Post-Gazette Transportation Writer Jon Schmitz Wins ASCE 2012 Excellence in Journalism Award

On December 14, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette transportation writer Jon Schmitz was notified that he is the winner of ASCE’s 2012 Excellence in Journalism Award. He has been invited to the OPAL Gala on March 22, 2012 to accept the award, which consists of a trophy and cash prize.

Mr. Schmitz was nominated for the award by the Pittsburgh Section. In an email following his notification, he extended his thanks to the Section for his nomination, and called the award “a tremendous honor, one of the highlights of my career.”

He has been a reporter and editor at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the Pittsburgh Press since 1978, and has covered transportation for the Post-Gazette since January 2009. He also authors the Post-Gazette traffic blog “The Roundabout.”

He has been honored twice with the ASCE Pittsburgh Section’s Journalism Award and in 2011 received an Excellence in Journalism Award from the Pennsylvania Highway Information Association. He participated in the Post-Gazette’s award-winning coverage of the Bonusgate scandal in the Pennsylvania General Assembly and the catastrophic flooding caused by the remnants of Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

He is a graduate of the Perley Isaac Reed School of Journalism at West Virginia University and resides in Washington County, Pa.

Congratulations to Jon Schmitz!

Pittsburgh Section Creates Transportation and Development Institute

To better serve the needs of ASCE Pittsburgh Section members, the Pittsburgh Section is creating a local Transportation & Development Institute.

The four existing Institutes currently found within the Pittsburgh Section of ASCE (Geotechnical, Environmental Water Resources, Architectural, and Structural) have been very successful at disseminating technical information and innovation through quality seminars and presentations, while providing career advancement opportunities through stimulating social interaction and networking.

Tell us what you think the newly forming Transportation & Development Institute should do by contacting Jeff Hans, Pittsburgh Section Transportation & Development Chair at JHans@chacompanies.com. Also, let Jeff know if you are interested in participating on the initial T&DI Committee!
Ground Treatment techniques to help you achieve your project goals.

To learn more, visit us at:

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E-Week is Coming February 19-25!

Call for Volunteers
On February 17 and 18 ASCE Pittsburgh will be manning a booth at the Carnegie Science Center’s Engineer’s Week festivities. The main focus of the ASCE booth is to educate children and young adults about what we do as civil engineers and that engineering can be fun. We accomplish this through several hands-on displays, colorful brochures and DVD videos. Often parents ask us as many questions as their children do, and those who staff the booth find it a rewarding experience. Look for the announcement regarding sign-ups in mid-January.

Awards Banquet
The Awards Banquet is on February 18 and will be held at ESWP.

Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day “10 for 10” Anniversary
Join the “10 for 10” ANNIVERSARY CAMPAIGN, a multi-faceted effort intended to reach 10,000 10-year-old girls with positive engineering experiences. “10 for 10” runs for 10 weeks, February 24 through May 8, Mother’s Day. Check out more at http://www.eweek.org/EngineersWeek/IntroduceAGirl.aspx

Pittsburgh Featured on Engineers Week 2012 Bookmarks
Gregory Kuklinski, P.E., M. ASCE, submitted all three of the winning photos for this year’s Engineers Week 2012 Bookmarks travel photo contest. Mr. Kuklinski is a member of the Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania Section of ASCE. Winning photos, determined by Facebook votes, are:
1. Downtown Chicago
2. View of the City of Pittsburgh
3. Rainbow Bridge

ASCE received over 100 photos and more than 600 votes.
ACEC/PA Issues Year-end Legislative Update

Below we reprint portions of a legislative year-end update by Eric G. Madden, Executive Vice President of the American Council of Engineering Companies of PA.

While ASCE is not affiliated with ACEC, many of the issues raised below are exactly those that the Pittsburgh Section of ASCE must face as well, and as Mr. Madden notes, the outlook is becoming increasingly dire as the legislature continues to defer action on the transportation funding crisis.

Major Issues on the General Assembly’s Docket

With the Senate and the House in adjournment, no resolution to new transportation revenue will be forthcoming before 2012. Transportation funding, along with Marcellus Shale, School Vouchers, State Store Privatization and P3 will continue to be topics of discussion in early 2012, along with the introduction of the Governor’s Fiscal Year 2012-2013 budget in February. Of course there are also the Primary Elections in Pennsylvania which are on Tuesday, April 23, 2012.

All this means is that the valiant efforts that we have done thus far, must continue in the weeks ahead. All focus now is on the Governor. We have been told that an announcement is forthcoming (again and again). We have also been told from members of the General Assembly that if the Governor does not make transportation funding a critical part of his Budget Address, it is unlikely that the measure will be brought up by the Assembly (particularly this close to a Primary Election).

We have heard that, as part of the Budget Address, the Governor is of the mind to push a major jobs bill in response to the slow-growing economy. The contents of said bill are still yet to be determined or at least shared with those outside of the Administration. ACEC/PA has heard from various sources that the bill “may” involve nine points of which infrastructure funding may be one of the nine. If the Governor’s intentions are true, transportation MUST be a part of any jobs program. My pitch to the Administration is how can you speak of any jobs bill and not have infrastructure funding as the cornerstone?

In the New Year, I plan to draft another letter to the Governor asking for his leadership and highlighting the impact of inaction. As an association and using member firms’ index numbers, I have been able to determine that employment within ACEC/PA member firms has decreased by 2,679 people since 2008. That is nearly 20 percent of our membership! Much of that is due to firms not renewing memberships because of financial belt-tightening, mergers and acquisitions, worker relocations (due to inadequate work in Pennsylvania) and simple downsizing.

Each of you…may wish to do the same in writing a letter to the Governor quantifying any losses your company has endured while waiting for leadership on a long-term funding solution. If the Governor wishes to talk about jobs in a jobs bill, let him know what this impact truly means. We in the industry can visibly see its impact around us every day.
YMF Dinner Features Forensic Engineer
by Jim Radion, YMF Vice-President

On Tuesday, December 6, the Pittsburgh Younger Members Forum (YMF) hosted their December Dinner, a part of the Pittsburgh Section Dinner Series. The event was held at the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh and sponsored in part by AECOM, GAI Consultants, and Lennon, Smith, Souleret Engineering, Inc. A toy drive was part of the evening.

Harold “Bud” McCutcheon (KU Resources) was the distinguished speaker who enlightened the 63-person crowd about forensic engineering. Beyond planning, design, and construction; civil engineering can diverge into law. In his presentation, “Law, Expert Witness, and Forensic Engineering,” Mr. McCutcheon shared his insights on the complicity of law and a role a civil engineer may play when things go wrong.

Thanks to a generous donation by Michael Baker Corp. and the donations of the attendees, the Brashear Association of Pittsburgh is able to support those less fortunate.

This event also kicked off the YMF Pens Raffle ticket sale. Donated by HDR, Inc. the YMF is raffling two sets of tickets for the game March 5, 2012 against the Phoenix Coyotes. For tickets, see your local YMF representative or contact Mike Panzitta (Michael.Panzitta@aecom.com).

2012 ASCE Pittsburgh Section Young Member Forum Resume Exchange

“I had competitive offers from several companies who had seen my resume in the book. Even after I had accepted a job, employers were still contacting me. It was a great way to get my name out to many companies with little time commitment while trying to juggle a busy school schedule.” - Melissa Fontanese

Email resumes to: Employment Chair - Bill Confair
E-mail: Bill.Confair@aecom.com
Deadline: All resumes must be received by 01/31/12
Questions: Please contact Bill Confair by Email or Phone Daytime Phone 412-316-3540

• Please e-mail Resume in Lastname Firstname.pdf
• Provide Discipline: up to 3 max (Construction Management, Environmental, Geotechnical, Structural, Transportation, or General Civil)
• Provide Type of Employment (Full-Time, Internship, or Co-op)

Sample Resume Provided
EWB-Pittsburgh Professionals and Students Deliver Clean Water to the Andes Mountains

by Joshua Jedlicka

To truly appreciate the setting in Tingo Pucará, Ecuador, one needs to grab a hiking stick and head for higher ground. At an elevation over 10,000 feet, the villagers of Tingo Pucará have sustained their traditional rural culture for years by having to travel up and down a mountain for several hours each day to obtain water, which was not always safe to drink. This has led to waterborne illness, high infant mortality, and less time spent on education.

Clean and reliable water is now on its way to Tingo Pucará through the efforts of the Pittsburgh Chapters of Engineers Without Borders (EWB). For the last four years, EWB-Pittsburgh has overseen the design and construction of a rain catchment system, a nearly one-mile water supply line over a 1000 foot elevation change and, through a partnership with a University of Pittsburgh senior design team, a home water supply distribution network.

Although water issues are often addressed by EWB, the level of partnership involvement and the degree of technical challenge makes this a unique project. With a little more fundraising and construction to go, there should be clean, reliable water going to each home in the village by 2012, an idea which seemed impossible when the project began.

The three current project managers—Melissa Day, a PhD candidate in Chemical Engineering at Carnegie-Mellon University; Craig Johnston, a Project Engineer with GAI consultants; and Bob Stachel, Executive Vice President of HRV Conformance Verification Associates and Director on the board of the Pittsburgh Section of ASCE—discussed their thoughts on EWB, and what these projects mean to the field of civil engineering.

As the project nears the home stretch, explain what you feel has been the biggest challenge in implementing the Ecuador Project.

Craig: The complexity and size of the project. There are significant geographical challenges given the size of the mountain the water needs to be lifted up.

Melissa: Apart from the sheer scale of the project— involving a long pipeline up an Andes mountain— I think the cultural difference has been difficult for the team. It’s not just a matter of communication; it’s also learning how to deal with a culture that is very different from our own. No one is at fault, but it makes relying information very interesting, and it’s certainly not an aspect that you are taught in school.

Bob: Designing to U.S. specifications is easy but we never know if there are materials available in Ecuador equivalent to ours. (Also) this is a very large project and could require over a year to complete the actual construction. It is very difficult to direct construction when so much is being done during our absence.

What has surprised you about the community you’ve worked with? Have they met expectations?

Bob: The people of Tingo Pucará are the hardest working people I have ever seen in my life.

Craig: Their work ethic and toughness!

Bob: Everyone pitches in from ages 12 to 70, male and female. The women work especially hard moving wheelbarrows, hauling materials and often carrying infants on their backs.

Melissa: As far as I know, it is very unusual to have a partner community as involved as the Tingoans are. They have landed deals with two major funding sources, which provides about half our construction costs and means that local governments are involved, which is a huge burden off our shoulders. Given the complexity of the project in the first place, we probably wouldn’t have been able to fund it had the community not helped out in this way.

Have you had to rely on more creative engineering problem solving skills since resources and budget are limited on this project?

Craig: We have had to be extremely fiscally conscious.

Bob: Fortunately there are local people in Ecuador who have contributed some very resourceful ideas. They know how to construct using available materials and waste nothing in the process. They were very creative when we had to support temporary concrete forms for tank walls and ceilings. Sometimes we just have to stand back, watch, and stay out of their way.

Melissa: We have to be resourceful, for sure, but tangentially I'd say fitting five adults, several saplings, and enough luggage and food for over a week into a four-seater pickup demands some serious creative engineering problem-solving alone!

Bob, as the most experienced professional of the group, what are your impressions on how EWB as career preparation for college students and younger engineers. Does this differ from the workplace?

Bob: I believe EWB is perfect for preparing students for the workplace. It teaches every single aspect necessary in the business world: teamwork, budgeting, design, construction and passion.

My biggest concern about engineering students is that they often graduate from college knowing basic design but are never taught about constructability. Students get the practical experience of building what they design. Students learn to design items that are functional, realistic and affordable. They have the opportunity to feel the hardware instead of just seeing it on paper.

As a business owner in the engineering community, I look for engineers with passion for their profession. That is exactly what EWB provides. I have made two trips to Ecuador and spent the last 12 months meeting almost weekly with these students. They have made a better person of me. Their selflessness is amazing and I hope that I can help them.
Craig and Melissa, as a mid-level engineer and a graduate student, has your experience in EWB been beneficial?

Craig: Within my career it has exposed me to new areas such as concrete tank design, pipeline design and construction. It has also exposed me to working on a project “cradle to grave” as opposed to just one part of the project. Additionally, I have gotten several job interviews through the contacts I have made in EWB. Outside my career, I have made some great friends through EWB and have gotten much satisfaction from the work we do.

Melissa: I was involved as an undergraduate and, though I never traveled, I got really hooked on the idea of using engineering to help people who need it most. This seemed way more “worth it” than what I had been learning in class, and kept me focused and interested. Having worked even more intimately with this project as a graduate student, and being able to travel, EWB has further cemented my goals for myself and future career. So it’s been very helpful, not to mention the fact that the documentation process has really helped my develop presentation and report-writing skills.

If you could recruit the ideal new volunteer for EWB, what would qualities would that person have?

Bob: I honestly think we do have the ideal volunteers. I’ve seen them first-hand. Unselfish, reliable, anxious to learn, great ambassadors, no complaints even under poor living conditions and unusual food.

Craig: Loyal, friendly, organized.

Melissa: I think Craig has it! It also requires a bit of willingness to plunge headfirst into the payoff, but the payoff is worth it.

What are your travel experiences been like? Favorite and least favorite experiences?

Bob: My travel experience has been nothing but amazing. I didn’t have a single negative experience. I love working with people under difficult circumstances and watching them persevere without issue. I’m very encouraged that our colleges are producing students of this caliber. If I have to pick a favorite thing, it is interacting with the local residents, working and playing. They have so very little but are most kind and generous.

Craig: Some of the best experiences of my life have been on EWB trips. My favorite experiences include learning new cultures, customs and making new friends. The people I met on these trips feel like family. I enjoyed spending time with the community and seeing how much different their life is than ours.

After returning from an EWB trip, you no longer take a warm bed, or a hot shower for granted. However, you do feel isolated from your natural environment, so it’s sometimes sad to see the vast difference in quality of life between them and us.

You all work full-time in industry or as students. What makes you pursue EWB in your free time?

Bob: I thought it would be rewarding and fun, and it is.

Craig: Wanting to help people who need it.

Melissa: There’s a certain sense of accomplishment at implementing a real-life project that doesn’t quite happen with a PhD project, which might be helpful to the state of science but not as effective at helping others in real time.

Has this project inspired you as to the role of civil engineers in society?

Melissa: I’m a chemical engineer by training, but working on this project has deepened my appreciation for Civil for sure!

Bob: This project has certainly shown me how to be a better person. I suppose that will help direct my engineering efforts to better service our society.

Craig: Civil Engineers allow society to move forward by giving them the things they need such as clean water, roads and bridges. This allows people to spend less time on these things and more time on whatever their interests and passions are.

To learn more about the Tingo Pucará Project please visit www.ewb-pitt.org. Though the story of Tingo seems complete, there is still a need for some participation and funds to be able to meet the goal of project completion in 2012. If you would like to get involved or donate to this cause, please contact Steven Traje at trajejr@gmail.com.

Joshua Jedlicka is an Environmental Engineer with CDM in Pittsburgh. He currently serves as an EWB Liaison to the ASCE Pittsburgh Section.
The Newsletter is published monthly except June, July, and August. **Deadlines for all material is the first Friday of the month prior to publication.** To change your address and to update your membership information, go to the website www.asce.org and select “Update Your Membership” under the “Members Only” link, or call (800) 548-2723 and ask for the membership department. Also contact Kate Luce Angell so that the change(s) can be made to the local database.

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