ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)
Transcription

Interview of: James Wolf

Date of Interview: January 2004

Interviewed by: Rod Kirkwood

Note: The last part of the interview is missing.

Rod Kirkwood
Ok this is an ASHRAE Leadership Recall interview and we're interviewing Jim Wolf at the present time. He with president, what year were you president?

James Wolf
2000-2001.

R.K.
2000-2001. Okay, and we'll learn from this interview how Jim came to this point and what all he has done and how his life is … responsible for ASHRAE for the whole year was able to make ASHRAE improve. Jim, I've got some questions for you.

J.W.
All right

R.K.
All right. The first one is, would you give us a brief biographical sketch of your life?

J.W.
Well okay. You know, I was born in Nebraska, lived some time in Arizona and went to the University of Arizona and got a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. And then ended up in the Washington DC area and got an MBA in government affairs from American University. Came from a family of five children. I'm the youngest. I had four older sisters. Married, I have three children. I call them adult children. They're all on their own, through school. What else? Any other areas in particular you would like for me to…

R.K.
Well I think you might cover your career a little bit.

J.W.
Okay my career, after I got out of the University of Arizona, I went into the on army for a couple years. I had gone through ROTC, so I was an army officer for a couple years. And then when I got out of that I went to work for the Trane Company in Lacrosse, Wisconsin for going through their student training class. And then was transferred to the Washington DC area to their government affairs market. Was there, or government affairs office. Was there for a couple of years then went into a sales position with Trane and then back to the government affairs office to manage that in1971. And so I've had most of my career in the HVAC industry and with the Trane Company and the successor American Standard except for the two years when I was in the military.

R.K.

Well that's a pretty good capsule of the whole thing in a very short time. Very short time to have to go through it.

J.W.

Oh okay good.

R.K.

Okay, next question. What was your first job in the, wait a minute I got ahead of myself. What attracted you to engineering and/or HVAC?

J.W.

Engineering, it was simply in high school, I was quite good at math and the principal said, you ought to study engineering and you're good at math so you ought to go into electrical mechanical engineering. You know a young mind could be influenced easily and I thought well that was good so that's what I did and got into engineering. Really enjoyed studying engineering and got the degree and then got attracted to the HVAC industry just by job interview and opportunities to build a career that would be using my engineering in a management type of area long term. And my goal was rather than doing design, was to do to use my technical background in a management perspective.

R.K.

That sounds like a good basis. Okay the third question then is what was your first job in HVAC?

J.W.

The first job was in what was in really a government marketing support office in Washington DC where we were building special products in the Trane Company for the Army and for the various government agencies. And my job was to help technical support in those projects building special military air conditioners for Army electronic vans, working with the various government agencies on their design specs, and product requirements for building, say, office buildings of GSA, let's say hospitals of veteran administration and the Department of Defense building. So at that point it was a marketing support where I wasn't selling anything. I was giving technical support to our sales operation in their dealing with the government. Basically selling special products and standard products to the government. And so I did that for a couple of years until we got, as an industry, bombarded by policy issues, energy efficiency, indoor air quality, safety standards, and thing of that nature. And then in the operation and governor affairs we expanded into the regulatory in the policy influence, about the time that ASHRAE got into the development of ASHRAE 90-75, which is now 90.1.

R.K.

Okay, thank you. Describe the industry at that time.

J.W.

Basically, you know, I guess let me come at it from the perspective of I would say it was an industry that was a mainstream industry, you know, of doing the normal things of designing quality buildings that could provide, you know, the comfort at reasonable cost for consumers. You know, doing research and expanding our ability to do that but not threatened a great deal with external regulation or a lot of government influence. That was beginning to come in to influence us in about 1970. When I joined ASHRAE and when I started the industry, it was mainly, you know, design good buildings, build good buildings and do it at affordable cost. Energy cost wasn't as big a factor at that point and we didn't have some of the external environmental and policy issues imposed on us by the government at that point.

So it was, you know, just a pretty straight forward, do your business, while making some advances in the technology as companies and ASHRAE doing research and others were advancing the technology. But not any major threats or any major shifts at that time as I would interpret it.

R.K.

When did you first join ASHRAE? When and why.

J.W.

I first joined ASHRAE in November of 1967. I had moved to Washington DC in August of '67. And the people I was working for there said one thing you've got to do for your career to keep up with what's going in the industry is you need to join ASHRAE and you need to get active in the local chapter and get to know people that are members of ASHRAE and learn and keep up with ASHRAE. ASHRAE is how we keep up with what's going on. Technically. So I joined ASHRAE chapter. The next thing I knew I was on the Program Committee. Few years later I was chair of the Program Committee, number of other committees, the Board of Directors, and before I knew it I had completed the term as president of the ASHRAE chapter. And then I started in activities in society. So it was an employer saying, you know this is what you need to do for your career if you want to grow as a professional.

R.K.

Well I think that was a good approach.

J.W.

It was. It was excellent.

R.K.

What were your goals when you were president?

J.W.

President of Society?

R.K.

Yeah.

J.W.

It's kind of interesting because as I planned my year while I was president elect, I had some very specific goals. And I had a lot of them. I won't go through all of them but I'll hit the major ones. And then as I went through the year as president other things evolved which will probably be remembered more for what evolved than what I planned. One of the things I wanted to do is something that would help the chapters build membership and stimulate them to be more active in their local area and exchanging technical information from ASHRAE. So one of the things I set out to do was to change the way we judge the chapters, what we call the PAOE, President's Award of Excellence. And one of the major changes there is I felt reporting was difficult so we made a major move and went into electronic reporting of the PAOE. So one of the things that I think worked out very well for the chapters was that. Another thing is I wanted to find out within the chapters what their constituents wanted, what their members wanted. And so I wanted to start a process of communicating with the chapters. As a result I visited about 40 chapters, had private meetings with 90 to 100 employees, contractors, consulting engineers, manufacturers, academics, to find out what do you, how do you view ASHRAE, what do you want from ASHRAE, how can ASHRAE help you be more successful? It became a basis by which I think a lot of good things have happened with ASHRAE since. It was coined by Joe Buck as Jim Wolf's listening tour. I think it happened because Hillary Clinton was going around the country on her political listening

tour and Joe Buck coined the phrase of President Wolf's listening tour and I fed all that information back to the Board of Directors into various committees. Other actions were taken in ASHRAE to create a dialogue to find out what our members wanted and I think we started a process at that point that helped to reinvent ASHRAE and to be more practical in providing information to our members to be useful to help them be successful. So and the presidents that followed me, Bill Coad and Don Colliver did an excellent job of following through on that approach. And I walk the halls today, people say, you know, we're working on item so and so that you know, you heard from employers. I wanted to do something about the environmental affair. I felt, aspect, I didn't think that ASHRAE was doing enough in energy efficiency and green buildings technology. So I challenged the TC to write a green guide, design guide for ASHRAE. Just attended a seminar today where they announced the green guide and it's selling like a hotcake. And you know I'm proud that I started that. It was something that needed to be done to get ASHRAE into the green design from being more aware of and helping our people design much better than the minimum standards of 90.1 with the design to high energy efficiency lifecycle cost. So you know, advance the arts and sciences of HVAC&R and my theme was engineering tomorrow's quality of life to try to build a confidence and a respect for what we do. And try to convey the message that through engineering we're helping the public have a better life. And it goes beyond providing heating cooling. You know it's building cost effective buildings that are comfortable and they're safe and you know so those were my broad goals.

R.K.

Well you accomplished a fair portion of those.

J.W.

I did. I mean, you know in one year, you can't accomplish but if you get something started and other presidents follow through and I was very fortunate that the three of us that I mentioned earlier stayed on the same general theme and followed through. And it made for a great three year span. Instead of this typical president comes in, he wants to emphasize a certain thing. It's his pet project and he goes this way and another guy goes this way and then you don't get the continuity. I think we got a lot of continuity and it wasn't just my goals because we had a lot of communications before my year with the people that looked as though they'd be advanced, you know, what can we do as a team.

R.K.

I guess the next one, what is meant by, what is ASHRAE meant to the growth of our industry?

J.W.

It's meant a great deal. When you travel worldwide as president of ASHRAE, you come to realize that there's no organization in the world that has the respect that I ASHRAE has or that people look to for information as they do for ASHRAE. Whether it is how to design some component of an HVAC system, whether it's the research we're doing, whether it's the technical information that's available, whether it's the training that is available or the opportunity to participate in an organization where you can grow as a person in your abilities whether it's making presentations or dealing with other people. So ASHRAE has had huge impact on the industry and very, very critically important to the HVAC industry because it's the only organization that's a non commercial organization where you can go get consensus reviewed information, get honest information, meet your peers and have good technical open discussions with them without the competitive worry and keep yourself completely up to date technically on what's happening in the industry. And there's been some major milestones of success within ASHRAE. I

remember very well when the National Bureau of Standards or the Department of Commerce was developing a new energy standard. I'm sure you remember it well also. And the government was going to write and they had drafted a standard that was totally unrealistic. And they were writing standards on how you design a building.
(remainder of interview is missing)