



# An ISSA Retrospective

By **Sandra Lambert, CISSP, CDP, MBA**  
*chairpersons1@issa.org*

## How it all Began

Two decades, or one score, plus two years ago, two women decided that the information security specialty's time had come to organize, and they brought forth the Information Systems Security Association.

In answer to the often-asked question of who started it and how, here's the real story. In April 1980 Security Pacific Bank launched an information security department by transferring two staff members from the IT audit department to start up this function, a function that needed to be designed, organized and funded. I was appointed the manager, and in the pursuit of trying to define and staff an effective program, I sought the experience of a few colleagues that I met at CSI's annual November 1980 New York conference. In those days it seemed that the educational offerings were few and far between and fairly expensive. There may have been about seven of us from the Los Angeles area, from all different industries (banking, aerospace, retail, petroleum, insurance). We said we ought to get together and talk about our infosec issues on a local basis. Then a year went by, and we saw each other again at CSI in November 1981. We reiterated that, though we came from different industries, we seemed to have the same problems, and we ought to share our solutions. Finally, I said to my friend Nancy Woolsey, the Infosec Manager at Lockheed, "If we don't put together a first meeting, we'll be talking about this forever." She agreed. I offered to get a room at Security Pacific for the

meetings, she picked a date, and we decided to invite anyone we knew who was doing infosec work. That's how it came to be that Nancy and I founded the organization.

In January 1982 that first meeting took place, co-chaired by Nancy and myself. There were about 25 people who attended, and everyone agreed that it was valuable personally, professionally, and also beneficial to our companies to share our knowledge. But when we invite people to a meeting, Nancy and I thought, we should have a descriptive name for these gatherings. We had heard about a group in the San Francisco area called the Bay Area Computer Security Interest Group, so we called ourselves the Southern California Computer Security Interest Group. The interest and enthusiasm displayed at that organizational meeting convinced us that our vision of bringing recognition to this profession and of helping everyone in the profession to enhance their knowledge and skills, with the ultimate result of providing for more rewarding careers for the individuals and increased value to their employers, was a valid starting point. It seemed so obvious, and the models were right there in front of us—the corporate security folks had ASIS, the internal auditors had IIA, and the IT auditors had ISACA (then called EDPAA). I had been an officer at the chapter level and on the international board of directors in EDPAA, so I left the ranks of that organization and knew what had to be done.

In February 1982 a few more people showed up, and we started having an educational program as well as an administrative part to the meeting.

Realizing that, in order to make a difference, this concept had to eventually be bigger than any one part of any state, we determined that we needed to eliminate geography from our name. Since we knew of the Data Processing Management Association, we changed our name to the Data Processing Security Association. The educational program we started then, and which lasted for a couple of years, consisted of one of the attendees volunteering to pick one specific topic, talk about the pertinent issues that topic created within their company, share how they addressed those issues, and share what solutions were applied. Then everyone would jump in, and it turned into a roundtable discussion. Sometimes the speakers had no solutions, and the group discussion helped them formulate options. It was simple: We had no money for speakers, so we were the speakers. Actually, we were the hands-on experts of the day in that evolving specialty.

In March 1982 Nancy and I enlisted the help of three other regular attendees—Cole Emerson, Carl Jackson, and K.C. Keffer—to be on the original Operating Committee, where I was appointed President. During the next few months we were still thinking about our name. We decided that Data Processing was going to be an outdated term, and we found that the acronym DPSA was already being used by other entities. So, in May 1982 we selected the name ISSA, believing that it would be timeless and global.

Throughout 1983 we sharpened ISSA's vision, set its mission, and determined that we would seek non-profit incorporation status, much the same as the other professional associations had done.

On March 8, 1984, we held our first annual working conference in Los Angeles. We specifically called it a "working conference" because we wanted to ensure that our employers didn't think we were off for a one-day boondoggle. In our effort to be more cost-effective than other programs, the charge for current ISSA members was \$10 to cover lunch and refreshments and \$50 for non-members. I called in a couple of well-known colleagues of mine from back East who somehow got their companies to pay their expenses to be our keynote speakers. I remember it like it was yesterday. The turnout was great (almost all 60 seats were filled), and we proudly knew that we were on the right road.

On March 28, 1984, we incorporated as a non-profit organization in the state of California, and we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of that event this year. At the formal elections I was chosen to be the Founding President of what is now ISSA, Inc. Cheryl Helsing (San Francisco) was VP, Carl Jackson (L.A.) was Treasurer, Denny Steinauer (Maryland) was Recording Secretary, and Russ Leone (L.A.) was Corresponding Secretary. In June Nancy flew off to England to marry Colin King, left the infosec profession, and returned to federal government employment with the IRS in their London Tax Attaché office, working international income tax treaty and expatriate tax issues.

On March 28-29, 1985, we held our second annual working conference in Los Angeles. We had about 100 participants from all over the U.S., and we announced that the Bay Area was our official second chapter. In the next few months, NY Metro became our third chapter, followed by Baltimore and Houston. We continued to develop and charter local chapters. We now have 82 chapters in 18 countries. We are looking forward to more international growth and will do our very best to meet the needs of our members globally.

## Benefits of Joining ISSA

Way back in 1984, as part of our chapter recruiting program, I developed a presentation on the benefits of joining ISSA (yes, I still have a copy

of it!). The following three major items are taken from that presentation. Below each one I've reflected and made a few short observations as to whether, to varying degrees, we have delivered these benefits:

1. Benefit: Exchange of information, including personal networking, educational programs and sharing job opportunities.

This was the main reason why we founded ISSA, and last year's ISSA Web site poll attests to the fact that this is the number one benefit of joining ISSA in our members' eyes. The "knowledge transfer" happens in so many other ways—our annual conference, *The ISSA Journal*, regional seminars, Web site articles, Web casts, e-news, and the Generally Accepted Information Security Principles (GAISP) project.

2. Benefit: A chance to change the direction of the infosec profession.

When I look back at some of the individuals who have led ISSA at the board and the chapter level, I see people who have shaped our profession, expanded its horizons, integrated it with other disciplines, raised it to the executive level, and integrated it as part of business and government risk management.

3. Benefit: Dissemination of information to the public regarding the importance of information security and its role in legislation.

In 1982 we wished that there were more magazine or newspaper articles on information security to raise awareness. Be careful what you wish for—we got it! Now it seems there are one or more infosec-related articles everywhere from *Network World* to *CIO Magazine* to *Vanity Fair*. I can't keep up with my reading pile! Also, I know for a fact that many of our members are involved in community outreach programs, and there are chapter as well as board scholarship programs. In addition, a number of our members are subject matter experts, have testified before Congress, and have been involved in drafting or reviewing proposed legislation on the state and federal levels.

In summary, I'd say that we have stayed true to our original mission. It's very gratifying to know that after 20 years, my vision is your vision.

## ISSA's Success Depends On You

But we need to understand that a successful professional organization cannot survive or continue to serve with only a head, and there is always room for improvement in some areas. ISSA needs the arms and legs of its chapters and members to stay the course as an effective, viable professional group. ISSA needs your support now, as chapters and as the membership, in two areas:

- ▲ First, keep up your recruiting efforts. We've had logarithmic growth the last couple years, even in these economic times. We need to continue that because it enables us to provide a lot of programs that benefit all the members, such as a more content-filled magazine (*The ISSA Journal*), better feature/function of our Web site, and more meaningful survey results. The December 2003 ISSA/BSA survey of our members shows a direct correlation between increased security and the involvement of senior management. We have developed a CISO program to address C-level executives. We need your help to communicate this program, which will benefit your management and consequently all infosec staff.
- ▲ Second, please participate and volunteer. Participate in the online surveys whenever they occur because the results will only be as useful as YOU make them. We're sensitive to not barraging you with

them too often, and they'll always be multiple choice (quick to fill out). I also urge you to volunteer in your chapter or at the international board level in committees of your interest. And after people get to know you, consider running for office!

I know you can immediately think of a million reasons why YOU don't have time to do this. The truth is that I didn't either, and neither have most of the leadership! But believing in the need for such an organization, we **make** the time. While working on a bid for a consulting contract the other day, I looked at my bio and realized how much of it was never part of any of my job descriptions or paid-for efforts. Over the years, I had made life-long friends, learned new skills, and secured better jobs—in large part due to squishing volunteerism into my "free time." In this profession, networking is the key word in building careers. I guarantee you the rewards of ISSA volunteer works are immense!

A few months ago a reporter asked me if I ever envisioned ISSA having over 10,000 members internationally. Much to his surprise, I said yes, because I could not see why there would be limitations to people making themselves and our profession better. I believe that we are fortunate to belong to a profession that is complex, continually evolving, that challenges us to think and develop better tools, and gives us multiple opportunities to expand our industry contacts. In the process of developing an association such as this, of course, there are some who seek nothing more than to embellish their personal resumes. But fortunately in ISSA's growth these past two decades, we have seen few of these, as the greater majority were significant contributors.

I wish to thank the long list of dedicated individuals who have made ISSA what it is today, many of whose names I know and the unsung volunteers that I have yet to meet. Collectively you supported our vision and mission for which many individuals and companies will greatly benefit. It is due to your willingness to share your experience and knowledge that we are all made better. The whole **is** far greater than the sum of the parts. ISSA is the world's largest, international non-profit association specifically for information security professionals, and YOU are ISSA.

Happy Anniversary! 

---

*Sandra Lambert is co-founder of ISSA, chairperson of its board, and the managing director of Lambert & Associates, LLC, where she specializes in information security and business continuity consulting.*