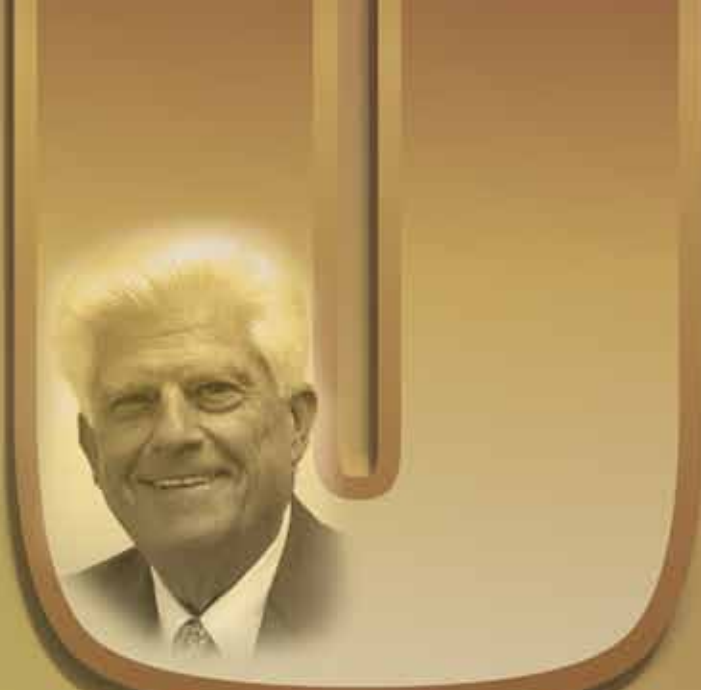


EGSSA

Time Capsule Interview Series



1965 2015



James Wright

- EGSA Past President 1990,

EGSA Reference Book Author

Forefather of EGSA Education Programs and the Namesake for our Education Award, sits down with EGSA for an Interview Active Member 1973-2012

While talking with Jim Wright on the phone, you would never pick up the fact that he thinks he is an education forefather for EGSA, but he certainly is! Our conversation started somewhat like this, "Ike Davidson repped for Lima Electric and both of us were heavily involved with the Education Committee. We decided at some point early on that we really needed to increase the professionalism of EGSA (former acronym) and the singular best way to do that was to educate people in our collective mindset.



We began envisioning a traveling schoolhouse. That first school was held in 1982 and from that point on, I taught all of the classes on Basic Electricity and Generators for the next 25 years or more," Jim reveals.

"Once we had established the traveling classes concept and gotten that approved, we determined that in order to keep the costs down, every other class was held at EGSA Headquarters, which at that time, was in Coral Springs, FL. We kept the classes to 30 students; with 25 being the ideal in my day, and it was also the number we needed to teach in order to cover expenses."

He continued, "The next step for us was to get instructors for the classes from Member companies, and since we didn't have our reference book at the time, each instructor brought his own course materials to cover each of the modules. The biggest challenge was to institute consistency between the classes and remove the company affiliation from the materials. If you asked me what brought our reference book to light, I think this was a contributing factor, because in 1986, the Education Committee decided that a reference book was the next order of business."

He made it sound so easy...and also so, matter-of-fact, but Jim Wright was one of our forefathers of the EGSA Education Program and there isn't much he doesn't know about the history of how we got here 50 years later!

Our interview continued.

Who was the most influential person in EGSA at the time when you were active? Why do you think that is true?

Jim Wright: "I would have to say Gordon Johnson of Kohler Co. gets my vote for most influential. Gordon was the style editor of the first three editions of *On-Site Power Generation* (EGSA's reference book). Without his guidance and advice, our industry's most valuable educational tool might never have been published.

We volunteered many of our EGSA School Instructors to author those original chapters and then Gordon edited them. That first book was published in 1990 (when I became EGSA President) and as it grew, we added chapters, updated chapters and some never changed...like the Basics of Electricity never changes. As they say, 'Like Topsy, the book just grew,'" he shared.

Do you recall a story that epitomizes EGSA colleagues working together for the good of the industry (not just themselves or the firms that they work for)?

Jim Wright: "When Ike (Davidson) first began compiling and reviewing all of the handouts that were provided by our Instructors, we had to sit on some of them (instructors) to prevent their class from being an informal. That being said, for the most part, all of the instructors worked very hard to make their class of real value to the students. We would get together before and after each school to discuss ways that we could improve the experience of the students."

What did you enjoy the MOST about being a Member of EGSA?

Jim Wright: "It might sound a little out-of character, but the thing that I really enjoyed the most was the "bull sessions" after hours. We told horror stories of field experience, and how we managed to solve problems. These experiences spoke to me, because believe it or not, the "horror stories" were good learning experiences for what to do, not to do, or how to get a customer unstuck.

Discussions of problems, solutions and product application meant a great deal to me in my day-to-day operations. That was the fun part... we'd make jokes, kid each other quite a bit, but the camaraderie that you would feel was great. I enjoyed technology discussions, not proprietary of course, with guys from all the major manufacturing members, and through discussion like these, best practices in applications for your products emerged. If we talked about it at the schoolhouses, we discussed it with our colleagues."

Any great rivalries or fun stories to share?

Jim Wright: “‘Competition is good for business’, as Darwin said, so when we would go to EGSA conventions, there were two established No-Nos. First, you did not discuss price and secondly, you did not reveal company secrets. I won’t say that there were not rivalries, but I think that at that point in EGSA history, we had too much memorable work being accomplished to have time for memorable rivalries. In On-Site Power, folks seemed to stick around our industry once they landed here. Whether Members changed jobs within the industry, such as moving from manufacturing to distribution, to being hired away by a competitor, or there were those of us who stayed with one employer for our whole career, the Association grew right along with us.

I have also been fortunate enough to see students of both my company training schools and EGSA schools, grow within our industry. Vaughn Beasley is a great example! Years ago, we held a school at Ring Power Corp. and Vaughn participated in that school very early in his own career. From time to time, Vaughn would give me a call and ask me where he could find a particular piece of information. Now Vaughn is a Past President of EGSA! This always made me feel good to help my fellow Members, regardless of company branding. This is also a fine example of a member knowing where to go, to get what they need answered.”

If you could tell a prospective member one thing about your experience as a Member, what would you impart to them?

Jim Wright: “I would suggest that for their personal and professional development that they join at least one EGSA Committee, and become involved in its operation. Working with fellow Members of different companies and products will broaden your knowledge, and thus improve performance and promotion possibilities. You should also pay close attention to EGSA speakers. Learn, gather papers, network with fellow Members and study! That is how you get great at what you do.

I also learned from experience that when you begin to write something, the author learns more than the student. If you are going to present (to other EGSA Members), you have to research and make sure that you are accurate before you take to that EGSA stage, so the end result is that you learn more than you teach. You even get others to review it, so that your accuracy grows and your work is refined and succinct. I bet if you talked to any of our other book authors, you will find the same answer. The subject of Generators has changed somewhat, but my naval stand on the Basics of Electricity is theory that won’t change. I used to joke to the students of my classes - ‘What is in the book is right, cause Wright wrote it!



Left – Jim and his granddaughter, Audrey, enjoying a day together at the Cleveland, Ohio Zoo.



Right – Jim and his friend, Annie, at Jim’s Marathon retirement party.

Tell us about your hobbies and interests outside the Power Generation Industry. They can be past hobbies or what you are up to at the moment!

Jim Wright: “I have been a member of The Elks (BPOE) here in Wausau for 22 years. Since I retired, I have become more active in their youth and community activities. This is a good reason to get up in the morning.

Jim Wright is coming to our 50th Anniversary in Jacksonville this month! In fact, by the time you are reading this article, he will be there. Other than Jim’s service to our education program, Jim was also a member of two other committees during his tenure with EGSA, Technical and Standards and the Legislative Committees.”

Jim received his BS in Nautical Science, and a commission as Ensign in the US Naval Reserves from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, Kings Point, New York. As he put it, “I sailed for a couple of years as a 3rd mate with the United Fruit Co. hauling bananas out of Central America to New York, Baltimore, Philly and Charleston, or on coast-to-coast runs from East Coast ports to West Coast ports such as LA, San Fransisco, and Seattle and then back around to an East coast port.

“My ship was in Seattle when I received my draft notice, so I requested the Navy to activate my commission (as an Ensign) in the Navy. I served the two year commitment, liked the life, and stayed for an additional 7 years, until I met my lady and came ashore,” he added.

After his service to our Country, Lima Electric was advertising for an inside sales representative for generators. With a degree in Nautical Science and not much else of real use to the Industry, Jim was very complimentary to the people that brought him along in the industry and probably decided then that he would pay it forward for years to come through his service in EGSA. He went to his first EGSA event in 1972, you could say that his blood runs EGSA Reflex Blue and we’d believe.

Thanks for the great interview, Jim!