

Reflections of Edward A. Schmitt

The two most significant events of my career occurred this year. The first was in March being named Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Georgia Gulf Corporation. The second was Dean Bourgoyne's call to deliver news of my selection to the LSU College of Engineering Hall of Distinction. For someone who thought he was not even college material to be recognized by his employer and university for professional achievement is the most humbling and rewarding experience in my chemical engineering career.

From childhood I knew that I would work in an oil refinery or a chemical plant. I can still see men in the neighborhood dressed in khaki pants riding bicycles to work while I waited for the school bus. I remember reports of flying saucers landing only to find out that a turbine in the refinery had disintegrated and launched shrapnel two miles in all directions. Sweet aromas filled the air and flares lit the night sky, reminding everyone that their jobs were secure as long as the plants were

running. A plant operator was what I wanted to be when I graduated from high school.

The summer after graduating from high school, I was introduced into the chemical business by working as a laborer at Allied Chemical. One intriguing item I observed were guys in white shirts and ties carrying clipboards, reading gauges and looking very important. Inquiring, I discovered that they were the engineers who designed plants and managed the operation. My goal of working in a chemical plant took on new meaning, but it would require a commitment of several years of college. At the time, earning an engineering degree seemed unattainable, especially when I remembered one of my algebra teachers telling me that I was the dumbest student she had ever taught. Fortunately, LSU accepted me and provided a rich resource through which I attained my goal.

Thirty-three years later I find myself being honored by a select group of successful peers and distinguished academia from one of America's most notable schools of engineering.

How can this happen? The answer may be good advice for the young freshman. Determine your objectives early in life. Educate yourself. If you want to be an engineer, attend LSU. There is no better university for engineering, although some may be as good. Dedicate yourself to your career and work hard every day. You may get a break or two through extra effort. When you have achieved some level of success, share your time, talent and money with those responsible for helping you achieve your goals. Do not, under any circumstances, focus on recognition for what you have accomplished. If you are deserving, this will come naturally.

Throughout any successful career there are numerous people and events which shape the ultimate outcome. There are a few, however, who deserve special recognition. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for instilling in me strong moral values and a healthy work ethic. Thank you, Karen, for your faithful support, which included attending to our children when I worked long hours on projects and turnarounds. Thank you, Georgia Gulf Corporation, for giving me the financial resources to share with those who helped me. And with deepest gratitude I thank you, LSU, for providing my professional education which has allowed me to accomplish more than I ever dreamed was possible.