As I write this article, it is the 9th of June and we are busy getting ready for the IMSA Annual Conference to be held in August. This issue of the Journal is scheduled to be mailed within the first two weeks of August so you will probably receive it just prior to leaving for the Conference. We are all very excited about the upcoming Conference as the plans are shaping up to make it one of the best yet. Thanks to the Florida Section members for all of your hard work!

In May, a survey was e-mailed to all members asking your opinion about future Conference sites. We were very pleased that so many responded and gave us their thoughts. Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey. Responses are still coming in so they are being logged and in a few weeks we will tabulate the survey results.

How is the decision made to hold the Conference in a particular city? Sometimes a hotel or conference center will contact me and ask if we would be interested in using its facility. Once I have determined the facility is suitable as far as meeting space, sleeping rooms, transportation, etc., I will contact the IMSA Section where the facility is located and ask the Section if they would be interested in hosting the Conference. Sometimes, it works in reverse. An IMSA Section will let me know they are interested in hosting and then the Section and I work together to find a suitable venue. Some of the surveys that were returned suggested cities that had good facilities; some there were no facilities large enough to hold us. For example, just for our exhibit portion of the Conference, we need 20,000 sq. feet. In addition, we need many meeting rooms to accommodate technical sessions, certification classes, student lunches, and other functions that can go as high as another 15,000 to 20,000 sq. feet. Once all of this has been determined to be suitable, the Board of Directors decides where the Conference will be held.

Over the years, we have had the Conference in many locations that seem to be very warm in the summer. Discussions have been held about changing the time of year the Conference is held. Bottom line – no matter when the Conference is held, we try to get the very best sleeping room rate for our attendees. That means that we usually try to stay “out of peak season” of the hotels. For example, there is one city we were considering that if we held the Conference anytime in January, February, March or April, the room rate would have been $230.00 per night. If we held it in May, it would have been $189-$195; June - $130-$140; July or August - $109-$114; September - $130-$140; October-$180-$190; November or December - $199.00. You guessed it! It’s very hot there in July and August; but that’s when you get the better room rates. Hotels that have the amount of meeting room space and the number of sleeping rooms we require are usually more expensive than the smaller hotels or motels.

There are many other considerations that have to be made when selecting a Conference venue but you get the idea. Please give me a call if you have any ideas about locations for the Conference or any questions.

Speaking of Conference venues, make sure to mark your calendar for our 2006 Conference in Overland Park, Kansas – just outside of Kansas City. The Conference will be held at the new Overland Park Convention Center and the Sheraton-Overland Park hotel. The dates are July 20-26, 2006. The IMSA Business Plan Committee came up with some new ideas about the Conference, which the Board of Directors has approved and we will give you that information in a future issue of the IMSA Journal.

In the meantime, we look forward to seeing you in St. Pete and wish you a very safe and happy summer!