

Mark Alpert receives Outstanding Engineering Alumni Award

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UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. – Mark Alpert, a 1980 environmental engineering alumnus, was recently named one of 12 recipients of the 2017 Outstanding Engineering Alumni Award.

The award, established in 1966, is the highest honor bestowed by the College of Engineering and recognizes graduates who have reached exceptional levels of professional achievement.

Alpert received his bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Lehigh University before heading to Penn State for his master's degree in environmental engineering.

He chose Penn State because it was one of the top ten schools in environmental engineering at the time and also because Penn State participated in an EPA traineeship program, which covered the cost of tuition, books, room and board.

Three months before graduation, however, Alpert became ill and was forced to leave school. Due to a loss of funding, he nearly didn't return. Instead, Alpert got married, became a father, and began his professional career as a field project engineer for the State of Maryland where he developed standards consistent with the new emerging water quality and effluent requirements that would lead to the cleanup of the nation's rivers. He also enforced the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Act.

Though he had left Penn State, Alpert's advisers never gave up on him. They saw what a bright star he was and convinced him to return to the University and complete his degree.

"We had faculty advisers who really brought us together and mentored us and guided us," Alpert said. "It was so unique at Penn State, given how large the campus and the department were. I thought it was extraordinary."

Upon graduation, Alpert held several positions in State government before he received his Professional Engineer license and moved to the private sector. There, he learned how to design water and wastewater treatment projects.

His first private sector position was with Metcalf & Eddy (1978-1983 and 1989-1992) – now part of AECOM – where he became senior vice president for his work in the project development unit. While there, he started a unique business unit focusing on new business ventures and projects that deployed emerging technologies.

In 1983, Wheelabrator Technologies in Hampton, New Hampshire, recruited Alpert. They introduced him to both project development as well as integrated design, construction and facility operations. “Wheelabrator taught me the business aspects of my field,” Alpert said.

He then joined CH2M Hill in 1983 working throughout the U.S. and Canada. Alpert became a senior vice president of the CH2M Hill Water Business Group and worked with key clients in over 40 states and Canadian provinces serving in many roles from project engineer, project manager and Executive in Charge on numerous projects ranging in size from \$1M to \$275M.

In 2009, Alpert was honored for his accomplishments by the Design Build Institute of America with its highest level of recognition – the Brunelleschi Lifetime Achievement Award.

Alpert formally retired in 2014 but has not completely left engineering behind. He continues to serve as the executive director of the Water Design Build Council and as chair of the board for the STEM School and Academy, a K-12 charter school in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. In addition, he is president of Integrated Delivery Solutions, where he advises public and private sector owners, as well as engineering, construction and technology companies. He also provides expert witness services upon request.

With more than 46 years of professional experience, Alpert has a good understanding of what it takes to be successful in engineering. He encourages rising engineers to play the field before settling into a set career path.

“Don’t assume your first job is the end all, be all,” he said. “Try all aspects of the field you’re in and don’t be afraid to make changes in the first ten years of your career.”

Alpert also reminds young engineers that there is still a lot they will need to learn once in the field.

“We all start at the bottom of the hill, and we all have to climb our way up,” he said. “If you realize that there are many things you still don’t know, then you can learn a lot and make a real contribution as you progress in your career.”

The 12 Penn State engineering graduates will be honored at the annual Outstanding Engineering Alumni Awards ceremony on April 20 at the Nittany Lion Inn on the University Park campus.