

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)
Transcription

Interview of: Bruno Morabito

Date of Interview: October 22, 1997

Interviewed by: Paul Britton

Note: Some parts of the interview are hard to understand. These spots are noted as (unintelligible).

Paul Britton

Good morning. I'm Paul Britton historian for the central New York chapter of ASHRAE and in Syracuse, New York. It's Wednesday October 22, 1997 and we're here to do a leadership recall interview of Bruno Morabito who was ASHRAE society president in 1977 and 1978. Good morning Bruno.

Bruno Morabito

Good morning Paul.

P.B.

Let's start off with a biographical sketch of your life including your place of birth, your childhood, your education, your family.

B.M.

Well I was born in Italy and I lived there until I was about four and a half years old which was about the time that my father, who had immigrated to America before us, sent for my mother and myself. And we came to America and landed October 1, 1926. Lived in Syracuse most of my life since that time. I went to school here in Syracuse. Elementary, high school and even college because I attended Syracuse University. I am married to a former (unintelligible) girl. Her name is Teresa. We have one daughter and that's about the size of my history.

P.B.

You probably don't remember much about Italy or do you?

B.M.

Oh yeah, I remember quite a bit even though I was only four and a half years old. Lots of things that I remember. Especially I remember the house I was born in, the plaza of the town, where the church was located, and a couple of incidents that happened to me while I was there. One in particular that I'll remember the rest of my life. It was my fourth birthday. My father sent me a pair of shoes from America as a gift for my fourth birthday. And I was so proud of those shoes. I had to show them off. So I put them on. I told my mother was going up to see my uncle who was up at the orchard. And so I did. I went up to the orchard by the high path. It was spring of the year, or prior to spring. It was the wet season. When I had seen my uncle and showed off my shoes, I decide to go back by the low road which was down by the river without really recognizing what I was doing. Anyway I went down there and started walking through there and there was a lot of mud. And I walked home anyway in spite of the mud. And when I got home my mother looked at me because I had a collection of dirt on my shoes, mud not dirt. And she says, my god what did you do? So she started scrape off the mud and guess

what? No shoes. I had left them back in the mud. Now that's an incident that I will remember the rest of my life.

P.B.

Something about those shoes really made a lasting impression on you didn't it?

B.M.

It sure did.

P.B.

What attracted you to engineering as a field of endeavor? Why did you become an engineer?

B.M.

Well I guess the reason was that I was particularly good with math and science. And my advisors in high school told me that because of that I ought to pursue a field of engineering or science and I picked engineering.

P.B.

And where did you go to school to become an engineer?

B.M.

I went to Syracuse University. They had a good engineering program at that time. I graduated from there in April of 1945.

P.B.

How did you come to select our industry for your career?

B.M.

Well when I got through school, there were no jobs in the actual field of endeavor that I had chosen which was building bridges and buildings. And so I went to work with a sewage disposal firm. Holmes, O'Brien and Gear at that time here in Syracuse. Well I found out that I was going to have to be on a board for a couple years before they'd really give me any engineering assignments. Well I wasn't too happy with this. And when I was at college, I took a heat to power course from Jim Carpenter whom I heard was now over at Carrier and managing their engineering training program. So I went over to see him. And he remembered me from school and he hired me on the spot. And so that's how I started work with Carrier and got into our industry.

P.B.

And that was your first job in our industry, was at Carrier?

B.M.

Yes.

P.B.

Did you, you stayed at Carrier for a good long time? Did you ever get to know Willis Carrier? Was he there when you were working there first?

B.M.

When I first started. I got to me- I didn't know him well, but I got to meet him and shook hands with him. And I was very awed by the gentleman because he was really a brain.

P.B.

Other ASHRAE presidential members worked or were associated with Carrier Corp. Would you talk a little bit about these people?

B.M.

Well Willis Carrier, we've already mentioned. There were others that I had association with, Ned Stacy, under whom I worked in application engineering. Walter Grant under whom I worked in application engineering. Bill McGrath, who turned out to be president of the machinery and systems division and whom I worked under. Stan Gilman who was an associate and who I had some friendship with. And Carl Ashley who was a consultant to research and development division. Those are all past presidents of ASHRAE with whom I had personal contact.

P.B.

There was one more president of ASHRAE also that's-

B.M.

Well. Since the time that I was president, another Carrier man, Don Rich became president of ASHRAE.

P.B.

Ok what were some of the influences that led you to get started in ASHRAE?

B.M.

Well 1952 I was transferred to Philadelphia as a field contract engineer. And I felt that as a field contract engineer I really ought to get to know my associates and competitors in the heating and air conditioning field. And so I joined ASHRAE and that was the first influence.

P.B.

That was in 19-?

B.M.

1952.

P.B.

When did you start at Carrier, I forget.

B.M.

1945. Well, several years later I was transferred back to Syracuse. And when I came back to Syracuse at Carrier I was induced by Bob Barr who was then a member of the ASHRAE to join the chapter and further induced by him to go at it, the Central New York Chapter newsletter. So he and I actually started the newsletter for the Central New York Chapter. And apparently was fairly successful because as a result of that Larry McCraw nominated me for the secretary of the chapter shortly thereafter. As I went up through the chairs finally Stan Gilman must have remembered, must have he did, he recommended me to the ASHRAE nominating committee for regional chairman. And the recommendation apparently was accepted because I was regional chairman for Region I for three years. After which Stan Gilman again, who is a past president, recommended me for treasurer of the society. And again, the nominating committee apparently accepted his recommendation. And I was elected treasurer of the society.

P.B.

And that started your way up through the chairs.

B.M.

Yes. Yes. Now while I was on the Executive Committee, which is what they call all the officers, I had influences from Bill Chapman and Bill Collins, both of whom gave me insight and encouragement so that I could do the assignments that I had to work at while I was an officer in the society. And that's how I got going.

P.B.

That's how you got going. You sort of reviewed, I was going to ask you to review your ASHRAE career. You sort of mentioned several of the positions already in the chapter and in the region and in Society. And you ultimately became president in 1977-78 in Society.

B.M.

That's correct.

P.B.

You've also served on many committees too, such as what?

B.M.

I don't know how many but I've served on like the Publishing Committee, the general committee, the Handbook Committee, the Research Advisory Council. I was in awards committee. I can't really remember all the committees that I served on but I have served on a slew of them, believe me.

P.B.

ASHRAE has plenty of committees to serve on. You certainly did your turn.

B.M.

Incidentally all these committees are voluntary efforts on the part of all of the members of those committees and they make a tremendous contribution to this industry.

P.B.

Along the way you received awards for your endeavors and there was one in 1961 the Wolverine Diamond Key award. It was for an outstanding paper. Could you explain a little bit about that to us?

B.M.

The paper was how higher cooling coil differentials influence system economies. I designed a system while I was in a field that used higher cooling coil differentials and by that I mean the delta T of the water that's been used. The norm was ten degrees delta T and my paper and the system that I designed was based on 15 degree delta T because with that delta T I could use series flow through the centrifugal machines. I used two machines. And by doing that I was able to reduce the installed horse power of the refrigeration system, of the pumping system, and even the air side. And I thought that that was a significant contribution to the reduction of energy. This probably was before its time.

P.B.

So that was before the energy crisis?

B.M.

Before the energy crisis. But apparently the reviewers of the papers from the journal for that year were impressed enough to give this paper its award.

P.B.

Ok let's move on to talk about your presidential year. What was your theme for that year, 1977-78?

B.M.

My theme was "Involvement Beyond Ourselves". Let me explain why I chose that theme. Engineers as a group are conservative and not too aggressive about inserting themselves in what other people are doing even though they might be infringing on the expertise of the of the engineer himself. As a result I thought we need to do something about that, to stimulate our people and getting involved in things where other people could make decisions that would affect us negatively. And that's why I chose that theme.

P.B.

Sounds pretty logical. Well the focus of the 1978 ASHRAE winter meeting during your term in office was on energy. How did this tie in to your theme and what was ASHRAE going to do about it?

B.M.

Well energy was a real crisis at that point in time. Everybody was concerned about reducing the amount of energy that was being used and ASHRAE was involved in the energy used in buildings. And buildings in this country use at least one third of all the energy that has been consumed during the year. Because of this we have an expertise in the use of energy and in the design of systems that will use energy efficiently and effectively. And I thought that at that time this was one of the reasons that we should insert ourselves in what government was doing in developing regulation because legislation was being developed that would affect us. And by becoming involved in that we could at least provide input so that they wouldn't make decisions that would be counterproductive to the use of energy.

P.B.

So you'r theme kind of tied right into that, getting involved with all the people that we're making decisions.

B.M.

Exactly.

P.B.

What other events of significance were ongoing in the industry while you were president?

B.M.

At that same time the halochlorofluorocarbon series problem became a real problem. Because of the fact that some scientists have determined that the gas is being released from air conditioning and refrigeration equipment when they leaked or when they were being serviced we're damaging the ozone level. And as a result there was a possibility that the ultraviolet rays were getting through more than they should and would be causing skin cancer with people who were exposed to sunlight. So there was developing legislation to try and protect people from this, at the time, curse. And this obviously was going to affect the design of equipment and the way it was going to be applied and all of the usage of the equipment because during, well for example, equipment could leak and that would be released to the atmosphere. During service of the equipment they used to blow the charge in the system in order to get back and fix the leak. All these things contributed to the problem of the ozone and everybody's becoming concerned about this. So there was legislation that we had to be concerned about. And there again my theme of becoming involved pertained.

P.B.

Ok let's move on to, also during our Society president year, what were some of the other compliments during your term?

B.M.

Well. I established for the society a management by objective system because I thought we needed to have objectives in order to be effective as an organization. In order to make sure that we manage that by objective system would work, I established the PEAC, the President Elect Advisory Council which was made up of Directors At Large who are responsible for the operation of the committees. Each one has a group of committees for which he's responsible. These people then were able to advise the president elect so that he could determine what objectives he would like to pursue when he became president of Society. And after he established his objectives obviously the Directors At Large would have objectives

that they were going to pursue and they in turn were able to establish ideas amongst the committees that they were responsible for as to what their objectives ought to be. So this system provided a closed loop for everybody to be working in concert on this business of meeting objectives in the Society.

P.B.

Sounds like it worked out pretty well. They're still doing it today, right?

B.M.

Still being in use.

P.B.

Were there some other things that you got involved in with the Society that are ongoing?

B.M.

Having relation to the previous subject I instituted initiating streamlining of the Board of Directors and this helped to reduce the number of hours that were spent in haggling over subjects that came to them for review. As a matter of fact I established the Research Advisory Council which was established for the purpose of taking some of the load off of the board by doing two things. One was to allow them to approve projects that the Research and Technical Committee were recommending that were not a big impact on the expenses or the treasury of the Society. So they could be approved before going to the board. And only the real large expenditures that were being proposed then would have to be approved by the board. Now this obviously took a lot off the board. The other reason for the Research Advisory Council that I establish was to do develop a long range research program or plan for the society. And this was done and eventually it was completed by Don Rich, who later became president the Society.

P.B.

Well, you want to move on to talking about the move from New York City.

B.M.

Yes. I think that was another thing that was done. In New York City the rents were going up and up and up. And we were a tenant in the United Engineering Center. And at the time that I was president it was, well it looked like the rents were going to continue going up and up. And so during my term we gave notice that we were going to move. And that forced the issue because a committee was established to look where we would go, not just to say that we'd look at whether we were going to move or not, but we were going to look at where we were going. And so, oh five years later we had a building of our own. And this not only saved money but we got a building out of it and today I'm sure that everybody is darned pleased that we made that move because it has saved this money from the start. And we now own a building on top of it.

P.B.

This is about our move to Atlanta right?

B.M.

Move to Atlanta, right.

P.B.

Were there any other events? I guess we covered them pretty much.

B.M.

Well, the other things that I was responsible for, I think, had to do with my theme because I, all the time I was president promoted the idea that we ought to interact with other societies, with government and with the trade associations that were pertinent to our activities, like ARI for example.

P.B.

Was there any involvement with the IIR?

B.M.

Yeah, that was one of the societies that was existent at the time and still is in existence with whom we interacted because that is involved in refrigeration.

P.B.

Ok. We're on television now and I think you're the only ASHRAE president to have been on national television. You were on the Today Show with Jane Pauley several years ago when she was active in that field. Would you tell us about that and any other TV appearances you may have made.

B.M.

Well I appeared on television in Canada. We had kind of a panel with the rest of the officers on television while at the annual meeting, or semiannual meeting in Atlanta. I appeared on television here in Syracuse. But the most memorable obviously is when I was interviewed by Jane Pauley on the Today Show. And the subject of the interview at that time was the HVAC industry and insulation all because again, of the energy crunch. And these two things were important to energy usage.

P.B.

So you were selected, our society was selected to have its president talk about energy which was back, this was in the energy era, crisis era.

B.M.

And this is somewhere sometime in '77 or '78. I can't really recall the exact date.

P.B.

Well that must have been kind of fun.

B.M.

It was, believe me.

P.B.

I'm sure you enjoyed that. What people from our industry stand out to you aside from some of the society presidents from Carrier? Tell us about some you knew, past presidents, some others.

B.M.

Well as I said Willis Carrier I stood in awe of. But there were others like Herb Laube who started the incremental system. John Engalitcheff who was on ARI when I was representing Carrier on ARI and who started the Baltimore Air Coil Business. Bill Chapman who was my mentor as I went through the chairs of ASHRAE. Bill Collins along with him. Frank Faust who was a consultant to ASHRAE and research and research promotion. And Pat (Rialto) Cherne who wrote a book with Carrier and Grant that was used as a text in colleges for the HVAC activities or courses.

P.B.

I'm sure that you probably have some hobbies. What are your favorite ones? What are some of them?

B.M.

Well I got I think four hobbies which are all equally important to me. One is golf. I love to play golf and I play three or four times a week during the summer and enjoy it tremendously. Another is I love to dance and so does my wife and we like to go out dancing and we do that quite often. A third is crossword puzzles. I'm a crossword puzzle bug. I enjoy whatever I'm doing even if I'm watching

television I work crossword puzzles not to waste my time just on television. And I love to read. Those are the four personal hobbies that I have that I truly enjoy.

P.B.

I'm sure they all keep you busy. Besides your hobbies after retirement you got involved with our local county government here in Syracuse, Onondaga County government. Would you describe some of the activities with that?

B.M.

After I retired completely from my second job which was, well when I left Carrier I went to work with Aeronca and I was group vice president and in charge of their three air conditioning divisions.

P.B.

What time was this?

B.M.

This was '81 to '84. And I retired from there. And I had enough of 80 hour a week job. So when I came back to Syracuse after I left Aeronca, I got a call from Al Giannini who asked me if I was interested in doing some consulting work for the county. As you know he was involved in the garbage disposal issue that was being bandied about here in central New York at that time. He was also involved in the feasibility study to expand the district heating and cooling plant that was being used to heat and cool the county buildings.

P.B.

In downtown Syracuse.

B.M.

In downtown Syracuse. And there was a move afoot to add some more buildings like the convention center, the jail, and stuff like that. And furthermore there were some public sector buildings that were wanted to become involved in the loop from the county district heating and cooling plant. So Al Giannini started a feasibility study with a consultant to determine if this was truly a good thing to do. Well it turned out that it was and he asked me to come and help him to go forward with this thing. So I became the liaison between the county planning agency, which is where we were doing the consulting and the consulting engineer which who was ultimately given the job of designing the expansion. And I worked at that for, I don't know seven, eight years.

P.B.

What was the name of the consulting engineer? Was that Robeson and Woese.

M.B.

Robeson and Woese, yes. They did the actual design with guidance from Al Giannini and myself. Eventually the thing went to bid and we followed all the way through from the beginning right through to the bid and got it through the county legislature so that it could be approved.

P.B.

So that plant is in operation today is it, as we speak.

M.B.

In operation today. Still has some bugs but they're working those out.

P.B.

Well in fact our chapter had a tour through there just last year. It's still in operation.

B.M.

That was one of the things that I did with the county. The other is that the state had what they called an energy advisory service to industry. And the county was chosen to administer the service for the state. And I got the assignment as a consultant to the county to review all of the audits that the auditors who are working also for the county, would do of these industrial systems that they went out to review.

P.B.

For, to see if there, in an effort to reduce energy consumption.

B.M.

Obviously yes. The whole program was to try and reduce the energy consumption and the whole state was behind it. And as a matter of fact it was funded by the funds that came back from the ESSO program.

P.B.

Well we would like to turn now to what do you feel that ASHRAE's meant the growth in the HVAC&R industry? How does it benefit to the-

B.M.

Well I think it's been a great benefit to the industry. The four things, research, standards, education, and personal growth that stem from ASHRAE activities. Research. All the manufacturers who do research do it primarily so that they can develop equipment. ASHRAE on the other hand did the research so that it could investigate what are the terms of human comfort. What will be the effect of water travelling down a pipe. What is the effect of air going down ductwork. This kind of research and research into food and other refrigeration problems all are part of what ASHRAE did and is still doing. So you see the research that ASHRAE has done has certainly helped the industry. Now let's take standards. ASHRAE's had a big standards program. We have developed standards on air quality and well all kinds of things. Now the standards that they have developed have become used as the basis for codes both at federal and state levels and even as a matter of fact municipal levels in order to establish what acceptable levels of energy consumption are going to be used for example. Take Standard 90. That's one of the things that came out of this and it's being used by all sorts of government agencies to determine what codes they need to have in order to be sure that the people who are installing equipment and systems come up with an energy usage for the building that they're designing that would be acceptable from the standpoint of energy consumption. Education. We as a society have developed seminars that go around the country and are being used by all kinds of people to try in and learn what it takes to be able to function within our industry. Take personal growth. I think it's a tremendous benefit to anybody who is involved in ASHRAE to go to a meeting and learn from the lecturer who is presenting some kind of system or product or whatever that may be used in their work beyond that. There's committee work that is done by members who are eager to participate in this kind of work. In addition to that people become officers in the local chapters and even in the Society. And I can't think of any better way to learn how to interact with people and become material for management in industry than participating in these kind of activities. So personal growth is a tremendous contribution from ASHRAE.

P.B.

I can relate to that myself having been an ASHRAE member for many years. And you've covered some of the benefits of ASHRAE to the industry. Have we missed anything? Any other points that I haven't asked you about that you'd like to address before we close our interview?

B.M.

Well. Just a piece of advice. And that is that anybody who is involved in our industry should really become a member of a ASHRAE because of the benefits that I have discussed. The attended benefits that we've discussed a moment ago. And the fact that I know from personal experience the kind of satisfaction that this can bring.

P.B.

Right. Well thank you Bruno Morabito for this interview. It was a pleasure to talk with you about ASHRAE and about your involvement with it.

B.M.

My pleasure.

End of interview.