In olden days seers would read tea leaves to predict someone’s future. Here at STLE, we’ve updated that ancient approach. Every year we look for indicators about the health of our upcoming annual meeting and exhibition.

I’m happy to report that the omens for our 2014 conference are overwhelmingly positive. The early indicators are that the event, May 18-22 at Disney’s Contemporary Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, about 19 miles from Orlando, could be our biggest in years.

Let’s take a look at the tribological tea leaves.

First, STLE is offering more than 400 technical presentations. Anything over 350 is a very encouraging sign. This many presentations ensure that anyone who comes to the meeting will have access to a broad range of the finest industry-specific technical research available in the world.

Another good indicator of strong meeting attendance is number of room nights, because reserving a room is usually the first action a member takes when planning a convention itinerary. Bookings for the Contemporary and for two additional hotels have been running more than 50% ahead of what we would normally expect to see.

Two other key indicators of a strong annual meeting are sales of exhibit booths and the Commercial Marketing Forum (CMF). For our Corporate Members, both events are opportunities to openly promote their products and services in a way the society doesn’t allow at technical sessions. For attendees, the two events are where you can find the kind of technical solutions that can save you thousands of dollars or help you better serve your employer and customers.

Normally, STLE sells booth space right up to the start of the meeting. This year the trade show sold out in early February. We added another row of booths, and they sold out in a day. The same was true of time slots for the CMF. All spaces sold out months ahead of the norm. STLE added another day of the 30-minute slots, and they were purchased immediately. We are running wait lists for both the trade show and CMF, so if you are interested please contact national sales manager Tracy VanEe at (630) 922-3459, tnicholas@stle.org.

So we know there will be a lot of people in Lake Buena Vista. Our estimate is that some 1,400 members of the lubrication engineering and tribology-research communities from all over the world are attending.

Of course, the key component of any industry event is content. Fortunately, technical education and training has always been our society’s strong suit, and our 2014 conference is no exception.

In addition to the 400 technical presentations, STLE’s meeting offers 12 one-day education courses taught by the industry’s most knowledgeable experts. For the first time, you may take a course without registering for the meeting.

A traditional highlight of an STLE annual meeting is the keynote speaker. This year we are very pleased to have Dr. Don Hillebrand with Argonne National Laboratory in suburban Chicago. Don’s topic is “Advanced Vehicle Technology Research”, and he’ll update us on such issues as the electrification of the automobile, the smart grid, advanced combustion methods, new fuels and autonomous vehicles. I know I’m looking forward to his talk.

STLE remains the industry’s premier source for technical education and training, but please remember that our annual conference also is a networking event. That means the most important element of any annual meeting is you. Please join us for an invaluable and unique experience that just can’t be replicated anywhere else. To register, just log on to www.stle.org up to and even during the meeting.

When you see me at the show, please be sure to say hi. I look forward to meeting you.

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