

CHARLES E. GULLEDGE III

ASHRAE President 2020-21



My name's Chuck Gullledge. I was born in a little railroad town called Hamlet, North Carolina, about 5,000 people. Very deep North Carolina, right along the South Carolina border. My father unfortunately died when I was seven, and I grew up with my mother as a single parent. She was a school teacher, French teacher. Well, we'd spend our summers with my grandparents on her side, and I learned how to build things. I learned how to plant things, grow things. My grandfather, he was an immigrant from Italy. He was a machinist and a farmer, and he taught me what I knew about getting into engineering, and that was how to build things. And being from North Carolina and loving North Carolina State University basketball, and they had an engineering program, and I was pretty good in math, it was a pretty easy choice let's go into engineering. Great choice. And that's the path I took.

So how did I end up being a HVAC engineer? I got that in my first job out of school. I went and worked in the Washington, D.C. area, and I was working on tunnels, tunnel ventilation. A little boy from North Carolina working on vehicular and transportation tunnels. These were underwater, through the mountains. I worked on the new Fort McHenry tunnel at the time, learning ventilation, and I got to work with all these international engineers that taught me how this was done. And it opened my door to heading down that HVAC path.

So, what was my path to ASHRAE from this? Well, it built upon this learning how tunnel ventilation worked. And a lot of the individuals at this international firm were ASHRAE members, and they started exposing me to it. And that's how I got into ASHRAE. And that was in the early 1980s? Mid-1980s.

I moved back to North Carolina in the early 90s, and I got hooked up with this crowd of people that focused on building engineering and really fun projects. And I quickly learned that to be successful in that community around Greensboro, North Carolina, you had to be connected with the ASHRAE network. So, the chapter I was a part of was the North Piedmont chapter, which is Greensboro, Winston-Salem, High Point the Triad of North Carolina. That's a small chapter, roughly 150 individuals, plus or minus, but it's a fun group. This is the old textile, tobacco, furniture part of North Carolina, so a lot of specialty contractors that knew how to build air washers, move lots of air around, and deal with process systems. So, the talent was incredible. Connecting with those people was pivotal.

Let's talk about Society year 2020–2021. It all started to come apart in the spring of '20 under Darryl Boyce's presidency. Everything started to shut down in February. The spring CRCs were being canceled. We, unfortunately, had to cancel the summer meeting in Austin, Texas. What we did, we did virtually: we filmed everything and put on a virtual experience. All of the fall CRCs were canceled. The winter meeting, ASHRAE's main revenue stream, was canceled. Now let's look internally at ASHRAE.

We were just moving into our new facility in Peachtree Corners, Georgia another headwind to deal with. Our revenue streams were drying up. Our products were not being put out for consumption as in events, programs, things of this nature. These were tough headwinds, okay? These were touch headwinds. We quickly learned, and I have to admit this influenced some of my theme direction, we transitioned to existing virtually. We connected people; we connected our product our dissemination of our product we connected it virtually. And it worked. Do you realize I visited over 150 of our 200 chapters that year? Virtually. I went to every CRC we had virtually. I did all this virtually. We learned that just because we were shut down, we could still communicate, we could still do things, and we did. And it was hugely successful.

So, who is E. Chuck? So, remember, I visited Every CRC virtually over 150 chapters. And one of the things I learned about doing digital-platform, meeting-type activities: you can do backgrounds, you can do things behind you, you can have people behind you doing things. But I started gathering photographs that eventually evolved to the expression "E-Chuck." One of the pictures I had was one of the filmings I did at the new ASHRAE headquarters. I was sitting in the president's office. ASHRAE Society has a president's office for the president each year. So, I got in there, and my presidential gift, and a little sign on the glass, and I'm back there looking studious, impensive, and that's one of my pictures for my backdrop.

Another backdrop is with my presidential gift; the little snow dude he was wearing a mask that my wife so masterfully customized to give the snowman a mask. So, I kept using these backdrops just to keep delivering, "We are ASHRAE. Your president is on the job. We are ASHRAE." And that morphed into E-Chuck. So, I use that sometimes.

What was the biggest success in this? It was overcoming the loss of revenue and still being able to conduct ASHRAE business. I don't know how we did that. We had a lot of strong people that focused on the mission. I had an incredible president-elect following me that was supportive the whole time. And we kept everybody focused.

So, what's the takeaway of what we went through? That's a good question. I want to say that we learned to adapt very quickly to, I use the cliché a headwind, but we adapted to a headwind. We learned that we didn't have to always be face-to-face to disseminate, conduct business, collaborate. Now we were forced to go all in on digital. There's no way around it. But we did it. And we kept people connected. We kept membership of ASHRAE connected. We kept the

behind-the-scenes business of ASHRAE connected. We didn't miss a beat. The hardest thing of that year was losing that personal connection with people. When I did get to go to my first meet somebody, connect with the ASHRAE membership, It was in early June, my last month, so the last month of your 12-month term. I got to install the new officers, and I got to pass on a presidential pin to somebody retiring. I cried like a baby.

What were some of the granular challenges here? Let's talk about that. What platforms did you use to connect people? You had, and I probably shouldn't name it, but you had at least three or four possible ways to connect people, and wherever you were in the world, they would have different preferences. So that was a challenge, getting that figured out. How do you deal with government, let's say public policy, that talks about sharing information? That was a headwind we had to solve as we were going through this. Was it appropriate, legal, whatever your word is? If you vote on something, is it binding, does it mean something? We had to tackle that. There were a lot of little chops.

I've been asked by a lot of people what was the major accomplishment? My takeaway is we didn't fail. I think it was the best time to be there. One silver lining that exposed itself was for ASHRAE to be a little more careful with how they plan their revenue streams.

So, what's changed since 2021? We've been better stewards of our financial position because the hemorrhaging of 2021 exposed some weaknesses that needed to be addressed. Digital twin, artificial intelligence, the virtual world it's that dream is coming together right in front of our eyes right now. So, what did living through the 2021 society year do for us? It made us stronger financially, and it's really opened up that which I had in my theme for society of be prepared for the digital world 'cause it's here and we're gonna be living in it.

So, one of the things I see coming out of this data is what you can do with it, and that's really the important thing. We are seeing the design and the construction and operation of facilities I don't care what kind of facility it is: hospital, manufacturing, an office building. We're able to take that data at a scale we never could before, virtually design that, virtually check it, virtually prefab it, virtually buy it in pieces, and just bring it together, in theory, seamlessly out in the field. And it's happening.

What advice would I offer newbies getting into this profession? It's very simple. Engage in opportunities that are afforded you for internship, from mentoring, from people that have lived through this. Get into an intern program while you're young in college, freshman, sophomore year. Do it. Get your hands dirty. Learn how things are done. Learn how they're built. Learn how they're designed. Virtually put it together yourself but learn. Get engaged in the moment. Don't wait till you get out of school and go looking for that job. I want to do this. No. Get in. Learn.

So, what are my interests? What are my hobbies? Because of what my grandparents told me; I love working outdoors. I'm big into landscaping, and I'm not just talking cutting grass, cutting weeds, I'm talking true landscaping. Configuring waterfalls, configuring landscape scenes, elevations, views. I just really love that. I love working with my hands in dirt. From a sports standpoint, love playing golf. It's getting a little harder the older you get, but I love playing golf. I'd say those are my two keep-me-focused activities.

So, what has ASHRAE meant to Chuck? It's the connection with people. It's being in that room. It's being part of something. Let's tie this back to the year that was 2021. Something else we did that I may not have mentioned earlier: we provided expertise to the world. We pushed the epidemic task force. We were out helping people eradicate, solve, protect themselves from this SARS-CoV-2 hideous pandemic that was taking place.

We supported public policy. We helped people do things in their designs and their operations of building to try to mitigate risk to building occupants. ASHRAE was engaged in that. We actually started, despite all these headwinds. Virtually, we started our decarbonization effort. That started as the PFBD Task Force for Building Decarbonization. Today, that is the Center for Excellence in Building Decarbonization. So that's my carrot: What does ASHRAE mean? What do I get out of it? It's being a part of something. It's helping.