

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)

Transcription

Interview of: Walter Spiegel

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Interviewed by: Charlie Henck

Charlie Henck

Good morning. My name is Charlie Henck with the historical committee and we're here in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for the Region III Chapters Regional Conference. This morning I have with me presidential member Walter Spiegel who was president of Society in 1972 and 1973. Good morning Walter.

Walter Spiegel

Good morning.

C.H.

We're going to start off this interview this morning with you giving us a little bit of background about yourself.

W.S.

I always wanted to be an engineer and I got a scholarship to go to the University of Pennsylvania from high school and after two years I enlisted in the Army. And I had a three year all expense paid trip to Europe.

C.H.

And what time was that?

W.S.

Well that was from 1943 to 1946.

C.H.

Okay, so you were there during the second World War.

W.S.

Second World War. And after I had been all over Europe I took a little bum's tour all over the United States and Canada and then resumed college in the fall and graduated in '48. And that was a period, parenthetically many of, much of the leadership of ASHRAE has been from that general age group of people that had that experience.

C.H.

So when you graduated in 1948 what did you do then?

W.S.

Well I want to work for a consulting engineer named Charles Leopold. He was rather well known. He designed the Pentagon among other things, the mechanical work. After about 13 years why I started my own office. And we have been most fortunate and had a career in that in which I'm still active.

C.H.

Oh, great, great. So when did you join ASHRAE? About what time in your career?

W.S.

Well about a year after I started working with one of the engineers at the office there.

C.H.

So your career has always been in the Philadelphia area.

W.S.

In the Philadelphia area and finalized in the HVAC industry.

C.H.

Okay. Now when you joined ASHRAE were you just a casual meeting attending, attendee I should say or did you get involved in committee work right away in the chapter level?

W.S.

Well I started working in the committees and ultimately through the chairs. And then because of the work that the firm did I got interested in panel heating and cooling and got on what they then called the technical advisory committee, now known as technical committees. So that I was exposed to Society activities which were very interesting to me.

C.H.

And what year were you president of the Philadelphia chapter?

W.S.

Okay, I don't remember. I think it was approximately 1961.

C.H.

Okay so you were doing-

W.S.

Just as the societies were merging.

C.H.

Right. Okay and that happened in 1959. And then from there you were doing technical committee work and then you worked your way up through TCs to be chairman of TCs?

W.S.

And then became Director at Large of the Society and then went on through the Society chairs.

C.H.

Okay so then that 1972 you were the president of the Society.

W.S.

Yes.

C.H.

Okay. Now what was your presidential theme when you were president?

W.S.

Well it was called "meeting new challenges" and I guess that this requires a little description.

C.H.

Yes.

W.S.

That was the time when the space effort was winding down and people were starting to look at what was happening to industry and society. And there were a group of business men that met in Rome and they generated a report called the Club of Rome report which more or less said that if the world keeps

growing in population and keeps using its resources that we'd run out of food, we'd run out of energy, and the planet could no longer sustain the environment. So that, the other conclusion was that labor just doesn't produce enough output to sustain all of the health and social and economic programs that we would like to see and we're always considering and to increase the quality of life. And the hope was that the public could be informed enough to make intelligent choices of relative priorities. If not we would be on a collision course and I think you're seeing some of that today and I think you're starting to see the folks who are suggesting that we reexamine our priorities. There was an article in Time just last week which pitted the environment against the jobs program which is one of the obvious collision points.

C.H.

How did you go about implementing your president theme?

W.S.

We thought that ASHRAE must sustain and improve its development and promulgation of information to the membership, to the industry, to the public, so that they can make these intelligent choices. One of the, so part of our program was not only to point out these things to the membership or to start reexamining our information process and our standards generation process and seeing how we could take it from there. One of the things that became apparent is that the energy dilemma was looming if it hadn't come to the lines at the gas station yet but a lot of our members were aware of it. And some action by the Bureau of Standards on energy standards was already in progress. And as president I called a meeting of high ASHRAE leaders and leaders of the Department of Energy to meet and the outcome was that ASHRAE and DOE would cooperate to channel and improve our research and standards development to make sure it goes in the right direction. And it was recognized that ASHRAE's resources weren't enough to maintain its preeminence in this field and that we should cooperate with the government. The government came to the conclusion that they needed a private sector volunteer group to do this effort so that it was considered a good method of cooperation which had been eschewed in the past. And that has pretty much developed that way since then. One of the other challenges that we had was because of our shows and our Handbook efforts that the budget kept seesawing. Our expenses kept seesawing so that we instituted a five year cycle budgeting method which would be updated annually which permitted the Society to anticipate trends and to anticipate problems. And I think that worked fairly well and subsequently the Society had a very dynamic growth pattern compared to other societies and it's been very remarkable. It's only leveled off recently.

C.H.

Well it sounds like during your term of office you were very busy. What else was happening within the Society at that time? I guess around that time TC, I mean the Standard 90 was being developed or thought about. You mentioning that with ASHRAE getting involved, the private sector getting involved with government.

W.S.

It was. I can't take credit for all of that. That was actually initiated before my term and continued after. And what I mainly did with DOE's help was to get the proper interaction and funding for other efforts and it developed from there on. And subsequently there were further efforts in standards generation and manuals and good practice on that.

C.H.

Well since that time there have been a lot of revisions. I mean it came out, Standard 90 in 1975. Revised in 1980. It's been revised again recently. Issued in several parts, 90.1, .2, and .3, and so on. What else was happening during your term of office in the way Society?

W.S.

Well we continued to stress the international aspect of our Society and our industry. One of the things that I did was motivated the establishment of a prize for the best paper not in our Society but associate societies in an attempt to improve the relationships between the associate societies and ASHRAE which was in paper only to a large extent. And we did have that prize and it was at that time successful for a period of time. Subsequent to my term of office, I followed that up by joining the International Institute of Refrigeration and became vice chairman of a commission on air conditioning and my wife and I travelled all over the world. And we even established a couple associate societies.

C.H.

What else was happening, say during the annual meeting or the winter meeting?

W.S.

Well during that time a couple of new procedures were tried. In 1972 which is when I went into office that meeting was in Nassau in the Bahamas. Actually a foreign country and offshore. And the swimming was great. The logistics were challenging and I think we concluded that we have to wait a little for the global relationships to solidify before we did that again. The term that I went out of office there was a coincident regional meeting. There had been a movement to emphasize the regional meetings and perhaps deemphasize the Society meetings and again the conclusion after debate that our normal procedures work pretty good and that we shouldn't tamper with them. And there's a tremendous synergism that occurs at a Society meeting. One of the great benefits is meeting other people and initially talking to other people that have similar interests. And that's happening to an even greater extent. That's the attraction for many people to come to Society meetings. And I think that we found that the coincidence of regional meetings defeats that. So the venue, the logistics of the hotel, all very important in getting a meeting where things happen not only officially but among people.

C.H.

I guess all of our Society meetings now are still in North America. We had one in Hawaii. We've been to Canada several times.

W.S.

Well I vote for Hawaii again.

C.H.

Walt, you mentioned earlier that ASHRAE was getting involved with government, with the government in trying to prioritize some of the government standards. How do you think ASHRAE can get their opinions or influence in government?

W.S.

Well the year after I was president I started a new committee as its chairman, the Government Affairs Committee. And we investigated and found that ASHRAE can under its IRS status do some lobbying so to speak. And the Government Affairs Committee worked on two levels really. One is the Society level where ASHRAE presidents and leaders would give testimony to Congress. And number two and try and encourage local chapters to become active in local legislative affairs and make the make the views of the

Society known. And that's been greatly expanded to the point where of course today we have a Washington office

C.H.

That's true. How many members were in our Society when you were president?

W.S.

I think we had a little over 20 thousand at that time, going on to 25 thousand.

C.H.

Now we're up to 50 thousand.

W.S.

Over 50 thousand yes .

C.H.

Do you know how many chapters there were at that time?

W.S.

Less than 100.

C.H.

And now we're up to almost 160 chapters. Substantial growth in the last 20 years. You've been recognized by Society, given the Distinguished Service Award. You're a fellow of the Society and you've also gotten the highest technical award in Society which is the F Paul Anderson Award. How do you feel about all these honors that have been bestowed upon you from Society?

W.S.

Well they're very gratifying. It sort of says that some hard work pays off. And we've had interesting time in the engineering field. The last few years we've become involved in the underground chilled water system for cities and thermal storage and I think we designed one of the largest chilled water thermal storage tanks in the country. And that's all been a fascinating career.

C.H.

I mean being the president of your own business and trying to run this as well as when you were president of Society. How did you juggle the two of those together?

W.S.

Lots of hours. Support of staff and most important a very supportive wife. and

C.H.

Well that's good.

W.S.

She was interested in the ASHRAE and she's helped me all along the way. So it made a big difference.

C.H.

Now when you were president ASHRAE I guess was still in New York at that time.

W.S.

Yes, yes.

C.H.

And now since the time you were president of ASHRAE, where you got involved with, I guess you were on the past presidents committee and other things like that.

W.S.

We'll I'm involved as a member of a number of committees. At the time I graduated from the presidency, why the president was automatically chairman of the Nominating Committee. And you had to be kind of a quick study. Since then I've served as a member on committees and have sort of faded out gracefully.

C.H.

Now you also were, told me that the region here and around the Philadelphia area had given you an award for engineer of the year for the National Society Professional Engineers for your work locally.

W.S.

It's a rather good kind of a thing. Much of the activity of the engineers we committee in this area which operates all year round is to influence high school students to go into the engineering profession and we got involved in that. And it calls attention to what engineers do. There are a number of television programs and so forth. So it's a rather useful activity which has many of the same objectives that our Society does. So I enjoyed that. The nicest part of it was that my candidacy was promoted by my competitors.

C.H.

That's great. It's a real honor to have your competitors do that, to nominate you. You mentioned about the Engineers Week committee. A lot of them have programs to get students involved in engineering. How do you think we can do that today? Get students involved in our field of HVAC&R.

W.S.

Well there of course is a debate going on now whether we're going to run out of technicians and engineers and so forth. It's a rather unusual time in our economy at this point to talk about how we can influence more people when a lot of people in our industry don't have jobs right now. It's still a common wisdom among people that have looked at the statistics that there will be a shortage of technicians and so forth and that we have to influence not only young people but women and I'm still active in our engineering alumni at Penn and there are more and more women going into engineering programs and they're very bright young people. And so I think it's the kind of thing that we should think about a lot. There are a number of other organizations. National Association of Women in Construction who have a block kids program that they take to schools and so forth. And I think it's probably useful for ASHRAE to possibly join hands with some other groups along this way.

C.H.

You've met I'm sure many people through your involvement in Society. Can you tell us some who had an influence on you?

W.S.

Well particularly during my year as president I met a lot of people who had high positions in their companies and I was very much influenced by their very prized constructive outlook. In a sense that that promoted personal growth in me. When I was working for a consulting engineer he took an attitude toward me that encouraged my branching out into my own firm. I've done that with some of my better engineers and who would leave in any circumstances and several of those have got large and important offices at this point. So I feel that legacies have kind of passed on.

C.H.

I guess how would you encourage our young engineers today when they do come into our industry to get involved in ASHRAE? What would you say?

W.S.

I think you've said that you said the key word is get involved. The initial motivation for a young person to join ASHRAE is a sense of insecurity. Here are people that know, maybe I can get some information. As soon as they become even partially active, it's other than just going to the golf outing, they meet people that they can interchange information with. They can meet other people that are engineers. They can meet contractors and sales people and vice versa. And then they finally the technical import can't be underestimated. It's just invaluable. So I would say that for young people to be active in the chapter committees is important. It's also useful to become active in the technical committee on Society level if the person's company will support that activity. It's very motivating.

C.H.

Walt, you're mentioning earlier about your international activities with ASHRAE. Can you elaborate a little on some of those?

W.S.

The first one really was going to Russia in 1975. And that was a congress with people from all over the world including many of the Iron Curtain countries. And we watched almost firsthand at some of the machinations in politics to go into international groups at that time. We subsequently went to Yugoslavia, Israel and a few other countries and it was quite fascinating to see how things were in other parts of the world. Nobody at that time could have predicted what happened in the last few years. Right now it's 1992. And communism is no more. We got involved, I got involved for example in the 60's on starting committee on survival shelters where we explored what our industries role would be if we ever had to go underground after, or in a protected space after a nuclear disaster. Fortunately that's no longer a relevant issue but if we look at some of the other things that we talked about in 1973, meeting new challenges and look at the economy and the various problems that are facing mankind today, the same that we had in 1972, meeting new challenges is still very, very pertinent. And the role of ASHRAE is extremely important and I can only hope that we will continue to go along with our major objectives of ASHRAE and benefit mankind.

C.H.

Thank you. I'd like to thank Walter Spiegel for being with us today and sharing his term as president of ASHRAE and other views on Society with us today. Thank you Walter.