

## FEATURE

# How the Asian American Engineer of the Year Award Was Born

## A Prestigious Award Program Sponsored by CIE-USA since 2002

By Thomas Wu

Excerpted from: "The History of the Asian American Engineer of the Year Award (AAEOY)" by Thomas Wu

**T**he Chinese Institute of Engineers-USA (CIE-USA) is an US-based professional organization founded in 1917 in New York led by Tien-You Zhan, a well-known talented and visionary Chinese engineer who graduated from Yale University. Today, CIE-USA is proudly celebrating its 100th birthday and evolving into a national level professional association with seven local chapters across the US continent.

During the past years, CIE-USA has developed three major flag-ship programs including the Modern Engineering and Technology Seminar (METS) in Taiwan since 1966, the Sino-American Technology and Engineering Conference (SATEC) in China since 1993, and last but not least, the Asian American Engineer Of the Year award program (AAEOY) in US since 2002. Both METS and SATEC conferences are taking place every other year, with AAEOY event is held annually. This article is tribute to the history of AAEOY establishment especially in early years and its impact to CIEUSA as a whole.

Prior the AAEOY era, the CIE-USA National Council was focused on two international conference events for METS and SATEC.

In 1996, the Dallas/Ft. Worth Area Chapter has begun to cultivate a goal to step into the mainstream of the US professional world and reach out to the tech companies and local universities, and invited the national-known Company CEO/Chairman from Computer Associates (CA) as the key-note speaker at 1996

CIE-DFW Chapter Annual Convention. Since then, the seeds for CIE-USA and local chapters to grow into the mainstream STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) world have been blossomed exponentially.

Back in 1951, the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) created National Engineers Week, or E-Week (now Discover-E), in honor of George Washington, our nation's first president and also a military engineer. NSPE celebrates E-Week every year around the time of President Washington's birthday to make the public aware of how engineering affects our lives.

In February 2001, inspired by the mainstream EWeek event in Dallas, a group of CIE-DFW chapter leaders attended the National E-Week celebration event hosted by the Texas Society of Professional Engineers (TSPE) and deeply impressed by its outstanding E-Week award program.

Later in February 2001, Thomas Wu of the CIEDFW chapter was elected Chairman of the CIE-USA National Council. With the inspiring mission and passion for bringing CIE-USA into the mainstream STEM world in US, Wu began the first step to contact the National Engineers Week Foundation (NEWF) organization in Washington DC and shared the thoughts and plans with NEWF officials included Ms. Leslie Collins, Executive Director.

With Ms. Collins's encouraging support and blessing of the CIE-USA National Council, Wu and George Wan (CIE-DFW board member) made a trip to Washington DC right after the 911

tragedy event. On October 15, 2001, Wu met with both NEWF and NSPE leaders and officials included Pat Natale (Executive Director of NSPE), Henry Hatch (Chair of NEWF Board committee), and Leslie Collins.



After a series of meetings there, CIE-USA was officially joined the NEWF executive committee as one of the institution members along with many well-known national level professional societies including IEEE-USA, American Society of Civil Engineers, National Society of Black Engineers, Society of Women Engineers, American Institute of Chemical Engineers, Institute of Industry Engineers, and many others to jointly develop and promote STEM events and programs in US.

It's noteworthy to mention that at that critical moment when CIE-USA desperately needed the initial funding, the Raytheon Company provided tremendous support and ultimately sponsored \$20,000 as the seed money for CIE-USA to pay for a sizable membership due in joining the National E-Week Executive Committee. CIE-USA was so grateful for Raytheon's generous support at that critical time. The record indicated that CIE-USA remained in the National E-Week Board until 2009.

After returned from the productive DC trip, a meeting was called by Wu in late October 2001 to further discuss the ideas and feasibility for creating a much-needed platform to honor outstanding Asian-American professionals in STEM arena... At that meeting, an executive decision was made to initiate an award program and name it "Asian American Engineer of the Year Award" in support of the National E-Week celebration events each year in February's.

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Feb. 23, 2002 was an unforgettable and historical date in CIE-USA history, the AAEOY award banquet was first introduced to the tech World. This award program was the first of its

kind in conjunction with the National E-Week celebration and promotional events in US. When this historical award event was first held in Dallas Texas, it was hailed as the "Oscar of technologies".

More than 40 national and local organizations sponsored the event, and nearly 600 distinguished guests, corporate executives, political leaders, academic and community leaders attended the first-ever AAEOY award banquet to honor a total of 17 awardees including two CIE-USA sponsored Distinguished Life Time Achievement Award (Dr. Chang-Lin Tien, Chancellor of UC Berkeley) and Distinguished Scientific and Technology Award (Dr. Leo Esaki, 1973 Nobel Physics Laureate). These two distinguished award categories were initially introduced in 2002 and have been adopted as the highlights in later AAEOY programs.

With a huge success and positive feedbacks from the first award event in 2002, AAEOY program was quickly established and supported in CIE-USA NC and became one of the major NC flag-ship programs besides METS and SATEC. Due to the scope and magnitude of the AAEOY event, other CIE-USA local chapters were not ready to host the second 2003 AAEOY award program. As such, Thomas Wu was re-elected as the CIE-USA NC Chair in 2002 for the second-term and once again, CIE-DFW Chapter continued to carry the AAEOY torch.

This was how AAEOY was born.