When I was new to the industry, my employer encouraged me to attend Cincinnati Local Section meetings, but after attending a few it didn’t take any more coaxing. The program topics were informative, the food was good, and the people I met were often sterling local experts in many subjects. In fact, the local section was the reason I joined STLE. Local sections are where STLE membership starts!

Today there are about 20 active local sections in the U.S., plus more in Canada, in addition to international sections and student sections. In May STLE’s Board of Directors approved the start of two new international sections in Ghana and Latin America. Auburn University is starting a new STLE student section. Conditions for starting a section are to have 20 STLE members (10 for student sections), officers, bylaws, a business plan and budget and a communications plan.

It is difficult to start a section where one has never existed, but lots of help is available. Each of these new sections plans to make initial use of the educational Webinars available from STLE at their regular meetings, and the new Latin American section plans to offer a number of sites for taking the CLS exam. Each of these sections also can access a limited amount of seed money from STLE to help get their programs going. We celebrate these new sections and plan to be supportive in any way possible.

Typically STLE’s president gets to visit several local sections during his or her term to see what these groups are doing. It is really quite inspiring, and the members usually have some very good ideas for other sections to try.

On a recent trip to the Toronto Section, Ken Brown recommended to me that struggling sections put on an education course and include the price of STLE membership in the course cost. With proper pricing, an education course can be a moneymaker for the section, as well as boosting the number of members in the area. STLE headquarters in Chicago can help supply instructors for the education course, although often the local section wants to add a few of its own instructors for selected topics.

More helpful hints for running a local section can be found by clicking the Local Sections tab at the upper right of the STLE Website (www.stle.org) and selecting Local Section Information. There you can find two Webinars that list the best practices of both small and large sections. Similar information was also presented last May at the annual meeting in a panel discussion for the benefit of section leaders. LinkedIn has a subgroup for STLE Local Section Leadership that is hosted by Kara Sniegowski from STLE headquarters; additional helpful hints can be found there.

One key to a successful program year for local sections is to offer a variety of different events. Here are just a few ideas heard during various recent discussions:

- Tour a local business, university, municipal vehicle facility, government lab, electric power plant, auto plant or beverage bottling plant.
- Looking for a social event idea? Feature a talk by a local historian, have a cookout, go to a dinner theater, sporting event or museum.
- Create reasons for younger members to attend by having more experienced members review resumes of younger members or conduct mock job interviews.
- Instead of one guest speaker, have some of your members conduct a panel discussion on a current topic affecting their businesses. Hold a Hobby Night. Have a Recognition Night for those who have been members for 25 years or longer or for past chairs.

Yes, local sections are where STLE membership starts. It is about learning things and making contacts. Being a section leader is challenging, but STLE has many resources to help. I hope each of you are actively involved in a local section. You just might be the reason another member attends!