

# MICK SCHWEDLER

ASHRAE President 2021-22



**Mick Schwedler:** Algoma, Wisconsin's a city of 4,000 people right on the shores of Lake Michigan. And my folks, Jim and Mary Schwedler, raised one daughter and four sons in that small town. They were both degreed chemists and very sharp. They moved back to our hometown, their hometown, and taken different jobs. My mom worked for the housing authority, some senior housing, and my dad was a partner with his brother and my grandfather in a TV and appliance repair business. We didn't have a lot of money, but we always had love. We always had a roof over our heads. They made sure that we strove for excellence, and they wanted to make sure that we had high character.

The next part is how did I get into engineering? Well, when I was 15, my dad had back surgery and he repaired the TVs and he repaired the stereos, but he couldn't drive a truck with automatic, with a manual transmission and he couldn't crawl around under TVs. So, after school and on weekends, I went on service calls with him; we would diagnose things, he'd tell me what to do, and I would do them. We were around at a neighbor's house; he had a very nice house, and I was repairing the TV, and the woman of the house, Mrs. Mercer, said, was asking me, "What kind of subjects do you like in school?" "Well, I like science, I like math." And she said, "Well, you could be an engineer." And then I uttered the phrase; my dad said, "Well," my dad says, "All engineers are crazy," because they didn't think about, when in the design, how it could be worked on.

The room got really cold because Mrs. Mercer said, "Mr. Mercer is an engineer." Okay, so I took care of the repair. I, we're walking back out to the truck. I said, "Dad, I think I really messed up. They're not gonna let you come back." "What happened?" I explained it to him. He went back in and explained the why. They're talking, they're laughing. But that's how I get into engineering, really. It's 'cause Mrs. Mercer said Mr. Mercer was an engineer, science and math, loved it.

I was able to go to school 'cause we didn't make much money. I got a significant scholarship to get a Bachelor of Science in Engineering at the Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. When I was a senior that year, when I was a senior graduating, I wasn't ready to start working yet. So, I thought, well, I can go to grad school. And I went to the advisors I worked with at Northwestern, and they said, "Well, your grades are good enough, and Northwestern's a good school, so you can go to any school you want to for free." I said, "What?" They said, "Yeah, they'll give you scholarships; they'll give you fellowships." So, I applied at a number of locations. I wanted to get into solar energy.

That was 1980, and solar energy was really starting to come around. I was interested in energy, reducing energy using, being an environmental steward, and I got a fellowship at the University of Wisconsin Solar Energy Lab, and the two top people, the people who literally wrote the book on solar energy, Jack Duffy and Bill Beckman were my thesis advisors. So, I got my master's degree in solar energy, mechanical engineering again in about 18 months, quick, just 'cause of some circumstances. And so, I started to look

for jobs, and I interviewed all over the U.S. I didn't have a relationship at that time from a romantic standpoint. It was time to, you know, you're 22- or 23-years old time to spread the wings, get out there.

Trane Company from La Crosse, Wisconsin, had an analysis program called TRACE. And the work I had done in graduate school was building modeling, and they really lined up well. I interviewed; I got a job offer there. And I had other job offers. And it was kind of disappointing that the best job offer was a four-hour drive from my hometown. Forty-three and a half years later, I retired. I'd been with Trane my entire career. Not many people do that anymore. The first job was to work on the TRACE programming, doing energy analysis programming, developing the program, doing training for users of the program.

About seven years later, it was time for me to grow, and I had the opportunity and blessing to move into a group called Applications Engineering. And our group's job was not to sell Trane equipment, not to take care of anything like that, but rather to help building owners, operators, and engineers design and optimize systems.

So, from an ASHRAE standpoint, I actually joined ASHRAE when I was a student. I took a course on HVAC in graduate school. It was a very practical, hands-on course. We joined ASHRAE at a low rate and got the 1977; it wasn't the hard book, it was the soft cover, handbook of fundamentals that told us how do you do loads, how do you do the calculations, how do you calculate the energy usage. So, it kind of set me up for the job I got into. And then, 1989 was the first time I actually attended an ASHRAE conference. I'd moved into the applications engineering group, and the manager said, "You should really go to this ASHRAE conference." And they were very; he was very open. He said, "Find something where you can learn, where you can increase your skills, speaking skills, leadership skills, building, organizing committees, and leading committee skills." And I got involved in technical committee 1.5 computer applications.

In 1994, in my day job, I was looking at something that was happening in the industry. And what had changed is the, in 1992, the U.S. Congress had passed the Energy Policy Act. And in it, it said ASHRAE standard 90.1, is the basis, and that's our energy standard for commercial buildings. And when it was updated, that once the Department of Energy looked at it and said it was a good thing, that every state in the union had to update their energy codes to be at least as stringent. And I went to my leader, applications engineering leader; we went to the Vice President we were working for, and I laid out what was happening. And then I have this thing called the boomerang principle. I still don't see it coming at me, but I said those, quote, fatal words, "Somebody at our company needs to be involved in this." And Tom, the Vice President, leaned forward and he said, "You're right, Mick, somebody does."

So, I started to attend those meetings, get involved in the mechanical subcommittee. I got onto, the main committee as a voting member in about a year and a half. And I learned so much because there were people who did lighting, who did the envelope section, who worked on elevators. Anything within the building that had energy usage was under the purview of the standard.

Spring of 2020 hit, and the entire world changed. They're a voice as the president. I, that year, I was the treasurer, and it affected things financially, significantly. ASHRAE with our staff, with some of the great guidance we got from ASHRAE's controller, we applied for some of the grants from the U.S. government, which allowed us to keep almost all of our staff. Because with the reduction in income, we wouldn't have been able to look the same and serve our members the same. As we went through that process, we started with virtual meetings. And so, in July of that year, I became President-Elect. Chuck

Gulledge is the president. And Chuck called me in early July, and he said, "Mick, I want to visit every chapter this year." And my first thought was, "Chuck, are you nuts?" But that was his goal. He offered to visit every chapter. It had to be virtual. And he had 154-chapter events. Three were in person. And I watched him do this, the courage, the perseverance, the character he exhibited was off the charts.

The year I was President; the world had opened up some. We had reached out; we'd put together a plan to get out to each region. At that point, we had 15 regions throughout the world for at least a week. We worked with the director and regional chairs for each of the regions and said, "What are weeks we can do this?" and put together an entire year. COVID didn't allow some of that to happen, primarily, Asia, South America, at the time we were supposed to travel there. But we had a lot of accomplishments that year. And I'd say the first accomplishments were the chapters started getting back together, and sometimes it was their first meeting in over a year where they were in person.

In addition, we have, we have a committee that presidents get to work with before they become the president to go through, "What are we going to do during the year?" And a couple of things that we did, we put together member to member connections. And what it was was a monthly and a virtual interview with ASHRAE members about different subjects: How do you get involved in ASHRAE? What are the advantages to your employer of you being involved? Not you personally, but the people who might be supporting you. Because we need that support from employers. And employers get advantages, different skills, management skills, growth potential, how to present. Not only do the people grow technically, but they grow from those soft skills, the personal skills standpoint. And all that comes back to the business establishment.

Probably September, you know, starting July, about September, I thought there are a lot of people dealing with mental health issues right now. Our family, particularly one of our sons, has had depression, anxiety he's attempted suicide, and 25% of the people in a building or in a meeting are dealing with some type of mental health issue. It might not be them; it might be a family member; it might be a close friend. So, Jen and I had been through training from NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, and we were at a point now where we could be advocates. We weren't in a crisis mode, and it was just, from my standpoint, something; the member-to-member connection was there, and if we're really gonna connect with members, we need to connect with where they are.

In addition, we did another thing called Learning Pathways. So, the Learning Pathways were basically bringing all that information together into one specific website for a particular subject. Here are all the manuals; here are the training courses; here are the ASHRAE journal articles on that. And that was a real benefit to people, 'cause it became easier to find. The final part was the ASHRAE theme that year. And it was: the first part was Personal Growth, Global Impact, which is important. But the last part really stuck with the members, and that was Feed the Roots. Help others. Help others grow. Feeding the roots works together. It doesn't matter the age. It doesn't matter the gender. It doesn't matter the location. None of that matters. We all have skills that we can pass on. And to this day, people still come up and say, "I helped feed the roots doing this. These other people helped feed my roots."

I'd say a big change coming right now. The refrigerant transition is huge going on to reduce the environmental emissions, to reduce the global warming potential of those refrigerants, and artificial intelligence. Trying to, everyone's trying to figure out how far can we take it, what should we use it for? From that perspective, it's a tool, like many of our other tools.

People come up, and they ask you for advice, and they think you know, which is kind of funny because none of us know everything. But I've seen some I guess advice I give younger folks is, one, get involved and put your hand up and volunteer for something. It doesn't have to be big. But it's outside of you, and it's to serve others and to feed the roots, if you will. When you volunteer and do things, you always get back more than you put in. Sometimes it doesn't feel like it while you're doing it, but you always get back more. That's not why you do it. You do it for the people that you're serving, for the people you're helping. So, number one is be willing to volunteer. Two, step out into places that are not comfortable. In the last two and a half years, number one in our lives is our faith. We have the same faith. We, I'm more active in our church now, doing outreach. I just got, since I'm retired, I got appointed as the pictorial directory coordinator, 'cause it takes a lot of time, and I will have some time. And then our family. We have two sons and a daughter. Two of them are married. We have three grandsons. And this gives us more flexibility to be with them. I've started to golf more. I didn't say I started to golf better.

During the year I was president, I had a chance to meet with the student branch at the University of Miami. And I asked the Region 12 folks, "What do you want me to do with the student branch?" They said, "Inspire them some." "Ah, inspire. I got this. I got this." Words something like this came out and had stuck. We make buildings sustainable and resilient. We reduce their energy use and emissions. 40% of the world's food spoils between the field and our forks. We reduce that a lot. We literally helped the world out of the global pandemic because we kept the vaccines cold. And most importantly, we keep people safe and healthy in buildings. There are always going to be challenges, and there will always be people and societies who step up to those challenges and to serve our mission, to serve humanity.