

Austin's Technology Advisors Group (TAG)

History: The Early Years:

In 1984, ABB (Austin Before the Bust), two attorneys believed that somewhere within Austin's "Next Silicon Valley" hoopla there was a nugget of reality. Walter Bissex and Barry Meyers acted on this belief by calling together a group of attorneys and Big Eight accountants to meet as the Technology Advisors Group. They felt that such a group could share expertise and industry experience to their mutual benefit and the benefit of all of the technology business clients who would soon accrue to Austin's existing short list. After several meetings, the two realized that the members had shared about all they would or could share amongst themselves and that something more was needed.

In January, 1985, the wheels fell off of Austin's real estate boom which was preparing it to be the "Next Silicon Valley". Since everyone had to go back to their day jobs and deal with the fallout, TAG ceased to meet for a while. Along about 1987, Walter and Barry decided to relaunch the organization and called around to find out who of the original members was still here. They also invited a number of other interested parties who had expressed interest in TAG. The response was so enthusiastic that eight of us were at the first meeting

They doggedly persisted in having a monthly meeting at which a speaker from the technology community would tell us what they really did, how their company got where it was, and what the industry looked like from where they stood. This proved popular as TAG members could actually learn how all kinds of "techie stuff" really worked. The organization grew by word of mouth, especially since nothing like TAG existed. Membership qualification was rigorous, "If you can find us, you can join." There was no cost to join, you simply paid for your breakfast. Since I was always calling Walter and Barry with ideas for speakers, and since they had usually not gotten around to scheduling one for the next month, I became Program Chair. After several years of this, the two founders decided that the cost of mailings and no-shows for breakfast was too onerous, and TAG instituted its first membership fee of \$10. All attendees without reservations will be subject to a surcharge of \$5.00

In the mid 90's, Norm Gelfand led the effort to professionalize TAG by coordinating a committee to draft a mission statement, draft by-laws, and drink beer. His leadership brought a lot of new participation in the operation of the group, and is responsible (with the assistance of many new and longtime members) for the organization you enjoy today. TAG has been and still is the place to be to learn how things work, where things are going, and to meet the people who will get you there.

(Author Unknown)

History: Last 20 Years

By 1998 TAG was meeting monthly at the "Metropolitan Club" on the 13th floor of the One America Center located on Congress Avenue. At one of Norm Gelfand's last meetings as leader, a very large board of directors was elected and from which new leadership was established. J. R. Bell and Jim Ford were key leaders of the organization as the Metropolitan Club closed and we moved to the Austin Club located on 9th Street in downtown Austin for our monthly gatherings. We survived the technology downturn of the early 2000's and our meetings were gaining in attendance through the early 2000's. In addition to J.R. and Jim, Randy Hill and Bob Ascott were part of the 1998 board and remain on the board 20 years later in 2018.

At that time, we had memberships with dues and member/non-member rates for breakfasts along with sponsors. One of our accomplishments during these years was the funding and awarding of scholarships to talented young high school graduates pursuing technology college endeavors. The board would gather on a long evening of reviewing applications in order to decide on the recipient.

In the mid 2000's our programs changed from general technology discussions to focus on Austin companies participating in the technology 'space.' This provided keen insight on both the business and technology aspects of these companies and remains the primary focus of our programs in 2018. These programs have been led by Bill Kleinebecker, another long-term member of the TAG board. During this time, we adopted a simpler membership structure where all attendees are considered members and the only breakfast discounts are provided for early reservations. Later we adopted the policy of requiring prepayment for breakfasts to avoid committing breakfasts for no-shows.

In January, 2016 TAG meetings moved from the Austin Club to Tech Ranch, located near the corner of Mopac and Hwy 183 in north Austin. To keep costs under control we utilized a caterer for our breakfasts and our meetings continued to flourish.

In September, 2017, due to a restructuring of the Tech Ranch enterprise, TAG meetings moved to Calivista Software located on Highway 360 in west Austin. That is our current home at the time of this history update (March, 2018).

TAG continues to be the premier technology networking organization in Austin and has provided an outstanding set of speakers and fellowship opportunities for all interested 'technologists' in the area. We are looking forward to many future years of programs in encourage all to join us on a Friday morning adventure.

Here is (a hopefully complete) a list of the presidents of the TAG organization who have served in the past 20 years:

- J. R. Bell
- Jim Ford
- Bob Ascott
- Chris Oddo
- Dan Kordick
- Kimberly Erler
- Eve Richter Dinnan

Author: Bob Ascott (Past President, current Web-Wonk), March 28, 2018