

RONALD E. JARNAGIN

ASHRAE President 2011-12



Interviewer: Ron, will you give us a little bit of your biographical background?

Ron Jarnagin: Well, I was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, in, on December 13th, 1946. And then my family moved to down to Baton Rouge as the state capital. And I lived there for most of my, life through up through college. Went to Louisiana State University, where I got my degrees in business. And then I subsequently ended up in Florida and went back to school to get my engineering degrees.

Interviewer: And how did you get your start in the HVAC industry?

Ron Jarnagin: I guess I, my probably my first exposure to that was taking a class in HVAC when I was in undergraduate school. And I was, I was kind of interested in that. And then after getting my graduate degrees, I was actually hired by the University of Florida to work for them. And they asked me to head up a program to develop an energy standard for the state of Florida. And so, I got involved with ASHRAE because they were, at the time, developing ASHRAE's, Standard 90.1.

Interviewer: So, so were you involved with any of the chapter level participation?

Ron Jarnagin: Actually, I wasn't, I probably, at that time, was not necessarily aware there was a chapter. There were student branches, but I wasn't aware of the, you know, the availability of that organization to do it. I prob, I didn't really get involved in the activities in the chapters until I moved out to the Northwest, Pacific Northwest.

Interviewer: Can you tell me how you came up with your presidential theme for Technology for Survival?

Ron Jarnagin: I thought a lot about what we ought to do. You know, I looked at a lot of the presidential themes and kind of got some ideas about how they did things, but after I thought about it, I was probably fairly strong on the technical side in ASHRAE having been in standards activities and TCs and things of that nature. And I was heading up a team of researchers at the National Lab in Richland, Washington, so I was kind of heavy on that side, but what I felt ASHRAE needed was not more technical sort of motivation because most of the people and the committees, I think, do very well at what they do and they know where they're going and they really didn't need a president telling them something else other than what they were doing. So, I tried to take a look back and say, So what seems to be kind of missing here? Or what is it that

we're not thinking about that we really should be thinking about? And so that kind of helped me get to my theme which was sustaining ASHRAE through leadership. And it seemed to me that the thing that we really needed to concentrate on was the development of leadership, the teaching of leadership, and the exercising of leadership in our organizations.

And some of that comes, I think, from a lot of the grinding committee meetings and detailed stuff that we do that sort of, by the time you get finished with that, you've lost your way in terms of what the organization needs and where it needs to go. And so, I tried to just step back from that and say, "What, you know, what do we need?" And because I had a young daughter and I was fairly old when we had my daughter, we, I got to thinking about the fact that what would-what would cause her to be interested in being in ASHRAE if she grew up and wanted to do this? And why would any of the people in that age, the millennials primarily, would why would they want to do this? What did ASHRAE offer for them? And its relative bureaucracy and staid kind of status, if you will, didn't seem to be very inviting. And so, I was looking for a way to break through that, I guess, and start getting naturally to look downstream, to look forward, rather than to you know, just look down at their feet in terms of what they were doing right now.

And so, it came to me that one of the things that we definitely needed to do was to actively start trying to develop young leadership, very young leadership, in fact, because it the change in the generation is going to impact every organization, not just ASHRAE, every organization. And the millennials coming along did everything different than we did. Their values were pretty different than us, and I had a daughter at home that every day reminded me of just how that was. So, I decided that that was gonna be sort of the centerpiece of mine, and that, and that focusing on leadership keeps you, keeps you from looking back, and it actually keeps you from looking down. It makes you have to look forward to see where you're going, and so I thought that that would be pretty good. And my good friend Bill Harrison, when I told him about it, his observation was that he said, "You're a person who has a choice of a theme speech. You could go the technical route, and you could go to the hardcore, but these are the things we have to do technically. Going the other direction is going to surprise people, because they're not going to expect you to do that, and so that's probably going to lead to a lot of people listening to what you have to say." Hopefully he was right.

Interviewer: What do you consider to be some of the more significant motions and actions that came about during your presidency?

Ron Jarnagin: Well, the one I'm proudest of, which was really my lead-off point and my presidential theme, was the creation of the Leadership University, right? And we can, we can see it today in the excitement about the young people that are coming into the society and to this program, because they're just getting revved up, literally, because of what they get to see. They don't, they see the expanse of the organization, they see the richness of the organization, and we had at the luncheon for the board they got up and announced all of the young people that are in this version of Leadership University. Three of the four slots were filled with young women,

then, in the Leaders Program, a number of those were women, so we've got more young women right now, and young men, of course, but I'm really impressed with the amount of young women that are getting into the program, that are jumping into this and are excited about ASHRAE, and that is kind of hard to conceive of, you know, when you look back several years, if you go back, why would want to do this? And now they're all jumping at it and wanting to do it, and we've given them, in many ways, a free rein to express themselves and encourage them.

Interviewer: During your travels as the president, I know you went to a lot of places. Can you share some humorous stories from those travels?

Ron Jarnagin: Oh, oh, yeah, well, there's probably a lot of those. I thought you were going to ask me about all the great things, but the humorous is fun, too. I had one-one trip that was, I kind of call it the trip from Hades because it was a multi-stop one where I flew to Kuwait for a technical seminar that was being put on there. Had to rush out of that one to take a red eye to Beijing for the Chinese Association of Refrigeration Expo, get up and take another flight to Timisoara, Romania, for the RIVA conference, and then run out of there and get up to the UK and to London for something with SIBCI.

But when I made the trip from China to, Timisoara, I had to go through Paris. And at that point, somehow or another my luggage, each piece of my luggage and myself had different ideas of, I guess, where we were going because... When we all landed that day, each of us was in a different city, none of which was my destination. And so, one bag went to Frankfurt, one went to Vienna, and I went not, I got into Romania, but not to the city that I wanted, so nobody got home that night. And it's imagining, it's kind of interesting how messed up things can get in the process.

I don't know that I'm trying to think of the things that were humorous. I not that, I didn't enjoy things which I absolutely did but there's just many things you can find when you're with the people. If I could leave a message for anybody, it would be that the people, wherever you are around the world, are so much more amazingly alike than different when you get to know them. I can, I've had the same conversation about family and children and kind of goals and things that you have or might have. I've had those with people in the Middle East, I've had them in the Far East, I've had them in Africa, I've had them in Japan and Korea and everywhere else, it seems like. And absolutely, I can tell you that people are not that different.

Our media sometimes portrays things very differently, and I think it does sometimes a disservice to people from other parts of the world and, I hoped that my sort of my travels and my willingness to sit down with the people and just have real conversations instead of posturing and being a President. Yes, you have the title but being someone that they see as a friend and a colleague and someone that they could partner with or someone who has an interest in what they do, which means that one has to learn to eat the food that they have, which is not easy for some people. It doesn't bother me. I grew up in Southern Louisiana and, you know, we ate stuff that grew by the side of the road and in the ditches and everything else, so I was pretty used to that.

But I found that most of the people where I went, when they saw that I would eat whatever they would eat, they would get really excited. They thought that was amazing.

The Nigerian chapter, when I went there, thought that was just the greatest thing in the world. I was eating the stuff that they were eating. And I could even figure out what it was sometimes, so. And they would laugh and just giggle and everything. And that's actually one of the funny points. They after seeing that, and I told them that I had learned to eat with chopsticks well, so much so that when I visited the Korean Organization right after I got back from, Montreal, when I was, when I was, inducted as a President. When I went to dinner the night when I got there, the first thing they said was, "You're very adept with chopsticks." So, and the point here is not so much that I conquered chopsticks, you don't know how long it took for me to be adept at this, but the point is that when you when you do things their way, when you do stuff like this, it comes across as a very clear thing that I care about you; your culture's important to me and they like you. I mean, it's very easy to be liked in those kinds of situations.

So, every one of those trips is not only, representing ASHRAE, but all of those trips actually is an ambassadorial visit on the part of the United States. And that's very clear to me. So, and the DRC for the Region-at-Large now tells me, he said, "You're the most popular you're the most popular president and most popular American in the Region at Large." I don't know whether that's true or not, but it was very nice of him to say that, and he's in a position to know.

Interviewer: I heard a story, someone whispered in my ear, about you chartering the Clemson University, chapter for the student chapter in an orange tie.

Ron Jarnagin: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, Ben Leppard. So, we went to that was at the end of an unfortunate event trip, where I had to attend, the funeral for, for Lynn Bellinger, our previous ASHRAE president who had passed away. And that was another one of those long trips with a bunch of things on it. And, and we got down there and, and, I mean it was kind of stressful for me, because I had to go to the IES conference and then straight up to fly up for Lynn's funeral and then fly down to Atlanta, and I had some other work to do, and I told Ben, I said, "I'm coming in if you want to do something there at Clemson." 'Cause he's asked me about going up there and talking to the student branch, and so I said, "I'd be happy to do that." And we squeezed it in between all those things. But I walked in, and I didn't have an orange tie on there, and so Ben walked up and proceeded to undo my tie and said, "I see you haven't learned how to dress yet." So, he took me downtown to Clemson, and he bought me a tie, and so I wore the Clemson tie to that meeting. And I'm sure it made everybody else happy.

Interviewer: He wants to know what you did with it, and he'd like it, like to have it if you're not using it anymore.

Ron Jarnagin: Oh, it's on my tie rack. Can I actually wear it? I actually wear it.

Interviewer: Well, that's great. That's great.

Ron Jarnagin: If I have to give it back to him, I no, don't you go. He's gonna have to come to Washington and get it.

Interviewer: What other interests and hobbies do you have?

Ron Jarnagin: Well, let's see. I like to read a lot. I play golf. Not well. Horribly, in fact, but I do. But I'm always good for a high handicap in a scrambler or something like that in the current, so I play in a lot of the ASHRAE golf tournaments. I go, I actually go to some of the chapters in my region that are, that are close, and I'll drive up there and play at their tournaments just 'cause it's a nice draw, and I enjoy the camaraderie of that. I do a lot of walking these days to try to stay fit, and the older you get, the harder that gets. But I got my little Fitbit in my pocket here, and I'm just at, I got it about a year and three months ago, and I'm just short of 2,000 miles. I probably will get, if I could get out of here and get back and get home, I'll get it the end of the week, so I'll cross that. It's kind of fun to do that. Those are probably the things I spend my time in.

Interviewer: Can you tell us a little bit about your children?

Ron Jarnagin: Just the one, it's easy. You know, don't have to worry about talking better about one than the other 'cause this is gonna be on the video. So, my daughter, Kaitlin Jarnigan, is, she's 23 now, and she, a little sidelight, if you, any of you remember when I was the President she introduced me. She walked up on the stage and introduced me. She was 19 years old, walked out on the stage in Montreal with 600x or so of people out there in the audience. She wrote her own speech, and I would say that she probably could have brought the house down if she'd have talked any more than she did.

And I the only thing, I thought about having her introduce me and the thing that drove me to do that was that, since I was going to call for this leadership university and bring these young people in, and I was going to talk a lot about how ASHRAE needed to prepare itself for these generational, you know, changes that are coming along, I said, "Well, I've got an object lesson here. I've got one right here." You know, and, for those of you who may remember, I put a little table up on the screen there that just showed some of the differences and how people in my age, the baby boomers, communicate, and how they the millennials, communicate, and everything was just sort of the inverse. If I had a lot of it, she had almost none of it, and vice versa.

So, I talked about getting my first Facebook account, which my daughter begged me not to do. And I think, I think she's relented by now, but and, and I was home; she was home at Christmas. She went to school at LSU, by the way all the way across the country, to go to school at LSU. And I asked her, I wanted to ask her, but I didn't want to put the pressure on her. So, I said, "So, Kaitlin, what would you think about maybe introducing Dad in Montreal?" Her reaction was, "Hmm, guess I'll have to write a speech." Turned out, just walked off. That was, that was the acceptance. I had to ask her in Montreal if I could just see what she was going to say before she went up out there. She hadn't shown me that. She said, "Why, Dad? Gonna try to change it?" And I said, "Nope, not gonna try to change it, but it's just a courtesy. I have to speak after you, and it's a courtesy to know what you're going to say." And so, we went up there, and I was I

mean, I was very proud to see her walk out there, and we kinda, I thought up that little scheme there where we, it was like my phone went off, you know? Almost everybody thought it really was my phone, even though that phone was turned completely off while I was up there. As if I, when I turned around after I'd given the, you know, pen to people, and everybody's off the stage, and I'm gonna turn around to the, or to the podium and they went through the audio system, and it was like a phone ring, you know, and then I reached and pulled mine out, like, "Oh my God, my phone's gone off," but it was actually going through the system, and it fooled everybody. It absolutely fooled them. I didn't think it, I didn't think it would, but it did, yeah. And so, they thought I was like a bozo up there, because I'm up there trying to press the buttons on the phone, which, of course, was turned off, and everybody was laughing. And then, you know, I was going, "Kaitlin, Kaitlin," like, and on the two screens on each side, we were simulating a text interchange between Kaitlin and I, right? And I'm trying to talk to her by text and fumbling, thereby sort of doing two things. One: getting the crowd engaged, but also symbolizing, really, the difference between the way the two generations work, right? It was a story within a story, play within a play. And for something that was not rehearsed, I would argue that came off very, very well.

Interviewer: I can attest to that; it was amazing, both of you.

Ron Jarnagin: Yeah, yeah, and then, so when I'm doing like, "Kaitlin," and then all of a sudden, the spotlight hits the right side of the stage, and here she comes walking across the stage, and she's not an unattractive young lady. And she walked up there and if I had to look at the videos afterwards and the pictures, but if you if you saw that, you would think that that child had been given speeches on stage all of her life. And for a 19-year-old, that was just impressive. I mean, that exceeded any of my expectations.

Interviewer: She was amazing.

Ron Jarnagin: But there was one little thing that I overlooked and I thought about it in passing, but it wasn't until I was up on the stage that I realized that I was going to be standing about 10 feet from my daughter when she did that, and I underestimated how emotional that moment was. It's not so much underestimated, probably, but I was thinking about other things, and then I said, "My God, you know, I've seen ASHRAE presidents get kind of tearful at the end, and that's fine, starting at the beginning just ruins the moment, you know, and I just, and I didn't know what to do, and so I remembered there was an old W.C. Fields statement that said, "Never co-star with children or animals." And I was running that through my head while my daughter was talking, so if I, if I had linked it to a single word she said, I would have lost it completely. But she was a big part of it, because I can tell you, at that moment, I had everybody in the room's attention. Just because of the way we played that thing out that everybody in the room's attention. And nobody, I don't think anybody expected that kind of a start. So, I was kind of actually proud of the way we staged that thing. But my daughter was the star. She was absolutely the star. I had, I probably had 20 or 30 fathers come up to me and say, "I was crying out in the audience." So.

Interviewer: Have you got any comments to make?

Ron Jarnagin: Well, I, you know, I'm certainly very thankful for ASHRAE and the people in ASHRAE giving me the opportunity to serve as the President. I tried to do it with, like, every ounce of energy that I had and every bit of commitment. I tried to work hard to build the global partnerships that I talked about and been successful in many of those. And it was just such a marvelous experience that it runs you half ragged to death, but I'd, you know, if the opportunity came again, I'd do it again. It was just that good. And I was very proud to represent the organization and get to go pretty much everywhere in the world. I was gone for about 275 days that year, so I was you were always busy, let's put it that way.

Interviewer: Well, thank you, Ron. Thank you so much.