



Dear Bay Area Section Member:

It is my pleasure to report to you that our annual holiday luncheon meeting on January 25, 2023, was a well-attended in-person meeting with about 170 attendees which included members, PECG volunteers and PECG staff. It was held at an iconic Oakland Scottish Rite Center, Oakland, with a sumptuous lunch buffet spread catered by famous Sukoon Indian Restaurant.

Ed Thometz, VP Supervisory and Peter Altherr (Past Director) manned the reception desk, verified the paid members list, and collected money from a few who called ahead to pay at the door.

Keith Fang, Treasurer, and Phil Cox, Director, couldn't attend the event due to a prior commitment. I want to thank them both for taking care of the duties assigned to them prior to the event.

Lalit Mathur, Secretary, was able to attend the event last minute as his mandatory meeting ended in time.

Michelle Manawis, HQ PECG staff provided solid admin. support to make this event happen.

As a current President, I was the master of ceremony. In my opening remarks, I welcomed the Bay Area Section and the Golden Gate Section. I expressed my pleasure that we all survived Covid, and that it was my great pleasure to meet face-to-face with our colleagues and friends after three years. It was not possible without the teamwork of the officers and volunteers. I urged and appealed the membership to actively recruit new members to keep the PECG strong and cohesive bargaining unit as strength is in the numbers. PECG advocates with policymakers for safe working condition for its members as well as better compensation, benefits, pension protection, and job security.

The Bay Area Section is seeking leaders to replace the current leadership as some of its leaders may be retiring soon.

Matt Austin, PECG's Director of Representation, provided members with an update on the 2023-2024 State Budget Proposal just released by the Governor. He commented on some of the factors which will affect members such as departmental budgets and hiring goals. At Caltrans, it appears that hiring will continue, since the infrastructure money from the Federal Government is ongoing and many senior members are retiring. Despite a downturn in state revenues, most engineers' department budgets will be maintained, although certain Cal-EPA agencies will have a difficult year. We do not anticipate any layoffs.

Matt also reviewed the new benefits provided by PEGC's latest Memorandum of Understanding, such as changes to longevity pay, the addition of Contra Costa County to the Geographical Pay eligibility, increased frequency, and amount of boot allowances, and increases in payments for medical benefits.

Agha Bhakt, President Elect, introduced officers to the membership.

Connie and Rinkal acted as graceful hosts to respectfully lead attendees to the buffet table to enjoy the freshly prepared naan to savor with a spread of vegetarian and non-vegetarian Indian delicacies along with separate tables for drinks and dessert. It was a scene to behold as members harmoniously chatted and broke bread with their colleagues at the table. High ceiling with focus lights created a royal palace ambience.

To add to the festivity as it was a holiday luncheon, a last-minute addition was a Persian dance performance by the Niosho, Director of Niosho Dance Academy and a Punjabi drummer who sang and played drum to enthrall the attendees. A raffle draw highlighted PEGC's diversity by bringing different members from different ethnic groups within Caltrans and Water Board on the stage to claim their prizes. The fun part was that each raffle winner was in a good mood to walk to the stage dancing to claim their prize. DJ Edwin Sing played foot tapping disco music from 80s and Bollywood music that made it irresistible not to dance for the prize while the master of the ceremony encouraged each to dance on the stage.

Peter Altherr, Past Director, was recognized for his contribution as a past Director and for preparing a detailed housing differential document for the benefit of the HQ bargaining team to seek geographical pay difference. Past Directors Soheila Bana and Ofer Bender took time to attend the event.

Now Hon. Soheila Bana is a council member of City of Richmond. She addressed the members and encouraged them to volunteer to join PEGC leadership. She offered to mentor anybody who wants to be council person of their city.

To view photos and video taken during the event, please click [here](#) and [here](#). A picture is worth a thousand words.

PEGC Corporate will be hosting a membership outreach to answer members' questions, distribute SWAG, and encourage non-members to join on Feb 28, 2023, in the D4 District Office Atrium. More details will be forthcoming related to the event. Please make it a success by attending.

Wishing you the very best,
Ajay Sehgal, President
Bay Area Section