

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)
Transcription

Interview of: Ronald Vallort

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Interviewed by: Dick Worth

Dick Worth

Good morning. I'm Dick Worth. I'm a member of the historical committee. Also I'm the region 12 historian and I'm here today to conduct a leadership recall interview of Ron Vallort. Ron is the 2004-2005 ASHRAE past president. Ron is also been very active in the Chicago land area of ASHRAE. Also Ron was with us for seven years down in Jacksonville, Florida. Let's go back in the history, just tell us about where you were born, where you went to school, how you decided to become an engineer.

Ronald Vallort

Okay. I was born in Chicago. In what they call the Pullman area. It was discovered by George M. Pullman who was the originator of the Pullman cars. I still chuckle a little bit because I call myself Southside Italian. My neighborhood was all northern Italian. I went to Catholic grade school and high school. I was lucky enough that my high school was a college prep school and I had a desire for math and science which sort of led me to engineering. I then went on to the University of Illinois where I received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in mechanical engineering and it was there where I had my first exposure to ASHRAE. My professor for air conditioning, a course I was taking there, held up a book and he said you can purchase this book at the bookstore for \$85 or you can become an ASHRAE student member and they'll give you the book as part of your membership.

D.W.

That's great.

R.V.

So I did an analysis right away and I says I think I'll become an ASHRAE student member.

D.W.

Outstanding. I wish we had more universities across the country that felt the same way. Too many people, I guess, promote ASME, it's good to see at least some of the universities promoting ASHRAE early on in your career. Now you mentioned you had an interest in math and science and that's one of my common ground. Did you really know any engineers or have any idea what you wanted to do when you made the decision to go to the University of Illinois?

R.V.

I wanted to see things being designed, being built, solve problems. That's really what took me to mechanical engineering as opposed to some of the other types of engineering. Some of the other types you don't see that, you can't see the amps running along in a wire or something like that.

D.W.

Well I think it's just the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. And that's really one of my big things too in this industry that we're in. It's a great industry. After graduating from University of Illinois where did you go?

R.V.

Well my first exposure to HVAC&R was really as a grad student at the University of Illinois. I worked doing testing for what they called the water table then. The water table was a way to simulate different types of air diffusers and the patterns of the air, whether it be a round ceiling type diffuser, a square ceiling diffuser, a high side wall, a low side wall, a floor diffuser. But then I went to work for Swift and Company which at the time was a major meat packer. But they worked on all types of projects. Projects I worked on there went from laboratories to office buildings to then meat and poultry kill floors. But I was blessed there. And sometimes you have to be lucky and I was blessed with my manager of the mechanical design department being very knowledgeable in air conditioning and he had two assistant managers, one very knowledgeable and refrigeration and the other very knowledgeable in boilers. And they knew not only the theoretical but also the applications. So I tried to be a sponge and soak it all up.

D.W.

Everyone needs a mentor. All of these guys ASHRAE members?

R.V.

Yes they were.

D.W.

And I think that's outstanding. I think that's the key to development of young engineers and also to ASHRAE.

R.V.

Also the president of the group was an ASHRAE member. And he was active in the local chapter. And he invited me to a meeting. He then went on to become an officer going through the chairs at the chapter and he kept on encouraging me to attend the meetings. And I've tried to do that all the way along the line with my employees. Are you going to the meeting? Let me tell you what it's going to be about.

D.W.

Right, we're doing a lot of that right now ourselves. It's certainly a way to get a lot of activity in the local chapter. And then it leads from local chapters into the region, region into society. So it's a great breeding ground. Ron we've talked a little bit about your early history but we haven't talked yet about your family. Tell me about your family. I know Carolyn and I've met at least one of your sons. Tell me about them.

R.V.

Well I have two boys, Joe and Jim. Joe is a lawyer but he's also an ASHRAE member in fact he's presenting a paper in Chicago at the ASHRAE winter meeting. And Jim is a mechanical engineer. Deals mostly in commissioning now. He has been a DRC on the ASHRAE board for Region 6, and now he's a director at large on the board and now Jim's wife is also an ASHRAE member. So I kid people I say, we have four ASHRAE members.

D.W.

It's a family affair.

R.V.

And I'm blessed with five grandchildren. And of course I just said my wife Carolyn.

D.W.

Ron, we talked about some of the key influences, your professor back in the University of Illinois and the three gentlemen at Swift and Company. Why don't you mention them by name and tell me a little bit more about how they influenced you.

R.V.

Oh I'd be pleased to. Now at the University of Illinois there were many people that influenced me. But the one that comes to mind first would be Professor Will Stoecker. Will taught a course for me in air conditioning, heating and air conditioning. He taught a course in refrigeration that I attended and I've made sure that I've had contact with Will through the years after that. He's been a wonderful mentor.

D.W.

He's also a distinguished lecturer who happened to be in Jacksonville just this month for our program.

R.V.

Oh great.

D.W.

I had to be in Tallahassee and missed it unfortunately but I have served on the refrigeration committee with him.

R.V.

Well he and I have been on many committees together and I like to think that maybe I reinforce him a little bit but definitely he's had a very positive effect on me. The three people that were my supervisors when I started at Swift and Company in the mechanical engineering department were Ed Emerson. He was the air conditioning person that I spoke about. Ed Holland, who was the refrigeration person. And Joe Campione, the boiler person. But then also through the years all of the people that I have met in ASHRAE that I have not worked with have had some sort of an effect on me through the years, all positive definitely.

D.W.

I know that since I've known you your specialty seems to be refrigeration in the food industry. And I know that you've been on a lot of technical committees regarding refrigeration. Is that true.

R.V.

Well, I've done refrigeration and air conditioning and like I said earlier boilers. There's not many people who still work on boilers and can design a boiler system. But I have gravitated more to the refrigeration industry. The refrigeration design and then the refrigerated building design. And there, we're really talking about vapor flow.

D.W.

When did you first become involved in your local chapter as a committee member, or as an officer? Can you go back that far for me?

R.V.

Probably in about 1966 very early after graduation if I remember right because the other thing then that was suggested of me was to join a technical committee. And way laid back then I think it was TC 11.1 on meat products. And there again I just tried to learn from people because it was made up also of the chief engineers of the other major meat processing companies. And I was the young kid that was trying to glean from them.

D.W.

Well that's great. And then did you evolve into regional activities or did you just stay in more society based activities?

R.V.

Well I've always been active at the chapter level. But then I pretty much went to the society committees, the TCs, the standing committees. Maybe the first standing committee I was on was standards I believe. And then program, refrigeration. I've been around long enough I've probably been on just about most of the standing committees.

D.W.

And what led you to want to become president of ASHRAE? Was that something that you had a desire to do or did ASHRAE actually call you or how did that developed?

R.V.

ASHRAE actually called me. I didn't have a goal for that early on at all. It was just a matter of doing more and more in the ASHRAE sort of chain of events. I think ASHRAE is a great place to network to learn more about the industry. A day doesn't go by where I don't learn something and I've always said whatever the problem was I know who I could call in ASHRAE to get an answer. To me ASHRAE is the members.

D.W.

I agree with you. Did you have a specific set of goals when you became president? Things that you wanted to try to get done?

R.V.

I had a whole series of goals that I wanted to try and get done but first of all I was privileged that my presidential year was the hundred year anniversary of ASRE, which was one of the two predecessor organizations that formed ASHRAE. So that was just a wonderful lead in. I'd been concerned for a while about the cold chain. So many people died because they, from starvation, malnutrition. That's really the number one cause of death around the world. Followed by then the fact that people can't get vaccines because they're not refrigerated and the vaccines spoil. And it's all the cold chain for food, for vaccines. So that was one of my goals, that tied in to the refrigeration end. I saw many, many ASHRAE members and non North American countries and they weren't a member of a chapter. There was not a chapter for them to join. So that was another thing. If the members wanted to form a chapter then I did my best to help them because really the non North American areas are different than the US and that there's a lot of students in HVAC&R and a lot of enthusiasm among the students, among the professors, among the practitioners. And that I think can enhance our ASHRAE organization. It can sort of give us new blood, new energy. So that was one of the goals. E-learning was another goal. It's something we hadn't tapped yet in ASHRAE and it's a lot easier if you could learn while sitting at your desk whether it be at home or at work instead of having to travel to another location. The expense in travelling, the loss of billable hours, all things that are important nowadays. I wanted us to have ASHRAE do things at the speed of business. The way we do things at our work. We always say that one of the strengths of ASHRAE is its checks and balances. One of the weaknesses of ASHRAE is its checks and balances. So we needed to find a way to say, well it isn't just that we'll discuss that six months later at our next meeting. How can we do it quicker to keep that energy that's developed some time in some of our activities. And just to improve the quality of life around the world. If we could do that then I

think we can accomplish a lot. Energy, I call it energy reduction, with global warming, with the ozone depletion potential, and global warming potential, I think the best way to solve that or to make a dent in it is with energy reduction. So much more global warming effects from not just the leakage of our refrigerant but really the energy used in developing our refrigeration, our air conditioning. So energy reduction is one of them. That's probably most of what my goals were. Was to try and have people enjoy ASHRAE as I enjoy it, to have some fun.

D.W.

That's certainly an admirable goal. That's one of the reasons I'm still here. I enjoy it a lot and I think from what I've seen that you've been successful at some of your goals. Certainly the e-learning I think has come a long way. I've been involved in that as part of the Professional Development Committee also. You want to speak to how you felt like your goals were reached.

R.V.

I thought that they all are better off now than they were. I said before I became president but it's really because other people jumped on the bandwagon and we all work together to achieve those. That again is the networking. When I would talk to new chapters that were being formed I said it's great that you can have technical presentations once a month now. But what you're going to enjoy more and what you're going to learn more from is the networking with the other ASHRAE members. I was at one chartering where then they had the dinner after that and I mentioned to the chapter president, I said, look around the room now. There you have fifteen tables filled with ASHRAE members and they're all talking among each other, they're all discussing problems and solutions. I says now you have an ASHRAE chapter.

D.W.

And the good thing about that, it's not only people of the same firm but peoples of competing firms and different industries a just a great melting pot.

R.V.

And they're willing to share with each other. And I've seen that with different countries. I was at a CRC where the ASHRAE members from India where they're working with the ASHRAE members from Pakistan.

D.W.

That's amazing.

R.V.

And I commented to them. I praised them at the end of the CRC. I said, I know politically you have your differences but I'm very pleased that the technology has taken over here and you're working together. Thank you very much and I applauded them.

D.W.

That's great. And I know Ron that you've been active with other organizations as a leader of ASHRAE. Tell me about some of the interactions and how they've led to ASHRAE being stronger and maybe the other organizations being stronger also.

R.V.

First of all, ASHRAE I think it is a great organization also for its publications, its Handbooks are the crown jewels, its standards, its guidelines but we don't need to start from scratch on everything other organizations are also working out there. And we can build on what they've done. We can work

together with them. So I think it's very important that we maintain contact with these other organizations. We see where they're at with things and we see where we can enhance them. So we don't go reinventing the wheel.

D.W.

If you have anything to do over again throughout your career would you change very much at all Ron?

R.V.

Probably not unless it was to maybe be a little more daring. But I guess that's not my style.

D.W.

Are there any things that you would like to mention that we haven't covered in the interview today?

R.V.

Well just that I was very pleased and felt privileged to be the ASHRAE president for one year. And that I have met a lot of wonderful people, a lot of people that have so much to share with each other, with ASHRAE and just to be a part of that gave me a lot of satisfaction. I thank ASHRAE very much. And I continue to want to do things for ASHRAE to really improve the quality of life and then the other thing to me is ASHRAE and its members. That's the prime thing. Thank you.

D.W.

Thank you Ron.