

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)

Transcription

Video Interview of: Lee Burgett

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Interviewed by: Dick Worth

Dick Worth

Good afternoon, I'm Dick Worth, 2007-2008 vice-chair of the ASHRAE historical committee. Today is my pleasure to have Lee Brugett past president of ASHRAE, 2005-2006. Welcome.

Lee Burgett

Thank you.

D.W.

I'm going to start this off by just asking you about your early background, you know, where you are born, when you went school, anything about your family that you like to share.

L.B.

Well Dick, I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan in the year 1939, middle of the last century. Grew up in the Grand Rapids area up with the exception of very early years spent in Detroit when my father worked on a defense assignment during World War Two. But after the war we moved back to Grand Rapids, there I grew up, went to school, finished elementary school, high school, at East Grand Rapids high school. And then off to the University. I graduated from Michigan State University with both a bachelors and Masters degree in mechanical engineering and then later took an MBA course at the University of Wisconsin.

D.W.

And then about your work career, where did you start off?

L.B.

Well when I left Michigan State University after the Masters degree I took a job with the Trane Company and that was in 1962, moved to LaCross, Wisconsin. And I've been there ever since. Actually, formally retired from Trane in 2003 but I continue to work on a part-time basis consulting with Trane, enjoy that, gives me a little time for golf and my gardening activities and things, but keeps me engaged with the industry.

D.W.

What products were you involved with Trane?

L.B.

Well early on I actually joined the research department, I had a major in heat transfer so did some work on really components. Worked on heat transfer enhancements for things that were used in fin and tube coils, the enhancements and internally to the tubes for water and refrigerants. And after a few years of that I moved into product development. And most of my time in the product development area involved centrifugal water chillers. Worked on development of an air cooled water chiller. I think that

hit the market in 1972 and then worked on a series of water cooled centrifugal chillers which had been marketed for many years. So that, you know during my early years when I was involved technically, if you will, and then I got promoted up the line and I became manager. And technical skills kind of waned from that point on. So my job became more dealing with people. And in the broader aspects of technology development, product development, so I worked at that. I also spent at the end of my career a few years working with looking at opportunities for acquisition of technology or businesses. That was about it until my retirement, I continue to be involved on a consulting basis with a variety of industry organizations including ASHRAE, AHRI, Canadian Standards Association, Green Buildings Council, UL, things of that nature. Primarily focused on developing standards.

D.W.

Well how did you first get involved with ASHRAE?

L.B.

Well that follows the standards track too, because my first direct involvement with ASHRAE was with standard 15, which was the safety code for mechanical refrigeration. That was back in 1985. And while I had been a member as a student I hadn't been active prior to that between the student period and that point. But they got me back in ASHRAE and you know I just continued to get deeper and deeper into it, I've enjoyed every minute of it. It's been a pleasure.

D.W.

Great. It sounds like you came into ASHRAE through the technical side but did you go through the chapter offices and regional offices or did you just come in to the society at a higher level?

L.B.

I did not serve through the chapter offices that involved a local chapter. Served in some capacities but not directly as an officer. Early in my career I had been involved with ASME local. Actually went through the chapter offices with ASME as opposed to ASHRAE.

D.W.

Okay. What were your first positions with society?

L.B.

After I was involved with the standards development for a number of years, I think I moved then to the standards committee, went through that and chaired the standards committee at one point in time, served on technology committee, I was involved with the programs committee, variety of - a host of committees. Pretty much up and down the line.

D.W.

What are the things that really stand out to you from your presidency, things that you are really proud of that you were able to get done that you enjoyed doing?

L.B.

There were a variety of things. We initiated at that point in time a roadmap for sustainability and so I've seen that, the roadmap being developed. I've seen elements of that roadmap being implemented as we gone on in time so that was a pleasure to see that. We also did the globalization roadmap and again I saw the roadmap come to fruition and now are beginning to see some of the elements of that being incorporated in the societies long-range directions, strategies for the future and in fact you know the international side of the society is the fastest growing element that we have today. Another recent author titled his book, "The World Is Flat", we're certainly moving in that direction. And we see of

course the economic developments going on in China and India and other Southeast Asian countries, change the whole landscape for all of us. You know some of it we may look at with varied concern, when we look at gas at four dollars a gallon because there are other folks in the world who want that petroleum too. So we have to learn how to conserve energy and you know that's one of the elements that I continue to work on as I'm involved with projects today in ASHRAE. I'm on the project committee for 189.1. So we're dealing with aspects of green building of the core element of that is energy conservation. And anyway I can I try to promote energy conservation just as I did during that period that I was President.

D.W.

It was probably on your watch that region twelve was able to expand south in Brazil and Argentina. I think they've been around about that long.

L.B.

It was in that area. I don't know if it perhaps preceded me by a year or something but it was in that area. And you know we saw developments in Eastern Europe the Danube chapter and others that were formed there. You know that's only part of an ongoing process now and having the society expand internationally.

D.W.

Is there anything that you might have liked to have done that you didn't have a chance to do as president?

L.B.

Oh yes. In fact when I finished my term the meeting was in Québec city. And I actually did at that time an analysis of what we did right and what we didn't do in one of the things we can do is implement the energy conservation measures that I've hoped for. I went to the 90.1 executive committee at one point in time asking for a 20% improvement, didn't get that. It was disappointingly low but since things have improved and today they're doing that job so I'm proud of them for doing that. There were other things that we did that I thought were improvements, I tried to focus on the society demonstrating continued, continuous improvements in a variety of ways. The analogy I made was it's a big ship it doesn't turn on a dime we got to guide it and turn it slowly and head it to the right target.

D.W.

This may be a little bit of a controversial question, but I know that Trane is continuing to support R123 as opposed to most of the other major manufacturers. Would you like to speak to that a little bit? We need to get a little bit of controversy going here.

L.B.

I can speak to it a very general way. You know during the. I served as a product development engineer and as a manager in product development we looked at the issues involved with 123 beginning with the Montréal protocol in 1987 approximately. R11 was taken away from us. While early on in my career going back to the early 70s we searched for the ideal refrigerant, it was R11. It had all the characteristics and the highest possible coefficient of performance - it fit very nicely. But that being lost what was the next best alternative. And again we looked at the whole front, the characteristics of all the refrigerants that were commercially available, 123 stood out, slightly lower in coefficient of performance than was R11 but significantly better than anything else that we could choose. So we picked up on that and then we got into what we refer to as the refrigerant wars. It was a competitive battle internally in the

industry and so 123 got attacked for a number of different reasons and one element in particular, it does have a small amount of chlorine and it. So there is some ozone depletion potential. It's quite small, numbers that I've seen most recently it's about .012. But still there is some ozone depletion potential there. But one of the redeeming characteristics is that the global warming potential of 123 is very small relative to virtually any of the other alternatives that are available, HFCs for example. So if we look at a balanced environmental impact, looking at both global warming potential and ozone depletion potential and the energy consumption plays to the global warming as well because if it consumes too much energy that means the power plant has to produce more energy and there's a lot of global warming gases going out at the power plant. Look at the whole picture in a balanced way we still feel to this day that 123 is the best thing that is available commercially.

D.W.

I haven't stopped specifying it yet.

L.B.

Thank you.

D.W.

Although I think that the days are numbered because of regulations but yeah. What are going to be your big activities now that your presidency over with, I guess you've been winding down at Trane.

L.B.

Well I have continued asked about a half-time basis as a consulting role. So as long as I have my health I hope to continue that as long as I'm contributing something positive. But you know I have hobbies. I like to play golf I'm not very good at it but it's a fun game.

D.W.

You have more time to get better now.

L.B.

Well that's a good point. I'm an age that my body doesn't execute in quite the way that it did.

D.W.

I can relate to that.

L.B.

There was a time that with the wind at my back and downhill I could hit the ball about 300 yards, I can't do that anymore. So I enjoy gardening and that's, you know, it takes me a little longer to maybe to get things done in the garden that I have fun doing it, enjoy it, plant a variety of vegetables in a space of maybe about 20 x 80. So I feed not only my own immediate family but everybody else that wants anything. When I can't give away I throw away unfortunately.

D.W.

Well hopefully you'll have some happy days with the consulting interests and satisfying days continuing to contribute to our industry and it was a pleasure meeting you today for the first time. I guess said I've known your name for some time this is the first time that we've ever been face-to-face. Thank you again.

L.B.

You bet. My pleasure.