

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)
Transcription

Interview of: A. Damon Gowan

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Interviewed by: Mike Kearney

Mike Kearney

Hello, my name is Mike Kearney and I'm here in the beautiful city of Baltimore on Monday June 29th. It's my pleasure to be able to interview Mr. Damon Gowan. Damon is past president of the ASHRAE society and was president during the ASHRAE year, '90 to '91. And Damon welcome to our little taping session and thank you for coming.

Damon Gowan

Thank you.

M.K.

Can you start by telling us a little bit about how you started in the lull of ASHRAE activities and where they lead to and how you got to the president.

D.G.

I guess I had the typical situation where one particular person twisted my arm to come and be involved with chapter activities and so I finally went to a chapter meeting and enjoyed the evening and went back for a second meeting and later on turned in my application and at that time you had to have 4 people to give you support to join ASHRAE and so I joined. Later on was asked to become part of a committee in the, in the ...

M.K.

Were you a mechanical contractor at that time?

D.G.

Yes, I was a sheet metal contractor at that time, doing sheet metal contracting and so anyway we joined and worked on a committee and worked on the Program Committee and later on was asked to become a chapter officer and so I progressed through all the chairs of the chapter and I worked on research promotion in one of the committees during that period of time and we had a real successful research promotion activity. And so I was asked to become an officer and then I was president in '77-78 of the Houston Chapter of region eight. I then from that point was I asked at the CRC if I would become the Regional Vice Chairman for Research Promotion and was active in research promotion for three years. And during that period of time, region eight had had a successful research promotion program but I was able to enlist enough support from region eight that we crossed the \$100,000 barrier that had seemed to be very difficult for any region to eclipse and so I was fortunate enough to go across that barrier. And in a time Bill Collins was of course real active in research promotion. In a sense we've got the Bill Collins Award. Bill would always challenge me and say you know Houston chapter against Oklahoma City and he would bet a quart of Chivas Regal against my quart of Jack Daniels and I've given him a quart of

Chivas Regal every year. I'm telling you that guy beat me every year. Somehow or another Oklahoma City would beat us and out of Houston, out of that top award every year for research promotion but there was a lot of camaraderie throughout the region on the research promotion and we had some real successful chapter research promotion contributions and so it was a lot of fun. At the end of that time Bill Collins cornered me one day in the Menger Hotel in San Antonio just about a block away from the Alamo and Bill said that he wanted to sit down and talk to me and Jack Thompson another ASHRAE past Director and Regional Chairman. They cornered me and we sat down in the lobby and talked a little bit about ASHRAE and then Bill asked me if I would let him put my name forward to the Director and Regional Chairman. And it's interesting how you grow in ASHRAE and you come from the grassroots and when you go on the board it's quite a different experience. You find yourself moving from being chapter oriented and dealing with issues that deal with the Society and you find yourself moving from vision of chapter and what the members need and then looking at the overall aspect of how Society deals with all the technical issues and how we must deal with the broad term of the technical side of Society as well as the grassroots side of Society

M.K.

So Bill Collins and another guy cornered you down there and a lot of good Texans have been cornered down there and have surrendered down there.

D.G.

That's right. Surrender around that Alamo I'll tell you. But it was quite interesting but yeah that's where it happened, right around the corner. Menger Hotel is a real old hotel. It was built about 110 years ago so it's kind of a nice old hotel and nice setting to be asked to go forward in ASHRAE. So from there I served three years as Director and Regional Chairman for Region Eight and then during that last year I was asked if I could if I would accept the nomination to be treasurer for society and go into being an officer. And there were several people but again Bill Collins was right at that front of asking me to do that along with some other people that were instrumental in twisting my arm to accept that. It's a funny situation and when you get to that point you're not sure you're ready for it you're not, you're apprehensive about all of the expectations that are put upon you to do the job and so it's, your reluctant at times to take it and after I gave it quite a bit of thought my arm was twisted quite, quite hard I finally accepted the nomination and I'm glad I did it was a tremendous experience.

M.K.

Damon, many people claim that the job of a Regional Director is one of the toughest jobs an ASHRAE. How would you address that question?

D.G.

I would say that Director and Regional Chairman is the most fun job I had an ASHRAE. I mean it's not the, you know from the standpoint of meeting people, going to the chapters, and being involved with a lot of people. I really had fun at three years. That's a delightful job and you get to see the society from the regional side and the grassroots side and you also get to participate with board activities and begin to learn a little bit about the other side of our society with the standards, the technical committee activities, R&T in research and all of the other functions that we serve. It's was very, very good experience and it's very necessary for someone to have served on the board before they move on into an officer's position. So it's a, a good to do.

M.K.

Then you became Treasurer. Yeah, evidently kept books well enough you moved on up from there.

D.G.

Well treasurer, I reached the treasurer's job about the time that society was going on to a new computer and was involved with establishing our budgeting process and involved with going through the finances and reorganizing some of that and we had the opportunity to work with staff and it was just a lot of fun to see our financial program develop on the new computer and on the system eight. And also to be involved with writing some of the Council rules of the board as it pertains to budgeting and financing and programs and approval of programs. And so during that year I had the opportunity to participate in some of the rules that now apply to Council finances and Council approval for programs. And it was a lot of fun to be involved with the development of those programs.

M.K.

That sounds like very dry activity, some of those tasks but once you have been in that process you have insight into how ASHRAE really works and it becomes a very valuable background does it not?

D.G.

It was, yes, and of course my background carrying me from a contracting business would certainly make it a little bit easier for me to do than some people that have not had that experience.

M.K.

Yes, contracting in and of itself is a very difficult type of work to account for.

D.G.

Right. And when we do we applied the estimate to the cost and compare that to the percent complete. So it's an ongoing process that we truly, the same thing you try and do with budget, budgeting for committees activities. And especially with programs that go forward for three or four years that ongoing programs with money spent and more than one fiscal year.

M.K.

You mentioned earlier that some of the proudest work you've done in ASHRAE has been during your time as treasurer.

D.G.

Yes, I enjoyed that very much because many of the rules that we wrote during that period of time are still in place and so that was, that was a big year. Served also on the Education Council and as vice president. And during the year that I was vice president of Society, we, the Education Council was new. It was only in its second year. In the first year, we certainly were trying to, I was on the Council the first years as vice chairman and I worked with David Butler who was chairman at that year and we all were looking for a direction to go with our educational activities. And during those years we are able to develop a direction for Society to go in order to span the gap between the graduate engineer and the graduate of other HVAC&R programs in order to provide him with continuing education as well as to go back and to teach fundamentals for those people coming up in our industry that had not had any experience during their formal education to go to us for correspondence courses. So during that time we developed the first correspondence course for ASHRAE and we are now moving out with other correspondence courses to help all members of ASHRAE to further their skills in the HVAC&R industry and we've had good results from that program. So it was really a lot of fun to see education and furthering of people's education a part of ASHRAE's direction and to see that developed under ASHRAE's guidance.

M.K.

Damon, where do you see our efforts in the educational field leading us now?

D.G.

I think it's very important that we continue to teach basic engineering skills in all of our universities and that we teach them all of the major skills that they would need but I think the more specific things ASHRAE should be depended on to bring forward. And that such things as new technology as it is developed, the research programs in new technology. We also need to look at the education of all of our standards. In any of the major papers that are presented we need to transfer that information out. So there are a lot of things that education can transcend and it's more than just the fundamentals that we deal with in HVAC&R. So but ASHRAE should be in a position to help with all these. I mean we should be able to respond immediately to one of our standards. We should get that information out as soon as that standard is developed. We should have, in house, the ability to take the that material and develop it into educational courses either into a chapter program or into a seminar or to take it to a correspondence course depending on the depth of it and so that's what we're trying to do with education. We're, we want to take education beyond just the fundamental education that we all received in the university or in our formal education training. So ASHRAE needs to be that to the society and have the ability to move promptly on issues. And our standards are a big part of that where we've got the standard writing in codes and in getting that information out to the public.

M.K.

It's interesting to me that once we publish a standard that is the leading edge.

D.G.

Yes and that's one of the things that we might look back in history and say we've learned from and that is that we have the technology, and ASHRAE has done an outstanding job of developing that technology. But I feel that we, look back in history, we can see that we could have done a much better job on 90.1, we could have done a much better job on 62.89 in getting that information out to the chapters and to the people that really need that information. In addition we have been reluctant to push it forward and put it in implemented into laws. And during my years in the presidency I emphasized the need to take our standards and put them into code. And fortunately through the help of other members we were able to get them adopted into the Southern Building Code Congress and also into BOCA and to get reference to our two major codes, our 90.1 and 62.89, the indoor air quality codes. So those, in standard I mean indoor air quality standards. And so with that we now have the ability to put those into code and reference them so that our engineering then becomes possible to go ahead and implement those standards for the good of the general public which is what we really set out to do to begin with. So they become, they pass the point to be voluntary, they become mandatory in many areas.

M.K.

There's a growing awareness that our educational efforts nationally in the fields of math and Science are in need of great help. Do you see us becoming involved in the effort to help in our secondary school efforts to improve education in math and Science?

D.G.

That's a good point. David Butler has been appointed to a committee that is the amalgamation of all the engineering societies in order to do more at the elementary and high school level to improve math and science and ASHRAE needs to address this. It's very difficult because of the breadth of that whole

problem for us to address that as a single society but as a group of societies for engineering disciplines, I think it's quite important that that ASHRAE be a part of that. And so that's been our approach during my year of president that we took in that we would join others in order to develop a program to try and help in the lower elementary and middle school levels to improve young people's math and science scores and so that what we're-

M.K.

I think we're going to find a lot of allies and fraternal brothers in their interest as we go ahead. You had mentioned that as vice president for the Society you also chair the Educational Council.

D.G.

Yes. I was vice president and then I went on as president elect of course and during that year you spend a lot of your time planning for your presidential year that's the year that is the most important part of being a president, is during your presidential year. And during that time you have the opportunity to work with the president elect advisory committee or PEAC which is the Directors at Large that are representing the Society and the board on all of the committees. They liaison to each of the committees of the society. And so it was a year by which I had an opportunity to gather a lot of information, a lot of input and at that time I came up with my theme, professional development through participation from a presidential year. And I really tried to set out the involvement of people. The more you participate the more you're going to get out of ASHRAE. You learn more by doing, you can read, you can set it aside in a couple years later you would not have remembered that but certainly by participating and being involved in helping to write many of the standards or being involved on technical committees at our society people learn a whole lot more. And there's just no substitute for being involved. So that is a little part of my year to get people involved and to further the voluntary participation of all of our members into the society activities. And that's, I had set aside ten points that I felt we really needed to concentrate on and those ten points then became kind of our focus for the year. And some of those we've already covered. The standards, the development of international standards which we were on the forefront at that time. We went into the international standards arena. We now formed a staff to participate in international standard. Very, very important that we continue that activity. International standards for the U.S. industry, especially our manufacturing industry, will be most important. And so it's probably that, I think probably the most important thing during the year was the adoption of these of our standards into codes. I think if you look back in history that probably will be the one thing that happened during my year that will be different than any other year. Yeah I'm proud of the fact that the educational efforts have finally reached the point that that they have and so I would not minimize that. I'm glad to see that we've now have staff hired and in place to begin to do the things that we need to do on education. And so we need to be involved with the education at the elementary level, middle school level. We need to do everything we can with other societies to develop that educational activities from the lower levels to improve math and science skills. We need to be involved with the recognition of students and putting ASHRAE's name before people and through society scholarship awards. And we were able to do that during that year we implemented a scholarship program and had some major contributions from the Rueben Trane contribution that was initiated during that year, during my years as president. And we also formulated the program by which we could bridge education for our members and that we would be able to do programs instantaneously and get that information back to our members so that our standards and new programs would be available to our membership much

more rapidly. So we now have staff available to carry out that program. I'm proud of that. Another thing that was important during the 1990-91 year is ASHRAE has been struggling or had been struggling with the relationship that we should have with the USNC/IIR. IIR is a refrigeration society that is based in Paris, France and the United States committee for that has been an independent committee of the IIR. Those people have come to ASHRAE for support during the previous ten or fifteen years and ASHRAE's acted as a Secretariat. And so we were able to help them formulate a formal financial program that has put the USNC back in business so to speak and has tied the refrigeration technology that has been developed through the IIR into the ASHRAE mainstream and also many of the IIR committee people and the people that have served on the board for the IIR are good ASHRAE members and so a lot of the activities that go on in the United States have been developed in the papers and have been a major part of the IIR technology. And so ASHRAE was able to assist in that and we have a strong U.S. national committee represented now on the IIR and that was an important part of the, of the 90-91 year.

M.K.

Do you see other international organizations and activities to which we need to develop closer ties and closer relationships?

D.G.

That's one thing that ASHRAE has had through their sister society and associate society programs, is we've had a strong relationship with allied associations dealing with HVAC&R and we do have a relationship with REVA, which is the parent organization HVAC&R societies in Europe. And we've had a very close relationship with REVA and all of the other nations. And ASHRAE throughout the world is looked upon as a leader in this industry. But there's an exchange in international society relationships that we really need and we need to understand that we need to be visiting their meetings and we need to encourage them to come to our meetings. And the international role that was probably developed first in its formal state by Richard Perry during his presidential year in the international aspect of ASHRAE has certainly been growing every year. And I support that quite a bit. Without the international role that ASHRAE serves in being involved with all of the other societies, we would not be as strong as we are. This past, during that year I was invited to the first ABOK meeting which was held in Leningrad, Russia and the Russians started an associate society of ASHRAE or a sister society to ASHRAE and that now has strengthened quite a bit and is a very strong organization. And it's a good place for us to exchange technology with the Russians.

M.K.

They ought to be very helpful to us as we get into designs that involves central and district heating and cooling don't you think.

D.G.

They are very poor on applied sciences but they're very, very strong and probably stronger than we are on fundamental sciences and so it's a tremendous opportunity to exchange with them a lot of their research programs which they've worked on for years to bring them down to a very finite perfection in order to improve on HVAC&R technology.

M.K.

As you think back, were there any visits or trips that were particularly interesting or memorable to you?

D.G.

We had a trip and we were invited to Cartagena Colombia South America. It was an extremely good conference. This was a conference of the Spanish speaking countries and they had all of the programs were given in Spanish and Portuguese and English and so it was just a well attended, the papers that were presented were exceptionally good. And so we finished up the conference later and we had a plane leaving from the airport, we were in Cartagena and the airport where our plane was leaving was about sixty miles away and so that, I had arranged for a taxi to take me to Barranquilla and we left early the next morning. The taxi driver that I'd arranged this trip with had a brand new taxi with air condition and everything the next morning at 4 o'clock in the morning the taxi shows up and it's an old taxi, no air conditioning, had holes in the floorboard. And so we took off and drove through back roads all the way across to there, I think I know I wouldn't book it again. I know that going through that particular drive and on the way there was one burrow that had been hit by a car and it was a sad situation but you really felt that all of the poverty and the situation that was there in that particular area that you were at risk at any time sitting on the side of the road waiting for the traffic to clear. It was a couple of inspection points that we went through and they finally got through those. But for a sixty mile drive it took about two hours to get there. But it was, the pictures you see of South America with the people hanging outside the buses and the old trucks that are overloaded with all kinds of equipment and materials, that's the, narrow roads, that's what we went through. And it was quite an experience to go from Barranquilla, from Cartagena over to Barranquilla. We had some good experiences and certainly the most important experience that we had throughout the thing is, were the people that we met in the receptions that we received. We arrived in the airports at two o'clock in the morning and there would be somebody there and then they had the ASHRAE Journal with my picture in front of them, waiting for me to come out and so that's the most heartwarming part of being Society president. And it's the response that you get from people and the help that you get and the amount of effort that everyone in ASHRAE puts out to do their job and to make ASHRAE a better society.

M.K.

People are the joy of ASHRAE

D.G.

You bet.

M.K.

And the oil of the machinery.

D.G.

You bet. I think that's a very, very good statement. Yes they are. And it's the difference the response that you get and the effort that people put out. Without that it would not be a fun job I can tell you.

M.K.

Pick a person out of ASHRAE that you recall with particular fondness and tell us a little bit about that.

D.G.

Well of course you've heard some me say about Bill Collins and I have a great deal of admiration for him but I have to go and you look at somebody like a Lou Flagg. I can remember sitting down with him in a meeting. We were in an EXCOM meeting, Barney Burroughs was president and we got on to some issue that was on the table and I got up and I was going to make my point and about that time ole Lou Flagg says, now listen here young man. So then from that time on if anybody get crosswise on Barney's

EXCOM that was the very thing that would come out, was now listen here young man. You know Lou Flagg of anybody in society just kept us all going in direction of bottom up. His direction and that has meant a lot to ASHRAE and how EXCOMs before him were reluctant to be top down because we know the importance of involving everyone in the decision making process. And so it's a very important part of ASHRAE, we really do enlist and try and develop our future directions based on what the members want and need. And so I think that's a very important thing for all future generations to remember. Is that we've been built by a society of member participation. And this is what ASHRAE is really all about.

M.K.

Isn't it interesting how the volunteer effort within ASHRAE really gets something done. On paper it wouldn't appear that a volunteer effort could solve the problems that ASHRAE ends up addressing and solving. Backwards from any other collection effort. I mean usually you get eighty percent of your collection from your top five donors. ASHRAE is totally the other way around.

D.G.

That's right. It shows what happens with the bottom up program and so it's very important. Our membership is the most important part of ASHRAE's, the whole program and their needs and what we can do for them and what they're doing for ASHRAE is all a big part of it.

M.K.

Are there any other people or events that you would like to comment on?

D.G.

Well you know there's just every president has a number of people that have just worked hard during that year and of course the executive committee that I worked with and the people on that executive committee really make it happen and I would not take anything but all of the volunteers and everything would be nothing without our staff and I would have to, it would not be right if I didn't acknowledge how much we as volunteers depend on our staff and how the leadership of Frank Coda has been so important to society and how the staff that he has arranged for and how important they are to our society program. Our staff is just exceptional.

M.K.

I would concur with that. I think our staff and the work they do is without parallel in ASHRAE. They're just marvelous people.

D.G.

You know it's wonderful to be involved because of the professionalism that we have from our staff and from all of our volunteers.

M.K.

Now Damon if this were a chapter meeting and you were talking to a young sheet metal contractor who had shown up for the first time and this was his first ASHRAE meeting, what would you say to him?

D.G.

Well I would tell him to be very involved. I would tell him that the most important thing is that he becomes active on committee level and that if given the opportunity to go further that he do so. But to work, to do his part, to contribute and all of the rewards then will just come one after another, you know. It starts with participation and then from that I think you do gain so much in your own professional development. So it's a two way street and it just keeps rolling, rolling around you know.

M.K.

Well Damon I'd like to thank you for the time you've given us this afternoon. I know at any of these society meetings past presidents have a very busy schedule and we thank you very much for taking time to discuss your tenure in ASHRAE here before our cameras.

D.G.

An exciting year and it's one you will remember forever. The trips and the people, all of the activity.

End of interview.