

ASHRAE Leadership Recall (formerly Leadership Recalled)  
Transcription

Interview of: David S. Butler Sr.

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Interviewed by: Charles Henck

Charles Henck

Hello, my name is Charlie Henck with the Historical Committee. Today we are going to be conducting a leadership recall with David S. Butler, presidential member of society who was the president in 1989-1990. Welcome David.

David Butler

Thank you.

C.H.

We would like to start off if you would give us a little background on yourself, your engineering history.

D.B.

Okay, I'm from Jackson Mississippi. I've moved there in 1967 from Meridian Mississippi. And I was employed at that point in time by a consulting engineering firm. I had received my education in engineering at Mississippi State University graduating in 1965. And moved to Jackson, as I said and worked for consulting firm for a couple years and then I worked for utility company, Mississippi Valley Gas Company for a couple of years in the marketing department. Then I opened up my own practice, engineering practice in 1972. And I've had that practice since 1972 and currently partners with another fine ASHRAE member, George Jackins who heads up our Birmingham office and I have the Jackson office responsibilities. So consulting has been, has been the career I've been in for so many years.

C.H.

How did you get involved in ASHRAE then?

D.B.

Well it was quite neat . I was going through the chairs as we do in the chapter and it became my year to be vice president and I was told when I became vice president one of the duties that I had to perform was to attend a CRC in St. Louis and my first question was well what is a CRC. And the guy that was president at that time who was going to be on the delegate said I didn't know what CRC stands for. But later found out it was the Chapters Regional Conference. So this is like 1977 and went to St Louis and met Hugh McMillan and some other society leaders who were at that meeting and the second day I went to an education workshop, education activities workshop and I always had an interest in the educational process and reaching out to students to actually interest them and hopefully encourage them to becoming involved in our industry. But I really got excited about what ASHRAE was doing in other chapters and what it could do and what it could mean for our chapters and for our members and the guy who conducted that workshop by the way was George Jackins , and George and I became fast friends and I really enjoyed working in the chapter and then went ahead and served as chapter

president the following year and I was elected by our region to serve them as regional vice chairman for education following George Jackins. So served three years as regional vice chairman for education and I was elected as Region 7 Director and our chairman rather and a director and I served those three years and thoroughly enjoyed it. And I was indeed fortunate enough to be asked to continue and serve as a director at large which I did for two years. Then I was elected as the society vice president and did that, served that office for two years as we did at that time. I was not, as I said earlier, was not able to serve a term as treasurer due to the untimely death of Tom Brown. And some shuffling that had to take place to keep the continuity within the executive committee that the nominating committee had to do and but I did serve two years as vice president, than a year President elect and then 89 and 90 was a Society president

C.H.

What was your theme for the year you were Society president?

D.B.

Well I've always felt like the strongest thing, the strongest resource that we have in ASHRAE are the people in ASHRAE, the members of ASHRAE. I'm convinced that the people who are involved in chapter activities, regional activities, and society activities are people who are committed not only to their own profession and their own livelihood but they are committed to society and to humanity and I think that we have the cream of the crop in ASHRAE in that regard. I wanted to during my year as president to focus on the volunteer member of ASHRAE and what they have contributed over the years to our industry, and of course ultimately to the people who enjoy our technology. So I chose as my theme that year "volunteers advancing environmental technology". And we did some things that would, through the presidential award of excellent program to focus on the things that the members and the member volunteers do that year .

C.H.

I agree with you. I found that I can get more out of ASHRAE then whatever I put into it. It's a really good organization. What was happening in the world let's say leading up to your term as president and then since that time?

D.B.

It was kind of fun. I actually had to go back to the year book Encyclopedia to pick that up and try to remember some of the things but just to hit a few of them that was the year that Ayatolla Kohemni died. That was the year that the Chinese troops opened fired on the pro-democracy demonstrators who were in Tiananmen Square. Tom Foley was elected speaker of the house. The B-12 bomber, the Stealth bomber made its maiden flight. Hungary opened its borders with Austria. Colin Powel was nominated by President Bush as chairman of, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and was the first black to hold that post. East Germany opened the Berlin wall and the rest of its borders. So that was certainly something that we were all pleased and remember very much. Rajiv Gandhi resigned as prime minister of India. Manuel Noriega surrendered to the U.S. troops. South African government held its first formal talks with what was then the outlawed ANC. Boris Yeltsin was elected president of the Russian Soviet Federation Socialist Republic. Nolan Ryan of the Texas Rangers pitched his sixth career no-hitter which was a major league record. So a lot of things going on at that time that really I think as far as really significant events would have to be what was taking place in Europe at that time. During that year we were fortunate enough to go to Sarajevo for a conference that was sponsored by, or co-sponsored by

ASHRAE, Clima 2000. We went to Sarajevo, and then to Zagreb and then Dubrovnik. And as a matter of fact I was the last ASHRAE president to go to Yugoslavia because of course it no longer exists.

C.H.

And that was for one of the Clima 2000 meetings

D.B.

And then we met with, in Zagreb with ? which is a sister society in Europe. And then we went to Dubrovnik to a heat transfer conference and of course that was as you saw a really, really a diverse cross section of the country.

C.H.

During your term of office volunteerism was your theme. What other items were happening during your term in the way of technical activities position statements or things along those lines.

D.B.

Well of course the industry challenges at that time, the hot buttons if you want to call them that were the CFC issue and the ozone depletion. Global warming was beginning to emerge as a as a real concern and of course energy conservation was an ongoing concern even though governmental programs had somewhat deemphasized that not as an overt action but as a simple resolve for them reducing their funding. But still those issues remain paramount in our industry and as a matter of fact still do today even though we've gone a long way to addressing some of those. But ASHRAE during that year finally issued Standard 62, which is indoor air quality standard. We issued Standard 90.1, which is our energy conservation standard and then we issued two guidelines, one of them had to do with building commissioning. This is the first time, by the way, that we had issued guidelines. Building commissioning and the other one had to do with CFCs and alternative classifications or classifications of alternative CFCs. So those were some significant things that happened that ASHRAE accomplished rather during that year.

C.H.

The guidelines are still being developed and issued. I think we're up to four or five at this point in society.

D.B.

I'm not sure exactly where we stand but the guidelines are still current and they are being updated on a regular basis as are our standards of course.

C.H.

Now when you finished your term as president, what have you been doing with society since that time?

D.B.

Well you know you don't drop off a cliff as a lot of people say. I remained very active as most past presidents do. Automatically you go into two committees one being nominating and one being long range planning. You spend a year as vice chairman of nominating committee and a year as chairman. Then you spend a year as a member and then a year as vice chairman and another year as chairman of long range planning committee. At this meeting I conclude my tenure as a long range planning committee. Also I was appointed to the Centennial committee which I will be on until it is dismissed as an ad hoc committee that will continue through the celebration. And then I chaired the building ad hoc committee renovated the building we bought in Atlanta for our headquarters some several years ago and we renovated it and brought it up to 90.1 standards and standards 62 requirements so we have an

energy efficient building to set an example and so that we can say don't do like we say to but do as we do, you know. It was a real challenge and kind of fun committee to work on and I have continued to be active, in fact I'm serving on the indoor air quality conference in, which will be in Philadelphia this fall. And I chaired the Far East conference in Hong Kong in 1992, I'm sorry 1991. And I continue to be active in my local chapter. I just finished a year as program chairman and I also was seminar chairman for a couple of seminars that we had on indoor air quality and CFC's all this past year.

C.H.

It's good to see you still involved in the chapter because a lot of times you might know a person that 's been through society and not be involved in the chapter anymore. That's really great, you doing that. At the chapter level, how would you, what kind of advice would you give to a young person, a new college graduate engineer often starting out in consulting engineering field to get them involved in ASHRAE. It's hard today to get people involved.

D.B.

And that's true and not only in ASHRAE but in so many organizations. Volunteerism has had problems getting people. Volunteerism is not the right word but volunteer organizations have been experiencing difficulties as a matter of fact, getting people to volunteer. There's so much pressure on people in terms of their time that they have available and things that they can, they can participate in. But I tell the people in our office when they come in to work with us and I tell students when I speak at Mississippi State or any other university or high school or whatever, that in order to benefit the most in and I mean that not financially so much as I mean just overall in your overall career. The best way to do that is to put something back into your industry, to give something back. You know, we all have grown on this wealth of information and work that our, the people before us shared with us through their volunteer efforts. And I think that we should feel fully grown but we have to put something back too. So I always encouraged them to participate and I always tell them that no matter what they put in to it, they'll always receive more from it. And I think that most of them, at least in our office they do enjoy participating and we encourage them and give them the time to participate too. And I think that's important and that's a lot of young people's problems today that their employers sometimes don't give them the time and don't encourage them to participate.

C.H.

I think that really sums up quite well as to how you get somebody involved in ASHRAE, is get the employer to encourage it and to help then support that. During your term as the director at large and as a director, I'm sure you were involved in many councils with ASHRAE. Can you tell us a little bit about your involvement in those councils?

D.B.

Yes, of course, as I was talking earlier I served on, as a director and regional chairman. You know during that time, you actually wear two hats. You are a member of Regions Council and you bring the concerns and needs of the regions to that council and then of course as an arm of the board, it can act on certain things or whatever. But you sit on the board and you tend to put on a different hat and you look at things from a different perspective and I think that's good and I think it's unique within ASHRAE that we are able to do that. When we are sitting around Regions Council table then we are really looking after our region. But when we get to the board we are looking after the society in the overall picture and that's quite a unique experience if you've never had that. But as, I served on some ad hoc committees

during that time, I think that, in fact I remember that ASHRAE really didn't do any fiscal planning as we do now but the process began while I was on Regions Council and Rick Perry appointed me fiscal chairman, fiscal planning subcommittee chairman for our Regions Council and my first question was, "what do we do?" And of course what we did at the beginning was we went to a finance workshop that was conducted by Walt Glassner and the society treasurer at that time. That began really the budgeting process that all the committees and councils go through now which has become very sophisticated. It's really been quite an evolutionary process and I learned a lot about fiscal planning and fiscal responsibility I can assure you of that and then I moved on to when I became director at large, then I was of course there again representing the entire society and acted as liaison and contacts between the board and certain communities and certain councils. And then the years I served as vice president. One year I chaired Member Council, that was the time when the Member Council was going through a transitional period from what it used to be to what it is today in terms of the committees that it reported to and the activities that came under that particular council. Then I also chaired Technology Council and when you become president elect and you automatically chair Regions Council. So not only did I have the opportunity to serve on Regions Council as a regional chairman I also had the opportunity to serve as a vice chairman and a chairman as a matter of fact. So those were really neat experiences and serving on Technology Council as chair, it was something that was totally different for me because you know, ASHRAE is, you kind of go if you are president you tend to go from one direction or the other, one direction being through the chapter and regional activities and the standing committees and that side of the society as opposed to the TCs and the technical activities of the society, both can lead to serving on the board or serving as an ASHRAE officer. I came through the chapter through the regional activities and the standing committees, having served on the Education Committee when I was regional vice chairman for education but I did have a great experience on Technology Council and really enjoyed that and really learned a lot about what the ASHRAE volunteers do in that regard and it's amazing the amount of work that is done by the technical committees, the TCs as we call them, is just absolutely mind boggling, the hours that these people put in and these guys come in and women, they come in, they might get here tonight on a red eye flight and then be here all day tomorrow, up until midnight tomorrow night and then they'll be gone. And we don't get to see those people as much as we really need to. We don't get to express our appreciation for what they do and that was one of the things that I wanted to do the year that I was president in focusing on the contributions that all the volunteers do make. But that was a very enjoyable experience. The other thing that I really enjoyed about being an ASHRAE officer was going to the regional conferences. You know it's the greatest thing to find, no matter where you are, in Canada or if you're in California, if you're in Florida, New York, there's a common thread that runs through all the chapters and all the regions and that is that we are all involved in the same type of an industry, the heating, refrigeration, and air conditioning industry. We're involved in that but the other thread is that you find out that people had a lot of the same values that you have, they have a lot of the same interests as you have. And so when you get to go it's just like being friends that you've known for a long time. And we were fortunate enough to return, make return visits to some of the regions during our years of vice president and then president elect and president. And I just, I know that we made all of the regions at least once and some of them twice. And it was really nice to go back and see friends and I see some of those same people at society meetings Sharon and I both have enjoyed it over the years. And by the way I did mention Sharon. It's amazing that over the years what

the spouses of ASHRAE leaders provide in terms of support and because it is a very time consuming job, very demanding in terms of your personal time and your business time. And simply stated none of us could have done that and made that type of a commitment if we had not had the backing of our spouses and certainly Sharon was there when I needed her many times. You know when you're flying across Afghanistan, 45,000 feet in the air and you look out the window and you don't see anything down there and you think, God what am I doing here. If you've been out of the country for three weeks, you know. But she was with me and she enjoyed it too and it was quite an experience for her but the support that she gave me and all of the spouses give the leaders is just something that we really need to recognize and I think we have made that effort. During that year we were fortunate enough to travel abroad quite a bit and we were, began the year by going to Kuala Lumpur for the Far East conference that was held that year and we went from there to Taipei, Taiwan and charted a new chapter, the Taipei chapter or the Taiwan chapter. And then from there we went to Hong Kong and met with the group that was planning the 1991 Far East conference and had a delightful experience there. Throughout all of this, anywhere you go, you're representing ASHRAE. It never ceases to amaze me the respect that everybody has for the organization and fortunately the way that they show that respect is by the way they treat existing ? like myself or whoever and nothing is too good. I mean really I, sometimes I was, we were treated so nicely and it was quite embarrassing you know but we have real fond memories of people that we communicate with and write and send Christmas cards to and this type of thing. But we also, as I said earlier, we went to Sarajevo, we went to Yugoslavia and we went Australia to attend the conference down there and then one of the most unique trips that we made was to South Africa to a co-sponsor conference by ASHRAE. The conference was great but the thing that I remember the most was the three days that we spent in Kruger National Park on camera safari with a lot of the local members from the great land in South Africa. That's not the whole story but I won't go into that, phenomenal just to be there. I think that you know we went to Hawaii like maybe three times this year and we were in Canada and I don't think that I've missed a country. As I said throughout all of that, the common response that we got was one of great respect and followed the organization of ASHRAE and what it does and what it has accomplished and you know it really was significant to me, I think because we take ASHRAE so for granted, I always have and the information is right at our fingertips. You know we get our journal in a timely fashion, we get our hand books and if we have questions we have people we can call and they can do a little research for us in society or whatever. But the people around the world are not that fortunate and I think that they appreciate ASHRAE much more than we do. We could take some lessons from no doubt. The other thing that was kind of neat that year, ASHRAE was the lead sponsoring organization for National Engineers Week. And that year we introduced DiscoverE Program. And I served as chairman since I was ASHRAE president and the co-chairman for that year was Stephen Bechtel with the Bechtel Group. And it was really an experience meeting him and traveling with him and we, during that National Engineers Week celebration we met with President Bush in the Oval Office and we gave him a proclamation and he was very nice to listen to some of the concerns that we had and I was fortunate enough to do what we call teach in in Kenton High School which is near Jackson, Mississippi and I did one at school in Atlanta, one in a Washington D.C. school, Rochester, New York, Lincoln, Nebraska. All during that week and it was a hectic week of traveling and what have you. But it was real exciting and it really gave me an appreciation for what engineers do and what contributions ASHRAE has made to the overall quality of life.

C.H.

Sounds like you really had an exciting time during your term as president, the travel and the people you got to meet and all the events you attended, sounded great, sounded real interesting. Tell me a little bit about anybody that had some influence on your life, getting you involved, with say engineering. How did you decide to become an engineer?

D.B.

Well I started my career in engineering because I was tired of delivering newspapers. It's a true story. It just so happened that on my newspaper route there lived an architect and an engineer. And they also had their offices on my newspaper route and you know I'd been cutting their grass and delivering their newspaper for years you know and I was kind of a cocky kid, you know, and I walked into the engineers office one day to give him his paper so I wouldn't have to climb the hill to his house. And he called me back into the drafting room you know and I wanted to look around a little bit. They had some guy they had just started off working, you know at this point in time I'm like fifteen years old. No I was younger, fourteen. I didn't even have a driver's license, I was fourteen years old. I looked at what the guy had done and I said I could do that. And he said, well whenever you get tired of delivering newspapers, says " we'll let you do this". And it took me about oh, 2 hours, by the time I got home I decided I wanted to change careers. So I quit. Went to work for this guy for six months. All I did was sweep the floors, take out the trash, you know, run the errands, make the coffee. And then when I wasn't doing that they had me lettering. I'd never had any drafting courses. They had been learning how to letter, you know we don't even do that now a days, everything is CAD. But I literally learned through that process you know and it was really neat that they were able to provide an opportunity to have that kind of impact on my life and I decided I really like what these people were doing. And back in those days we didn't do a lot of air-conditioning and the way we did the heating and ventilating was very un-sophisticated but yet we always had the ASHRAE handbook on the desk when we were doing load calculations or anything else. And I'll never forget the advice that my first employer gave me was that, he brought me the ASHRAE handbook he says if you to do what the ASHRAE handbook tells you to do, you'll never have any problems. And if you do have problems, then you always got a resource that you can say well I did it according to the experts. So that started me thinking, you know well it wasn't ASHRAE back then it was ASHVE, I said well those guys, they must be really sharp you know. I went on through high school working for the same group and then I went to Ashton, went to two years at a community college in my hometown of Meridian and then went to Mississippi State. When I went to state I worked for a consulting engineer George Ramsey. George had moved to Starkville from Memphis where he worked for a number of years and I remember every month George would get in his car and drive 120 miles each way to Jackson, Mississippi to go to the ASHRAE chapter meeting. Today it's only like a two hour and 10 minute drive, back in those days because of the roads and what have you, it was a good three hour drive each way. And I really couldn't understand why anybody would do that. But he felt like he relied so much on that participation and he learned so much from it that he made that commitment. And he always went to the ASHRAE annual and winter meetings. And I just saw that commitment he had and really George, he served as a chapter officer in Memphis when he was up there and that sort of thing. He never got involved in society except coming to the meetings and going to the sessions and that type of thing. But he really had an impact on my life because anybody would do what he did to make those meetings, it really had to be something good. So unfortunately when I graduated from

school I was in Meridian and I did not have a chapter that I could attend but when I made it to Jackson, you know I was encouraged to join, did join in 1968 and have been going to meetings and active ever since.

C.H.

And the rest is history right?

D.B.

Right, the rest is history.

C.H.

That's good. Would you like to have a closing remark or summarize things or recommendations you have for people. Sort of floor is yours, whatever you'd like to say.

D.B.

Well, I still believe, that as I did when I was turning over in my mind, what did I want to focus on during 89', 90', I am still convinced that the human resources that we have within ASHRAE are the best in the world and the most important resource that we have and I think that we need to do things that make participation in the society activities more accessible for more people. I think also and I firmly believe that we are in an era that we need to consider, I think the buzz word is diversity. We need to make sure that every person, no matter what their race or gender is, has the opportunity to serve and to participate in ASHRAE. The most overriding thing that I hope continues is that people will realize what they gain from giving something to ASHRAE not because you have to and I hope that that will continue that volunteer spirit that we have in ASHRAE will continue. And you know, it's kind of, it's kind of ironic. I also believe that the people who really do the work, you never hear about them. Their stories are not told, their songs are not sung. But they are the people in the trenches. They've built our technology over the years, you know kind of like the ? . And I just wish that there was some way we could recognize each every person throughout ASHRAE and throughout history that have made these significant contributions

C.H.

Thank you, Dave Butler. I appreciate you sharing with us your recall and leadership in ASHRAE. Thank you very much.

D.B.

Thank you.