

Houston Chronicle

WTGS Fall Symposium goes virtual this year

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The West Texas Geological Society's annual Fall Symposium is going virtual this year. That includes the annual field trip to the Guadalupe Mountains, where a virtual tour will include maps and discussion of outcrops.

Just as previous Fall Symposiums presented by the West Texas Geological Society have featured technical innovation, this year's edition will offer technical advances.

Except this year, amidst the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, the technical advances being showcased are those allowing for virtual meetings.

"The very first meeting (the organizers had) in March-April, we asked if we should hold it or call it off," said Judd Tudor, technical director of this year's symposium. "It was easier to call it off, but we thought we could do something to help people."

After all, he told the Reporter-Telegram by telephone, "the WTGS is in the business of helping the community, helping geologists, helping other societies."

What has been crafted is a virtual symposium to be held Sept. 23 that will feature 19 talks, a virtual field trip to the Guadalupe Mountains -- led by Bob Lindsay, Bill Fairhurst and Charles and Linda Sternbach -- and include maps and discussions of the outcrops, and a poster session.

The only thing not being held virtually is the golf tournament, Tudor said.

The event opens with a keynote speech from Scott Tinker, Charlie Kerans and Bob Loucks that will pay tribute to the late Steve Ruppel, a long-time senior research scientist at the University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology.

Organizers decided on the SpotMe platform, because it will allow participants to interact and virtually network. It will feature virtual vendors' booths, raffles and giveaways, linkable abstracts, pictures and biographies, chat rooms, attendee 'games' that encourage networking, on-demand content and digital sponsor recognition. Cost is \$75.

Users will be able to create their own profiles with photos and links to their own social media sites and their own articles. Tudor encouraged early registration to allow participants time to set up those profiles.

Another benefit of going virtual is it will allow anyone anywhere – whether it’s Midland or Houston or Calgary – to attend.

Topics range from seismic and microseismic to geochemistry, geomechanics and geomorphology to petrophysics, sequence stratigraphy, private equity and historic geology.

Tudor promised the talks won’t be a rehash of old topics but will let the presenters show “the ingenuity they’ve designed to move the community forward. Science will be shared and networking available if attendees want more knowledge,” he said.

If those interested in the symposium can’t attend on Sept. 23, Tudor said the site will be live for the next 30 days so registrants can log on, visit all the talks they’re interested in and the virtual vendors’ booths. They won’t, however, be able to participate in the raffles or games, he said.

“This is a step forward in what we do,” Tudor said. “We plan to add this to the 2021 Fall Symposium and make it an additional thing we offer. Each year, there are more limitations on budgets, restrictions on travel. Now we have cheaper admittance fees and lower costs.”

Online registration is <https://www.wtgs.org/2020-fall-symposium-registration/>.