

Education Is the Best Provision

In the January/February 2006 issue of *Plumbing Systems & Design* I reported on a noteworthy educational effort being put forth by ASPE's New Jersey Chapter under the leadership of Mitchell Weiss, PE. He was motivated by his own early experiences as a plumbing systems designer when he was fortunate to attend New York University School of Plumbing Design. This curriculum, staffed by some of the most prominent engineers in the area, made a lasting contribution to the industry as witnessed by the outstanding careers of so many who benefited from the shared professional knowledge of these instructors.

Mr. Weiss was one of those who did not forget. He felt it was important for him and the New Jersey Chapter to come up with a giveback. He felt that the value of this proposed course of instruction would be greatly enhanced if it was affiliated with an existing educational institution.

This was not easy! Most schools contacted were quite indifferent. Eventually Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC), after investigating ASPE and the local chapter's credentials, agreed to participate within its corporate and continuing education segment.

The curriculum is basic: water supply sizing, hot water heating sizing, pump sizing, and storm water pipe sizing. The material delves into the theory guiding what we do to allow students to understand the reasoning behind the calculations. The course, while the immediate offering was modest in scope, is encouraging. How far it will go depends on how much the design community takes advantage of it.

The course has no prerequisites and is attractive to a wide scope of industry participants: newcomers, full-fledged designers looking for a refresher, manufacturers sales representatives who could benefit from understanding how a complete system functions, contractors, and facilities personnel who wish to broaden their knowledge base. The class is held on five consecutive Thursdays for two hours. It is non-credit, but all students who finish the course receive a certificate of completion.

I had decided to check back at the end of the scheduled class periods to get a feeling for the response to the opportunity itself, as well as the makeup of the original student class, the reaction of RVCC, and future plans. The class began with an enrollment consisting of three engineers with experience levels of eight months to five years, a member of RVCC's facilities engineering staff, an estimator from a mechanical contracting firm, and a newly hired salesman from a local rep firm. All six finished and will receive certificates of completion.

But the best is yet to come. In the next semester RVCC will again list the plumbing design course. It will run for five consecutive Thursdays, October 18–November 15. Serious consideration also is being given to an advanced design course. The day I called Mr. Weiss for a recap he told me that RVCC authorities also had called, stating their enthusiasm for the advanced course!

The New Jersey Chapter's Education Committee also is exploring the possibility of fire protection classes in the spring of 2007, once again with the college's participation. So what has hap-

pened? What will continue to happen? I believe that the appeal has hardly started.

The mechanical trades are anxiously selling the benefits of their industries to high school seniors. An educational opportunity like the RVCC program has to be of interest. Why shouldn't high school and college guidance counselors be aware of the opportunities for a career as a plumbing systems designer? One of the most frequent comments I hear visiting engineers around the country is the scarcity of plumbing designers and the complete absence of formal training programs for potential candidates. This story tells how one ASPE chapter is addressing this problem.

One of the greatest benefits I received from my affiliation with ASPE was the training about how complete plumbing systems function that was presented at chapter technical sessions. Wouldn't it have been great if there was an opportunity like the RVCC affiliation?

A favorite movie of many of us is *Field of Dreams*, the wonderful story of a baseball field that was constructed in the middle of an Iowa cornfield to attract deceased baseball stars. The movie gave us an expression that took its place in the most repeated category: "If you build it, they will come."

What the New Jersey Chapter has done underlines its universality. We certainly don't expect to see engineers, contractors, and sales reps walk out of New Jersey cornfields to assume a place in the industry, but potential is now in place. There is every reason to believe it will grow and improve.

It all began with one man's desire to present a payback for the opportunities that were given to him by concerned and sharing engineers. Congratulations to Mitchell Weiss and the New Jersey Chapter.

How about some other ASPE chapters? All of you have talented personnel in your areas who could present the design courses previously described. It is also fairly certain that there are community colleges in your areas with continuing education curriculums in place. They never considered plumbing design, for sure. But neither did RVCC until an ASPE member told them what the Society is all about.

We should share the educational experiences of chapters with each other. Over the last few months we have used this space to recap the efforts of Boston, Syracuse, and Philadelphia. Let's hear from the rest of you!

In the words of my sainted Uncle Herschel, "Don't measure yourself by what you have accomplished, but what you should have accomplished with your ability." **PSD**



PETER WARSHAW retired from Delta Faucet Co. as vice president of commercial sales. Currently he is associated with Delta as an industry consultant. He is a past president of the Plumbing Manufacturers Institute and served three terms as affiliate liaison to the ASPE Board of Directors. To comment on this article, or for more information, contact articles@psdmagazine.org.