

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)
Transcription

Interview of: Hugh McMillan Jr.

Date of Interview: June 1992

Interviewed by: Mike Kearney

Note: interview isn't complete, stops with about 2 minutes of silence at the end

Mike Kearney

Good afternoon. My name is Mike Kearney. And we're here in the lovely city of Baltimore, Maryland and it's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce you to Mr. Hugh McMillan, ASHRAE President during the year '79-80. And welcome to Baltimore and thank you for joining us today

Hugh McMillan Jr.

Glad to be here.

M.K.

Hugh, can you tell us a little bit about your walk through the various chairs and committees of ASHRAE that led you to the presidency?

H.M.

Well I was a student at Texas A&M and we had the first, we didn't call it the student chapter, we called it student branch at that time. And I joined ASHRAE student chapter there and subsequent to that, moved to Houston and went to work down there. As a student member we were able to go right into a chapter without paying any special Society dues for the first year. So I got introduced to ASHRAE there and I kind of liked it. I was also a member of ASME, which you normally are if you take mechanical engineering. And I went to some chapter meetings of ASME and found that I liked ASHRAE, well it was ASHVE at that time, and I liked them much better because their friendliness and openness and so forth. So stayed in, worked in the chapter. Of course they give you every kind of job they can at that time from bar tender, ticket salesman and all that sort of thing.

M.K.

That's good training for an engineer.

H.M.

But in about 1955 or so I was standing for elections for Board of Governors. At that time the Nominating Committee didn't control that level. We actually ran for election at the first level for the Board of Governors. And an interesting thing happened after we had elections for the new member of the Board of Governors, well we were in a dead heat. So the tellers came out and announced that we have had a tie and I realized that time that I had actually voted for the other guy, you know, sort of a courtesy you know. Matter of friendship and so forth.

M.K.

Did he vote for you?

H.M.

Well, I don't know. Well I don't think he did because off the count that we got after I voted for myself. I just barely beat him. You know I reflect on that sometimes and realize that maybe if I hadn't won the election I may not have gone on in ASHRAE, or it was ASHVE at that time. Then I proceeded through the chairs and became President of the Houston chapter in 1959-60. At that time we were merging. We changed the name of our Society from ASHVE to ASHAE. And they merged at that time with ASRE. And so I shared the office of President. The RE local President was President for the first six months and I was President the second six months. We got the merger through in about three or four years of taking all of the officers and working them all through the chairs. Six months terms of office.

M.K.

How did that work practically? The splitting of the presidency into six months tours of office. It would seem to me that that would have been a difficult adjustment.

H.M.

It was a short term but we sort of worked together the whole year. The RE person was the particular head for the first six months and I had the second six months. We kind of flipped the coin to find out to figure out who would go where. But it worked out fine and we all knew each other. We were the same industry, basically so it worked real smooth. Sort of an embarrassing deal for RE. They were about to go broke frankly, and they had to do something. Their only alternative was to merge.

M.K.

All right, you were still working in the chapter level than when the Society became known as ASHRAE.

H.M.

Yes.

M.K.

Okay. And what lead you out of the chapter?

H.M.

Well of course, finishing that, a few years later, I attended a lot of the CRCs. Enjoyed that very much. And took my wife. She enjoyed that. And for a number of years just kind of, I guess I became generally known and I developed a reputation, good or bad, during that period of time. In '66 well I was the chairman of the national meeting in Houston. So I got to know quite a few other people.

M.K.

All right so you were involved at the chapter level and then became involved through the CRCs with the work of the Society, nationally.

H.M.

I was general chairman of the Society meeting in Houston in 1966 and so I got to know a lot of officers and Directors of the Society then. We completely financed our bill, sent the money back, which is almost unheard of and so I had sort of a backer there. You know we talk about people. I had a backer in Houston, Clarence Fleming that happened to be on the Nominating Committee and wanted to know if I would serve as Director at large. And I told him I would. I wasn't too sure if I want to do it or not because by that time I had my own business, working pretty hard in that. By golly I was nominated about 1967 I was nominated the year before that and went on to serve in that capacity from 67 to 70. After that I spent about a year, I thought my career in ASHRAE was over.

M.K.

Paid your dues at that time.

H.M.

Not get renominated for anything and I want to say this, I never really wanted or sought, actively sought nomination for anything. I just never did. Some people, you know, find that a little bit incredulous but it's true. I've just never really wanted to. I did have a real desire to get out here and someday be President of ASHRAE or go through all the chairs.

M.K.

That's really not unusual. Most of the fellows that we've had the privilege of interviewing, reflect the same thing, that the job in fact seeks the man.

H.M.

I'm not surprised at that.

M.K.

Now it's been not a reluctance necessarily but almost always a surprise.

H.M.

Well it was. It was to me. But about a year after not being in anything, I did some committee work. That's something. That's actually work. But a year after that the Director and Regional Chairman job in region VIII came open and so I was nominated for that. Served on that for three years and I had a year or two that I was off after that in committee work again. And also one of the committees was the Finance Committee. Of course now I had six years experience on the board so I had a pretty good idea how the thing worked. But the Finance Committee was I think more of a training program at that time. Learned how the finances of the Society worked. And when you know how the finances in any operation works then you know how the whole thing works. So served my term and shortly there afterwards nominated for Treasurer of Society which now is a seemingly higher office I thought it should be at the time. But it was a higher office than Vice President. You carried with you a lot more responsibility I thought. So I served in that and went on straight up from there to President and through the President Elect route, of course. You're nominated for President Elect, that's President. That's really what is it.

M.K.

Before we get into your accomplishments and observations during your presidency, which of the jobs that you've held within ASHRAE have the been the most challenging and rewarding?

H.M.

Actually two jobs. Well three jobs. Regional Chairman which that's more of a people to people type operation. That's where the rubber hits the road, you might say. Sort of, you know you're the bishop going around and calling on all of your churches and keeping them in line. And that's a pretty hard job.

M.K.

It still is a challenging job in the Society.

H.M.

And then when I became, there were some other jobs that were very interesting. I'm not trying to take away from them at all. But then as President Elect you're also chairman of, at that time we called Regions Central Committee, which was a committee consisting of the Regional Chairman's seat. Now that there, I enjoyed that very much. Enjoyed that very much doing that. And probably though the most challenging during that year as President Elect was preparation for the Presidential year. Recognize some of the things that I felt needed to be done. Not just that I felt but other people of

Society felt and planning for that and then actually accomplishing it during the President Elect year and the Presidential year.

M.K.

You mentioned earlier Hugh the importance of planning for your presidency during the year that you are President Elect. Would you elaborate on that?

H.M.

And a little bit before. As soon as you find out that, I think that any President Elect or fellow that knows he's going to be President Elect and ultimately President, if the job don't killing him see, then he needs to start immediately to plan what he wants to accomplish. You know record the things that he'd like to get done or Society to get done.

M.K.

Would you talk to us a little bit about the things that you planned and felt you accomplished during your presidency?

H.M.

There were several things. During my service prior to, you know, as the Director and Regional Chairman and Director and Treasurer, I recognized that there were several things that I felt like needed to be changed and first, in terms of a business that we did with the Board of Directors. We just were trying, it was paralysis by analysis what I thought. The meetings began early and they lasted late. Sometimes we would stop to do a social function at five or six o'clock in the evening and go back in at seven o'clock at night and keep the meeting going to one, or two, or three o'clock in the morning which I thought was ridiculous. So what we ended up doing was committee work on the board and we shouldn't do committee work on the board. So I felt like that we needed to change our organization of the Society somewhat so that we could relegate everything down to its lowest level. In other words, if an individual member can make a decision to do something, let him do it. If a certain committee can do something, let them do it. Just don't patch it all up to the Board to figure out what to do. So that was one of the things I had in mind changing and then another thing was that there was, we had no energy policy and at that time that was very critical in our country. Remember the oil shortage and the dollar a gallon gasoline and then selling for 39 or 35 or something? And we just felt like that was terrifically high. Talking about the oil going to \$100 a barrel. So energy conservation was very important and the energy policy statement by the Society I felt was very important. We had very little Society planning in my opinion. We had a Long Range Planning Committee. They frankly didn't do much planning. It wasn't because I don't think that they don't want to, I think they just didn't have the thing geared up to do it, you see. So we were kind of like a ship without a rudder. I mean, was ad hoc. If we had to get something done, well we had to just do it on the spur of the moment. When the emergency arose, we took care of it. So I felt like, that some amount of planning, thought needed to go in as where we wanted to take the Society or where the Society was going to take us or however you want to put it. We put that all in writing and developed a plan you see.

M.K.

Alright and if you would tell us a little bit about how you went about doing that.

H.M.

Set up an MBO set up which is management by objectives. We first, during my Presidential year and I want to tell you and hasten to add, this has been greatly improved upon since I've left office but they've

gotten a lot more sophisticated with it since when I left. I mean when I was there we set up, made each committee chairman tell me some of the objectives that he thought he ought to have. And we had to approve them or the President Elect would approve them. And we'd sit him back down and make them give a report at the end of the year as to, and interim too in mid year term as to what had been accomplished so far and what percentage they were along on accomplishing all these goals. So we were able to take care of that in that manner. In a pretty simple manner but we did it. Then in order to change the Society organization we set up a committee of Don Banfleth and Bill Chapman and some others to discuss how we might change that deal. And I had in mind, I kind of gave them some instruction. Well look, what we want to do is we want to develop a committee system much like Congress so that they can really make all of these decisions in these committees and then they just bring the results to us and we yeah or nay them. So but they went a step farther which really will enable the Society to grow almost without bounds and they have another layer of management in there that does the approval and they bring it to them so they handle a lot of that.

M.K.

The other layer, what we call the Council now.

H.M.

The Councils layer. Correct. They brought that, group activities under one table. That's correct. Ranks groups of a similar kind in on the one table and then the council brings all that stuff to the Board now. I don't really want it to be quite that sophisticated but it's worked out very, very well.

M.K.

Yes this process that we call ASHRAE is very interesting. There's real work accomplished by this group.

H.M.

Well there is a lot of work and that's the reason for the committees to bring out, to discuss these issues in great detail. And course what my idea was to get that away from the Board back down to committees. While we were on the Board a lot of times the Directors at Large would bring their chairman in. When I became President, you know, to make all the presentations, I just told him if you want to bring the guy in from your committee, you bring him in as back up but you will make the presentation. And so we kept them short then see and to the point and we got our job done and it just worked a lot better. And hopefully they're still doing that. I don't go to many Board meetings anymore but I'm sure they are. I know they don't have any nocturnal meetings anymore.

M.K.

Yes and now they sort of cut out the presidential suite bar a little bit at this meeting.

H.M.

That's right. Well we had to have that bar and I mean the meetings lasted so long we were exhausted. Had to get rejuvenated. Some other things that I noted was overcrowded facilities in New York City at the engineering center. We had 64 people in 8,000 square feet. We had people out in the elevator lobby and in the halls and within our space. And we just had to do something about it. And at that time we were paying 100,000 a year let's say 108,000 a year rent to the United Engineering Center for rent which was a good deal for rent for New York City. But it would appear that we were going to start paying about \$25 a square foot and we needed about 20,000 square feet. So you can see that rent was fixing to go up pretty high and we couldn't find anything in New York City. You know had so many people that complained about going to New York City. You know, the cost of housing and all that sort of

thing for meetings. So during this period of time, you might say gestation of these ideas, I decided that let's try to see if we can't find another place to locate and we looked in a number of different places. But during my Presidential year I set up a committee to look into locations. We got it down to three or four. And it really came down between, Washington DC came in about a third because they really set up for organization like this. They got a lot of personnel available. Thing that I think knocked them out was cost of housing in the area and rent wasn't all that bad but housing. And you know the cost of personnel at the time. And then we came down between Dallas and Atlanta. And of course I have my own wishes but I took myself out of the loop.

M.K.

Coming from Houston.

H.M.

Guess where? But we lost in a real close vote. The reasons being and it made good sense. It was very relatively close to Washington DC. And another one of my programs was to establish a Washington presence because I recognize that nobody in Washington knew anything about ASHRAE. They had no, they knew a lot about ASME and ASCE and IEEE and all these other so-called founder societies but they don't know anything about us. So I felt for a very small, a relatively small investment we could start presence there. And we now have a Washington office you see.

M.K.

Did you do that by starting with Mr. Cox?

H.M.

We had to fund it, and vote it and all this good stuff. But we made a search and found Mr. Cox

M.K.

Okay because that's been a very important initiative on the part of Society.

H.M.

I think it is. You have to, we have to kind of tiptoe through the daisies there because we don't want to be doing lobbying even though we're authorized. We can do up to five percent of our budget lobbying. But we don't do anywhere near that. But we're not lobbying. We are there for technical assistance. Not to influence legislation and all that sort of stuff. You know we certainly do. But I've felt like that's a very important thing. These ideas that I'm telling you, they aren't all mine. I'm not that brilliant. But I had a lot of people come to me and talk to me about these things. You know about the Washington presence and, you know, boy we need to do something about headquarters location.

M.K.

Hugh, during your presidency, the investigation of alternative headquarters sites resulted in the move itself, did it not?

H.M.

We did not, well we bought the property. But we didn't actually move. We moved in about five or six months after my term ended. We had to, we bought a used building. We had to refurbish the building and get it all set up. So it took us, you know, a little while to do that so we moved on that and everything worked out real good. We, I feel like it was a good investment and I can guarantee you we saved money.

M.K.

Even though Atlanta isn't as close to Houston as Dallas might have been, looking back do you think that was a good decision?

H.M.

I think it was a good decision. I really do. Even though now you can go nonstop to Washington National Airport from anywhere in the United States almost. At that time they had a FFA ruling that coming into Washington you couldn't have a flight over 500 miles away so I think Atlanta, I believe it was 500.

Atlanta just barely got under that mileage and so if you go nonstop between Atlanta and-

M.K.

That's interesting.

H.M.

Yeah it was.

M.K.

You really looked at quite a number of parameters while you studied this move didn't you?

H.M.

We did. Well we had to. And, you know, was it a quality city. Did they have things like professional sports and do they have a, you know, so we get good people on the staff. So you can't go into some 25,000 people town and maybe, is there a symphony there and all that sort of thing. We looked at every bit. Quality of life was a very important part of it. The cost of housing. The people that moved down from New York City, you know, on the staff and that's another story. When they moved down they actually came out very well financially. Those that owned property in New York City and sold it, we guaranteed to buy it at an average price. Say of average appraised of three appraised prices. And they usually sold it for more than those appraisals. But they came down and bought, I mean as we say down in Texas they started living high on the hog down in Atlanta. Real nice homes and all that money to buy homes with, see. So their quality of life and their comfort improved by moving down there and we lost only one person we really want to keep. Standards. Director of Standards. But we got a replacement for him and everything's just working fine.

M.K.

How do you view this Society now?

H.M.

Bill Chapman said it like this, he said that ASHRAE is a magnificent society and the reason it's magnificent might be because we make a lot of money and we're not hurting for money in this Society. But because of the people we have and it's a people society we have so much commitment and dedication of our members at which other societies, some societies just don't have. And we have people that really will come in and work harder at Society business than they do at their jobs, you know, which is pretty important. They kind of have to watch that a little bit. But we have some of the most highly qualified people in the world to call on. And while I was President I was able to call on people that certainly are tremendously more qualified in the particular field I was talking about than I and which was just a blessing. I never was turned down by anyone.

M.K.

You mention earlier Hugh that some of us can get involved in ASHRAE and actually work harder in the ASHRAE job than we do at our own job and the need to protect yourself from that. Can you elaborate on that for us?

H.M.

It's a problem. And it's one that sets a position of that kind of responsibility really needs to look at before he takes on a responsibility. First of all, as President for example or like let's say a President Elect or chairman or the R&T committee or chairman of the Standards Committee or something like that where there's just so much activity, they need to make sure that they know everything. That if they run their own business-

Remainder of interview missing.