce and for supply chain management for technical services. In his role as senior Chief of Engineer of Airplane

Systems, he is responsible for driving technical excellence within the airplane systems community while also ensuring the technical integrity and success of Commercial Airplanes' development and production programs.

Prior to that role, Zarfos served as Senior Chief Engineer of Support and Vice President of Engineering for Commercial Aviation Services. Before that, he served as Vice President of 747-8 Engineering and Senior Chief Engineer of Airplane Systems. Other previous roles include Vice President of Engineering for the 747, 767, and 777 programs, Vice President of Product Development for Boeing Commercial Airplanes, and Chief Project Engineer for the 777 program.



Todd Zarfes served as Executive Chair of SAE's AeroTech conference in 2015.

worked at the ground floor of what it takes to develop standards. In my current role, I oversee how we use our standards and who supports them—encompassing the entire life cycle of the process.”

Outside of standards, “we have an overarching mobility strategy and we’re going to make sure we continue to move forward in the major thrust areas,” he said.

The thrust areas address ongoing industry trends. “Autonomous technology, for example, obviously is an important industry trend, and there’s a continued expectation

around safety regarding these types of products and services,” said Zarfes. “So for me, it’s making sure that we bring forward new capabilities—what new standards do we need to develop to prepare industry as we move forward? That’s where we’ll spend a lot of time and effort on the board, refining our strategies keeping SAE at the forefront of standards development and as a recognized thought leader in the mobility space.”

Automation, data science, AI, cybersecurity, alternative fuels, and battery technologies are the other focus areas.

“We have standards in many of these areas,” he said. “But things continue to morph and ebb and flow. We are all experiencing a lot of disruption to these different technology sectors. That’s one of the things we’re trying to stay ahead of from an industry perspective.”

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Todd Zarfos

“SAE is about providing the enablers around mobility: safety, accessibility, and affordability. All three of these focus areas go across all of our transportation sectors,” he continued.

Encouraging students to go into STEM fields is a priority for Zarfos, as it has been for previous SAE Presidents. The SAE Foundation-funded A World in Motion curriculum for K-8 and the Collegiate Design

Series are the two main vehicles through which SAE develops and executes activities geared to entice students into an engineering career. At his December 6 visit to headquarters, he met with staff representatives from the SAE Foundation and SAE’s Pre-Professional Programs unit to discuss how he could advance their missions. Zarfos himself has some past volunteer experience with those specific SAE STEM programs.

At the close of *Update*’s interview with Zarfos, he said, “I’m here for the community, and so if there’s something that we need to improve or change—whether it’s SAE the institution, the team or within our industries—I’m more than willing to do my part to make the change happen. I consider it a distinct honor to be part of the SAE leadership team and I am super excited about SAE’s future.” ■

By Patrick Ponticel, *Update* editor

Officers and Directors of the Board

The Executive Nominating Committee invites SAE International members to submit names for consideration for the Board of Directors, Slate of Nominees. Key qualifications of SAE Board members include: a demonstrated, strong commitment and knowledge of the SAE Vision and Ends; active membership and participation in the society; and the time and talents to serve in a leadership role. Nominations may be submitted at any time via email encnominations@sae.org or fax +1.724.776.5944.