

EXECUTIVE INTERVIEW

by Emily Sopensky

AN INTERVIEW WITH ASC CHAIR BECKY TAYLOR



**Becky Taylor, Chair,
Austin Software Council**

Long involved with the Austin Software Council, vice chair Becky Taylor, took over as the new chair of the Council in March. In her crowded schedule as CEO of a thriving multinational software company, Terrace Mountain Systems, she was able to take a few moments to talk about her vision for the coming crucial transition year for ASC.

Q: As the Austin Software Council moves from the protective folds of The University of Texas to become a stand-alone nonprofit organization, you are taking over at a critical moment. Why now?

A: ASC is well positioned now to become a nonprofit corporation. For George Kozmetsky and other founders, it was always the plan to become a stand-alone, self-ruling entity that ascribed to a partnership of business, academia, and government—a working viable model that SEMATECH excelled at laying the groundwork. It's the Austin thing to achieve such cooperation!

In addition, ASC is sizable enough now that controlling our own budget becomes more important. Under the auspices of UT, we had no such control.

Also, the timing is right for the Council to move forward. If we had waited, we would have missed opportunities. For example, as a nonprofit, we can start to circulate information on bills that address regulatory and taxation issues. With a legislature that meets only every other year, obtaining nonprofit status means we do not have to be out of the loop for three years until the next time a legislature convenes.

Finally, the membership is ready. Many conversations have been held among ASC senior management over the past year that reflect the enthusiastic support from members and others interested in ASC's success.

Q: What are you going to do first?

A: Two things. This spring we'll be embarking on a sponsorship drive to raise money. And second, I'd like to see us have an EVENT—one where everyone has fun. We don't do enough of that. When I first joined the Austin Software Council in 1992, we got a group of people to have 'drop-ins' at local restaurants. That was a lot of fun for awhile. Now, I'd like to see an event dedicated to having fun. Several people are already looking into making it happen, including Kerry Tate, of Tate Austin and last year's Austin Chamber of Commerce chair.

Q: What do you see as the most important contribution that you would like to make during your tenure?

A: I want to focus on the sponsorship drive. It's important for ASC to establish a cash reserve to cover operations for at least a year, and preferably for two years. And I want to grow the software company membership rolls, especially mid-range firms. Specifically, I'd like to:

- See a modest increase in TSS (Texas Software Symposium) attendance; it was 200 last year.
- Increase membership 50%.
- Strengthen existing peer groups and increase the number of groups. We already have the very successful CEO Peer Group and a burgeoning entrepreneur peer group for firms 1 to 3 years old. In addition, a new mid-level peer group for firms that are 4 to 7 years old started meeting in March. Recently, we added a marketing peer group for marketing executives and we're investigating the possibility of starting a project manager peer group.

Q: What issues do you think the ASC will be facing in the next year?

A: Austin has matured immensely in five years, as has the Austin Software Council. The Austin Software Council has handled the nuts-and-bolts issues of getting things set up and folks have taken off and run with it. We want to enable companies to keep up with the increasingly fast-paced changes in the industry by providing ongoing training and information on issues that affect them.

The CEO Peer Group has already become self-directed and has taken on some big issues like recruiting. By putting everyone in a room together and letting them talk, the issue of how hard recruiting has become came up. As a result, a job fair was held in March at UT that featured 25 Austin tech companies.

A number of people have approached us about forming additional forums, and we're encouraging them to take the initiative and start them.

Q: You have been involved with the Austin Software Council from its inception in 1992. What were you looking for the Council to provide then? What do you think you and other members are looking for now? Is it different from what you wanted in 1992?

A: As I told the *Austin American-Statesman*, I was very busy building my software company, but I went to my first meeting hoping to find other people in the same situation. I did; I signed up immediately.

The Austin Software Council provides a forum for executives to meet and talk over common business concerns. Many of the over 600 software companies in town are small firms. Keeping up in this highly competitive industry is hard enough when you have deep pockets, but most of Austin's software firms don't have the means to keep

up with business issues and they need a way to learn how others have tackled problems.

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