The biggest geothermal energy event in the world this year was held from October 23-26 in Sacramento, California, USA. The GRC Annual Meeting & GEA GeoExpo+ welcomed the global geothermal community to the City of Trees to commune, network, learn and exchange ideas.

We will document the meeting in two parts. In this issue we will report on the Opening Session, the winners of the 37th Geothermal Photo Contest, one of the Fieldtrips and get some feedback on the event in an article by Sue Hodgson. In the January/February GRC Bulletin we will write about the GRC Awards, other GRC Fieldtrips, the Student Leadership Luncheon, and the Poster and Technical Session awards.

Opening Session
by Ian Crawford

The GRC Annual meeting committee decided to change-up the Opening Session this year. Gone, for better or worse, were the flags of all the geothermal energy producing nations. No corporate PowerPoint presentations. Instead, as attendees filed into the ballroom of the Hyatt Regency Hotel, many might have been forgiven for thinking they were walking into an upscale lounge instead! On the stage were positioned five large, very comfortable-looking leather-clad club chairs, arranged facing the audience. The back-drop was a soothing neon green light bordered by black velvet curtains.

The mood was set for stimulating conversation and the session did not disappoint.
Master of Ceremonies, John A. McKinsey settled the attendees and President Paul Brophy gave a warm welcome to the Opening Session of the 40th Annual Meeting of the Geothermal Resources Council.

The new Director of the Geothermal Technologies Office, U.S. Department of Energy Dr. Susan G. Hamm first gave an update on support for geothermal energy from the federal government.

Dr. Hamm reported that the GTO had asked for an additional USD 33 million in the budget for 2017-18, with the bulk of the funds to go to the FORGE effort to advance Enhanced Geothermal System (EGS) technologies and to hydrothermal and resource confirmation through Play Fairway Analysis. She also announced that the GTO will launch feasibility studies into large-scale, low-temperature deep-well geothermal systems coupled with advanced direct-use applications and cascaded surface technologies whose applications will extend the reach of geothermal into geologically distinct parts of the country beyond the western U.S.

The first panel on international opportunities in geothermal was chaired by Andrew Palmateer, Director of the U.S. Energy Association. A feature of this and the other panel discussions was the relaxed atmosphere in which the moderators led an intelligent discussion on the topics. There seemed to be a more thoughtful analysis of the subject matter.

Bob Sullivan, Executive Vice President of Business Development at Ormat Technologies said that his company was planning to add another 150-180 MW of geothermal energy by the end of 2018, half of which would be international. He said that East Africa remained a hot-spot for development but the legal framework needs to be made easier if private investment is to be attracted. "Bring in the private money and development will happen," he opined.

Mike Long, Senior Project Manager at Power Engineers agreed that to continue geothermal energy development in Kenya the government needs to better support private investment. He also said that Caribbean island states could be the perfect fit for the geothermal energy industry. He added that if you take the risk out of exploration, especially drilling, then more development will occur.
Pierre Audinet, Clean Energy Program Leader, World Bank said that his organization has increased the proportion invested in geothermal energy on exploration from 6% in 2012 to 18% in 2016.

On the domestic front the Honorable Eduardo Garcia of California 56th Assembly District - that includes Imperial County and the Salton Sea - said that there was a sense of urgency in the Golden State’s legislature to replace baseload energy that is being lost but not the same urgency to use geothermal energy instead. The industry needs to convince legislators of the benefits of geothermal energy: it is cleaner, the overall cost is lower, and greenhouse gas emissions from geothermal energy are low. These should be to mind especially in making climate change legislation.

Kevin Kelly, General Manager, Imperial Irrigation District, questioned why there was a push to expand the western imbalance market for electricity. Instead he advocates urgent development of the geothermal resources at the Salton Sea to help with restoration of the Salton Sea.

Randy Keller, Director of Development, CalEnergy, said his company was ready to go with a shovel ready project at Black Rock, by the Salton Sea, but it needed a PPA and additional investment to get it off the ground. A possible additional revenue stream for geothermal plants is the extraction of lithium, especially as the price of the strategically important light metal continues to rise.

The Honorable Mike McGuire, California State Senate, 2nd District and Member, Senate Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Communications ended the Opening Session with a rousing message to the geothermal energy industry. “Thanks to your efforts, we are taking millions of tons of dirty burning coal out of the atmosphere across America and you are helping this state and nation end its reliance on oil. Up at the Geysers alone, Calpine and NCPA’s operation prevents the emission of over 3 million tons of carbon dioxide annually – that’s the equivalent to over 450,000 car trips.

And we can put thousands more of our neighbors to work – with good paying, living wage jobs – if this state re-dedicated itself to Geothermal. And it’s the type of jobs we need in the regions that have been hit the hardest in our economy... No matter if you are in and around the Salton Sea or in the poorest County in California, Lake, expanding our geothermal portfolio will put some of the neediest residents of this State to work.”

More photos from the GRC Opening Session can be seen on the GRC Flicker website at: https://flic.kr/s/aHskKzYfn7

The Honorable Mike McGuire gives the keynote presentation to round off the Opening Session.

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(From left to right) Sean Porse, Stephen Henry, Dr. Susan Hamm and Zachary Frone, all of the U.S. Department of Energy.