

# Quality: Our Ongoing Challenge

*The text of the inaugural address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers Inc., in Indianapolis, Indiana*

Fellow ASHRAE members. I am deeply honored to have been chosen as your President, and excited at the opportunity to serve this great Society. I am mindful of the fact that I am following in the footsteps of past presidents of impressive stature, men who have served ASHRAE and our industry with great distinction. It is through their efforts, and through the support of thousands of dedicated members, that ASHRAE has risen to its present pre-eminent position.

I believe that ASHRAE is the world's leading technical society. Some may say that's an overstatement, but let's look at the facts.

First are our Handbooks. The ASHRAE Handbooks are recognized throughout the world as being the premier reference source on the arts and sciences of heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration—and they are free to every member. Not just to new members, but to every member—year after year.

Second are our standards. Many organizations write standards, but few have the impact that ASHRAE's do in terms of their effect on the quality of people's lives.

Third is our research program. Our research budget this year is over \$2 million. How many other organizations do you know that conduct a research program of this size—all based on voluntary contributions?

But finally—and I think this is most important of all—is involvement.

I recently attended a workshop for officers of technical societies. One of the sessions covered ways of increasing membership participation. I left the conference convinced that none of the organizations who attended—and this included some of the largest and best known societies—come close to ASHRAE in membership participation and contribution.

Being a mature leader is a wonderful position to be in. But it is also dangerous because it can nurture complacency and an acceptance of the status quo.

Acceptance of the status quo was certainly not in the minds of our past leaders. Willis Carrier, father of air conditioning and

president of ASRE in 1927 and ASHVE in 1931, offered the following challenge to his associates, "We must continuously obsolete our greatest triumphs."

Harry Truman—when questioned about his administration's programs—said, "We'll just try them and if they don't work, why then we'll just try something else. Reality isn't static, it's *dynamic*. If we don't like it, we'll get something *better*."

With the celebration of our Centennial only a few years away, these messages from the past offer invaluable guidance for the future. If ASHRAE expects to be the world's leading technical society 100 years from now, we must remain dynamic. We must continually search for improvement. We must focus on quality in everything we do. "Quality: Our Ongoing Challenge" is the theme I have selected for this ASHRAE year.

The opportunities for improvement are limitless. I shall suggest just a few.

Program is a core activity for ASHRAE. Program is what attracts the average member to attend a chapter meeting, a CRC or a Society meeting. If the content is good, the member will attend. If the quality is good, the member will return.

Like it or not, ASHRAE is in serious competition for its members' time. Many of our members, maybe even most today, have working spouses. This makes their time outside work more precious. Before giving up this time to attend a meeting, they must be convinced that attending will be worthwhile—in short, they must be convinced that their time at the meeting will be quality time. And quality time translates into quality programs.

The challenge, therefore, is to continually improve our programs. But to do this we must find ways of measuring program quality so that we know if we are making progress. How do we do this? It is really quite simple; we just need to ask our members what they think. But we must not just do this once or twice, we must do it continuously because customer satisfaction is a moving target. As quality improves, expectations increase. What was considered quality yesterday may not be quality today, and surely will not be quality tomorrow.



In support of my theme, I've added Chapter Programs as a new category in the Presidential Award of Excellence. I've done this because I believe that in the long run, chapters that continually improve the quality of their programs will prosper, and as the chapters prosper, so does the Society.

Publications is the second area deserving attention. While program can be thought of as ASHRAE's principal service, publications are its principal product. Publications are ASHRAE's deliverables to the global technical community.

Just as a manufacturer must continually improve his products if he is to stay competitive in a global economy, so ASHRAE must continually improve its publications if it is to remain as a leader in the global technical community. To the technical community, ASHRAE is what ASHRAE publishes.

It is for this reason that I was alarmed when I heard recently that some researchers feel that ASHRAE publications lack visibility in the research community. It's been proposed that this issue be dealt with by creating a new publication devoted exclusively to research. I support this proposal. In fact, I support the concept of making this an international journal.

Such a journal would maintain ASHRAE in the forefront of international research. Being published in ASHRAE would carry with it the prestige of being published with the world's leaders in HVAC&R technology.

International involvement is the third area that needs our priority attention.

This issue has an outward goal and an inward goal, both of which complement one another. The outward goal is to strengthen ASHRAE's role as an international leader in HVAC technology. The inward goal is to bring more of our international members into the mainstream of Society activities.

For many years ASHRAE has had formal relationships with other technical societies of kindred interests. Called International Associates, they exist in every industrialized section of the world, and at last count numbered 31 organizations.

But are we really taking full advantage of the opportunities that these relationships provide?

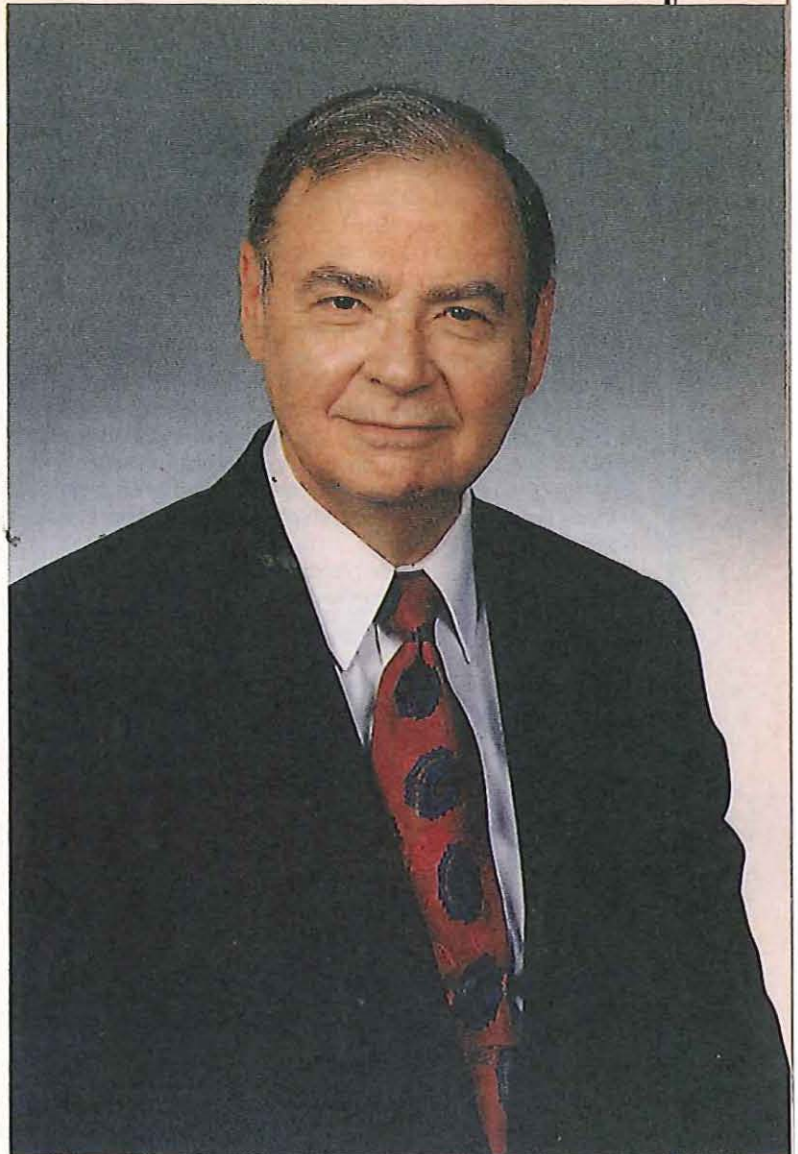
I believe we must strengthen our ties with our International Associates, searching out ways in which we can work together toward common goals. The opportunities are many. Among them are cosponsorship of research, reciprocal review of publications, cosponsorship of seminars and issuance of joint position statements on global issues.

We must also bring more of our international members into the mainstream of Society activities. ASHRAE has some 5,000 members from 107 countries outside the United States and Canada. We know that many of these members are not only willing and able to work for ASHRAE—they are anxious to do so.

We must find ways to take better advantage of this exceptional resource. We must provide them opportunities for contribution in critical areas such as international standards, technology transfer, education and research. We must also provide them more opportunity to participate in Society leadership roles.

The fourth area of opportunity lies in expanding our technology base. There are thousands of technical people who work in our industry who are not ASHRAE members, but who could benefit from membership. One of the reasons they don't join is because they believe, sometimes correctly, that ASHRAE is not concerned with and does not serve the technical areas of their interest.

There are many such technical areas. I will cite just one—manufacturing. Manufacturing plays a vital role in the HVAC&R industry, and everyone agrees that advances in manufacturing technology are needed if our industry is to remain competitive. President Bush, commenting on the Malcolm Baldrige National



ASHRAE President Donald G. Rich

Quality Award Program said, "The improvement of quality in products and the improvement of quality in service—these are national priorities as never before."

All engineers involved in product, process or systems design have a vital interest in topics that deal with manufacturing. But in my observation, it is rare that such topics are discussed at ASHRAE meetings.

The arts and sciences of heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration are many and varied. They clearly afford many opportunities to expand our technology base, and thereby, to increase our membership.

Research is a fifth opportunity area. ASHRAE's research program is exceptional in many respects. Its scope is broad; it addresses problems that are relevant to the industry; it is well planned and managed; its results are effectively communicated to our members and to the world technical community.

Can our research program be improved? Of course. I would suggest that there are opportunities for improvement by increas-

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## The Presidential Address, Continued from page 13

ing the ratio of high-risk to low-risk projects. By high-risk projects, I mean projects that have a low probability of producing results of immediate practical value, but if successful would have a significant impact on the future of the industry.

Both new and old technologies should be considered when searching for opportunities. New, emerging technologies should be critically surveyed with the view towards identifying those that are most likely to impact ASHRAE's interest. At the same time, old technologies should be reevaluated in the light of advances in related "enabling" technologies or changes in socio-economic conditions.

Clearly, developing and managing a program of high-risk projects presents special challenges. One must be open minded and optimistic, while at the same time being selective and critical.

My final challenge is to increase the scope and quality of ASHRAE's outreach activities. We must speak out on issues of public concern—issues such as indoor air quality, ozone depletion, energy conservation and global warming. Public awareness of these issues has never been higher, and their importance is indisputable.

Engineers have high public credibility. A recent poll revealed that engineers have the highest credibility of all professional groups—higher than doctors, higher than lawyers, higher even than clergymen!

The message here is clear. ASHRAE has a responsibility to speak on issues in which we have expertise. And if we speak, the public will listen. If we don't, others less qualified will speak for us.

In order to keep ASHRAE the dynamic organization it has been for nearly 100 years, we must continue to practice what Willis Carrier preached: "To obsolete our greatest triumphs."

Improvements in the areas of program, publishing, international involvement, research and public outreach only touch the surface of the task before us.

For after all, ASHRAE is an educational resource. This past year's president Damon Gowan clearly recognized this in his theme: "Professional Development through Participation".

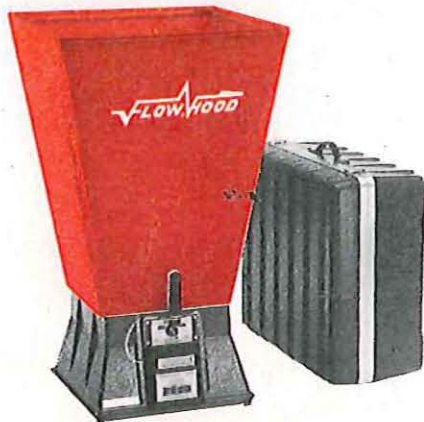
If we improve the educational products and services that we provide for our members, our members, in turn, will improve the quality of the products and services they provide to the public. And because our technology is critical to the well-being of humanity, improving the quality of what our industry provides will improve the quality of life world wide.

Your Society is now in the process of finalizing a Long-Range Plan, and is beginning work on a new Strategic Plan. These plans will establish a variety of objectives covering all aspects of Society operations. A common goal of each, however, will be quality improvement.

Quality will be our ongoing challenge.

I shall conclude my talk with a quote from Robert Persig's classic novel *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Discussing quality as a philosophical concept, Persig said, "A real understanding of quality captures the system, tames it, and puts it to work for one's own personal use, while leaving one completely free to fulfill his inner destiny." ■

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