

History of The Engineering Society®

Throughout its existence, The Engineering Society of Detroit® (also known as The Engineering Society®) has been a leader, whether in promoting the engineering and scientific professions or by providing invaluable technical assistance to the community.

In 1895, thirteen young engineering students from the University of Michigan formed the Detroit Association of Graduate Engineers, later known as the Engineering Society of Detroit, for one specific purpose – to demonstrate to the Regents at the University of Michigan the value of an engineering education. During the next six years the Society's membership expanded to include engineering graduates from other universities. By 1929 the membership grew to 871, but the Great Depression descended upon the nation and within five years the Society lost 75% of its members. Faced with bankruptcy, then president, Harold S. Ellington, an engineer and partner in the architectural-engineering firm of Harley and Ellington, sent letters to past and present members asking for financial assistance and suggestions by which the Society could regain solvency. Bryson Horton, a trustee of the Horace H. Rackham and Mary A. Rackham Fund suggested the Society petition the Trustees for financial support to assist with its work in promoting the advancement of the engineering profession.

Based on this initial request there has been an ongoing relationship that continues today between the Rackham Engineering Fund and the Society. With the financial support of the Rackham Engineering Fund the reorganized Society experienced phenomenal growth from 523 active members in 1930 to 2,396 in 1938. In 1942 the Society's moved into its new home which was dedicated, the Horace H. Rackham Memorial Building. For the next fifty years The Engineering Society of Detroit and the Rackham Memorial Building served as the hub for metropolitan Detroit's engineering community.

Since our early beginnings, ESD has enjoyed the overwhelming support of industry within the metro Detroit region. The list of members reads like a "Who's Who" of past and present industry and civic giants from Charles Kettering and William "Bunky" Knudsen, to Henry Ford and Henry Ford II, Alex Dow, Walter J. McCarthy, Jr., Lee Iacocca, Elliott "Pete" Estes, Dexter Ferry, Albert Kahn, Richard Kuhn, Father William T. Cunningham, Keith Crain, Dr. David Cole and G. Richard Wagoner, Jr.

Today ESD continues to receive the overwhelming support from industry leaders. As one of the largest and oldest multi-disciplinary engineering societies in the nation, ESD's membership represents a multitude of industries and related technical fields including automotive; utilities; construction and design; information technology; materials, chemicals and steel; and education and research. With several hundred corporate and several thousand individual members throughout the Great Lakes Region, ESD unites engineers, scientists, architects and those in related technical fields in a common goal – the advancement and promotion of the profession.

The Society's programs and services are dedicated to enhancing the profession and the community, while encouraging growth and development of engineers and scientists for the future.