

AIAA Returns to the 2021 Space & Missile Defense Symposium

by

Ken Philippart

Images courtesy of Ken Philippart

The Greater Huntsville Section returned as an on-site exhibitor for the 2021 Space & Missile Defense Symposium from August 10 – 12, 2021 at the Von Braun Center in Huntsville, Alabama. Last year's symposium was only held virtually so the section looked forward to participating in person again this year. This was the section's sixth year exhibiting at Huntsville's largest annual technical forum. Participation in the symposium was part of Greater Huntsville's outreach to its Department of Defense constituency.



Christopher Kitson explains the benefits of AIAA membership to a visitor to the Greater Huntsville Section booth.

Despite a two year gap in staffing any exhibit, Greater Huntsville built upon previous years' successes and lessons learned and continued to innovate and improve its processes, exhibit and results. With planning led by Vice Chair Tracie Prater, the section promoted the benefits of volunteering and divided the volunteer schedule into easily manageable 2.5-hour blocks. Our members responded to the call, with 11 volunteering to work the table, including three student members, two of whom traveled from the University of Alabama at Birmingham to help out. The

exhibit was staffed by a minimum of two members throughout the symposium, allowing volunteers to take breaks and wander the exhibit themselves during slow periods.

A Volunteer Handbook containing the shift schedule, volunteer contact information, general instructions, Frequently Asked Questions, membership categories and rates and a list of benefits of AIAA membership was available for all volunteers to consult. The Handbook allowed seamless transition between volunteers, served as a reference and standardized the section's message so all volunteers spoke with one voice.

The exhibit included a business card drop bowl to encourage visitors to leave their contact information for the



Lisa Philippart visits the Rocket City Trash Pandas' inaugural exhibit at the symposium.

chance to win a Greater Huntsville Section challenge coin. Congratulations to this year's lucky winner, Scott Pitcher from System High!

The exhibit displayed a wealth of information about AIAA and the Greater Huntsville Section including Professional Member, Student Member, High School Member and Educator Associate brochures, copies of *Aerospace America* and announcements of upcoming events. The section's suitcase rocket and quad copter were especially popular and lured many a visitor to the table to ask questions. A bowl of candy also enticed visitors to stop by the exhibit. By far the most important part of the exhibit was the chance for members to relay their personal experiences and benefits of AIAA membership. Contact information for forty seven prospective members was collected during the symposium, three times more than in 2019! All who signed up were subsequently contacted to provide additional information on AIAA membership.



Lisa Philippart relaxes after her exhibit shift with a refreshment at the networking social.

The Tuesday evening hospitality social was once again a highlight of the week with AIAA volunteers availing themselves of the opportunity to network with colleagues in a fun, relaxing setting with good food, drink and entertainment.

A big thank you to our volunteers: Wesley Zou, Frank Pichler, Tim Chee Wong, John Lassiter, Marc Becnel, Christopher Kitson, Rebekah Clark, Ken Philippart, Lisa Philippart, Joe Wong and Paul Kovacic. Special thanks to Wesley for working the entire symposium and to Christopher for stepping up at the last minute when some volunteers withdrew from their shifts. Well done Greater Huntsville!

Mark your calendars for August 9 –11, 2022 for the 2022 Space & Missile Defense Symposium. We'll see you there!