

Reflecting on 25 Years of Working with Banning Engineering, and 45 Years of a Career

25 years ago, this month, I worked for the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service. I occupied the chair of State Conservation Engineer (as well as the acting chairs of Assistant State Conservationist for Information Resources and Assistant State Conservationist for Technology). It was a busy, stressful time in that organization as it re-created itself (aka reorganization). My family and I had been blessed with a fruitful, geographically diverse (we moved a lot), 20-year long career that had experienced all the corn belt I-states (Illinois, Iowa, and Indiana) and seriously looked at opportunities in Montana, Alaska, and Rome. We had participated directly in more than fifteen federal construction contracts, as well as stints in watershed planning and design. We met and worked with an extensive group of talented, committed people that loved what they did. Too many to name, too important to forget. The people and the first 20 years' experience helped define who I am today.



That was 25 years ago...

The past 25 years, I maintained contact with many of those from the first 20 years but enjoyed and am blessed with an entirely new expanse of acquaintances and contacts. These people have been employees of Banning Engineering, elected officials of counties, cities, towns, and conservancy districts as well as employees of the many entities we have served. This group includes associates of permitting agencies and other consultants.

I recall clearly, the fall Sunday afternoon standing in our kitchen with my wife Eve, along with Jeff and Nettsie Banning, discussing the possibilities of a transition from "safe and secure" federal service to an upstart engineering company who had recently secured leased office space and had maybe eight employees. "Do you really want to do this?", questioned Jeff Banning. That was 25 years ago...

Over the 45 -odd years, I have "matured" from newbie to gray-hair. From Engineer-in-Training to Professional Engineer with licenses in six states. From IL farm kid to someone who has performed as a professional engineer in twenty-eight states and a few foreign countries. From mentee to mentor. From someone pushing all the buttons on new-fangled computer design applications to primary responsibilities as quality assurance and quality control. Read that as, I cannot run the models we are using today but know intimately the data and processes that we are attempting to implement to evaluate and design projects.

Notice a pattern? Yes, I am older, more experienced in terms of engineering and projects, but it is still about people. People you live with, people you work with, people you worship with, people you serve and are served by.

So, for the past 45 years (more or less) I have experienced and been blessed to have been associated with an untold number of individuals that have contributed to my life. To those, again, too many to name, too important to forget, thank you. Sounds like I am retiring, right? Well in a way... transition again. Fewer hours worked, fewer projects managed, fewer phone calls, fewer emails, and texts. I could enumerate hundreds of projects that have gone well, gone... challenging, succeeded and otherwise. Nevertheless, it is the people.

"Leaders aren't necessarily the first to cross the finish line- people who run alone are the fastest. Leaders are the first to bring all their people across the finish line." -- The 360° Leader

~ Jeff Healy

