Editor’s Overview

Technological Change

by Ricia Sturgeon-Hendrick

“The most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable from it.” — Mark Weiser

When elevators were first invented, people were disinclined to relinquish their safety to them. That’s why Elisha Graves Otis cut the rope to the elevator platform he was on at the Crystal Palace back in 1854. Even after that, people were reluctant unless there was a human operator driving the car. The Atlantic, in a 2015 article, notes that when technological change and cultural change intersect, a new “technology can go from seeming extraordinary to mundane” very quickly. This month, we have Dr. Lee Gray’s third part in the series on The Water-Balance Elevator. While the first two parts were great, the last part includes some reactions of people who actually rode this type of elevator in the late 1800s and lived to describe it as “exhilarating and...terrifying.” These are words rarely used in connection with any kind of elevator today – much less hydraulic ones. The Atlantic article goes on to suggest that, like elevators, autonomous self-driving cars may be the next technological and cultural intersect. My idol, Elon Musk of SpaceX and Tesla, suggests a future where driving your own car might be illegal!

As we prepare to go to Interlift, Europe’s largest elevator exposition, this book is packed with many company and product spotlights as suppliers vie to stand out from the crowded field. Our features include The View from Above with pictures from the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH). Dr. Antony Wood, CTBUH executive director, quickly snatched up the chance to tour the world’s tallest building, Jeddah Tower. Once at the 52nd level of the under-construction high rise, the tour continued in a box hanging from a crane, which provided an amazing (and possibly terrifying) view. Another feature, Reach for the Sky by Italo Savastano, offers a view from one of Italy’s tallest buildings, Allianz Tower. The Otis panoramic elevators to the rooftop provide a view of Milan’s business district and old town.

We focus this month on Special Application Lifts, which always provides new ways to approach accessibility. Elevators Improved in User Friendliness and Comfortability is an Elevcon paper that addresses how Toshiba gradually moved to universal designs that help people with disabilities, especially those in wheelchairs. Up on the Roof follows Otis Turkey’s development of a helicopter-pad access elevator for four hospitals in Turkey and a hotel in Saudi Arabia. Another special-application situation in Turkey is that on the Osmangazi Bridge, which cuts 5-1/2 hours from a trip between Istanbul and Izmir. In An Ideal Solution by Fatih Zeybek, Maspero Elevatori SpA was chosen to design and install the elevators (two freight and two passenger) in the bridge tower legs that lean toward each other. Finally, in Hillside Access Issues Solved by Laurel MacLachlan, the history and distribution of HillHiker, Inc. is revealed. The article highlights a unique installation on an island in Maine where a generator was provided for the lift due to the remote location without electricity.

Many other companies and events are sprinkled throughout this issue, but two articles touch on environmental issues — something on our minds as we address a rapidly changing climate. Toward a Sustainable Future by Joanna K. Sfampa looks to the issue of elevator lifecycles. KLEEMANN has studied its elevators and developed a scenario for a lift designed in such a way that its materials can be easily separated and recycled at the final stage of use. The other article, New Life for Hydraulic Elevators by Frank Fletcher, touts a new oil testing and reclamation process. This, it is claimed, would make hydraulic elevators last longer and perform more efficiently. In many situations, the cost, including maintenance, is 25-30% less than a machine-room-less unit.

As I sit here today, in early September, a Category-5 hurricane bearing down on Florida has postponed the National Association of Elevator Contractors convention in Orlando. This is amazing: a weather-caused event with the power to shut down a state, and it is the second one in a month. So, I wonder, are we lagging in the technological changes needed in this new world of catastrophic weather? It is something to think about.