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Monroe Professional Engineers Society

A Chapter of the New York State Society of Professional Engineers

657 East Avenue, Rochester, New York 14607

Dedicated to Professionalism in Engineering in the Interest of Public Safety and Welfare

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Get Ready to Catch the Next Wave – Interview with James T. Scancarello, P.E.

As we were wrapping up the election process for the 2017-2018 MPES officers, I was able to connect with MPES-member James (Jim) Scancarello. Mr. Scancarello had recently retired from a 40-year career as a professional engineer, thus I asked if I could interview him about his reflections on the engineering profession with regards to current and future challenges.

Mr. Scancarello attended Clarkson University and earned his Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering in 1977. Coincidentally, Jim met his future wife in calculus class while attending Clarkson. Within a year of graduation, Jim completed his Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) certification and went on to earn his PE license in 1984. He said that the PE license was always on the horizon: "For any kind of career advancement, a civil engineer needs their license. With PDH requirements, you send a message that you are keeping up with technology." He would eventually go on to complete his Master of Science in Education.

Jim's career would see many changes and new opportunities and take him to various locations. When it came to the motivation for career changes, he says: "Most decisions were not in regard to what was best for my career, rather what's best for my family." Jim started his career with Sear-Brown Associates, in Rochester, NY, working on general structural engineering projects. In the early 1980's he joined Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, a national leader on investigations of catastrophic failures. This was a period when forensics engineering was in its infancy. Jim developed expertise in determining why failures occurred and helping engineering professionals to learn from past mistakes. This experience would serve him well later in his career.

In the mid 1980's, the family moved to Potsdam, NY, based on a relocation assignment for Mrs. Scancarello, who had become a Mechanical Industrial Engineer for GM. Thus Mr. Scancarello rejoined Sear-Brown Associates (later known as the Sear-Brown Group) in their Canton, NY office. In this role Jim would manage the local bridge inspection program for NYSDOT Region 7 for several years. Jim was able to utilize his forensics engineering background while investigating several bridge collapses in NY State and served on a task force for underwater bridge inspections.

In 1996, the Canton office of Sear-Brown closed. While offered the opportunity to relocate to Denver, Jim felt that the best option for his family was to stay in the Potsdam area. This led to the beginning of Jim's teaching career as a full time instructor for Civil Engineering Technology at SUNY Canton. In 2002 he joined Atlantic Testing Lab, from where he would eventually retire. In his role as a Senior Engineer at Atlantic Testing Lab, Jim worked on vibration monitoring as well as wind turbine foundations. Nearly all the Wind Turbine foundations built in Western NY from 2006 to 2016 were designed by Mr. Scancarello. In 2011, the family decided to return to the Rochester, NY area where Jim had grown up and started his career.

Mr. Scancarello joined NSPE in 1986, serving as president of the St. Lawrence-Franklin Chapter for nearly 10 years. He spent 8 years coordinating the Mathcounts competition in his area (he still participates in supporting Mathcounts to date). Jim says that he sees NSPE as a vehicle to come together as a community in dealing with issues facing the engineering profession. Jim reflects on the challenges in retaining members in the engineering society. He notes that fewer companies are offering financial support for membership in professional societies, thus resulting in a negative impact on overall membership. When asked about the challenges facing the engineering profession today, he noted political, economic, and profitability influences. He hopes that decision makers will value the input of engineers.

In looking back over the past 40 years as a professional engineer, Jim says he has no regrets. His career path was unpredictable, but he let it unfold and evolve and he was very happy with the results. Speaking to the next generation of professional engineers, he says "The world will change. Be prepared. Sharpen the stone." When thinking of the ups and downs over the course of an engineer's career, Jim says is a lot like surfing. "Catch a wave, when it's over, it's over. Paddle out and catch the next one."

As always, we encourage active membership in the Monroe Professional Engineers Society. We are constantly striving to improve your membership but we always need more help. If you are interested in becoming an active member or have any questions, please email me at dcreobertspe@gmail.com or contact MPES through our website at www.monroepes.org/contactus/.

David C. Roberts, P.E., President, MPES