

CHAPTER HISTORY.... BY BOB DALY P.E.

Ruth Giacobbe was the first female to be elected New Jersey Chapter president in our history. It has been fifteen years since she was elected. I interviewed Ruth and was surprised with the road that took her there. The following are excerpts of my interview with Ruth, in Ruth's own words of turning points in her career and her accomplishments as a Chapter President. Ruth continues to be a very active member of the chapter as well as the Chapter Administrator.

Bob Daly P.E.
NJ Chapter Historian

Ruth Giacobbe

"My daughter Donna started in high school and I was tired of sewing (I did dressmaking and taught sewing in adult school for about 15 years.) In 1975, I went back to work and decided and also to go back to school. I wanted to get a business degree. In 1978, I took a position with a mechanical contractor who did design/build. I became very interested in HVAC and Middlesex County College was offering HVAC Technology Courses, with credits. I changed my courses and after a day's work went to school three nights a week at two different buildings in different towns, for two years. I finished my degree in Liberal Arts. No one was offering an engineering degree at night unless I went to Wayne or Newark N.J.. No thanks, not after working all day.

The HVAC instructor was a very interesting man. His name was Joe Pennesi, a portly Italian man who was very knowledgeable and expressed strong values. He got his P.E. License before he completed his college degree. He had served in the India/Burma theater during WWII and swore he would never be hot again. After the service, he went to work for Grumman Engineering designing air conditioning systems for spacecraft. The sun only shines on one side of the craft so they only needed Air Conditioning on one side. As I said he was very interesting. He worked for a variety of engineering companies in NYC and NJ and knew every building in NYC by it's HVAC system.

Joe was very much an ASHRAE member. He had been president of the NY chapter and was constantly pushing ASHRAE to his students. He held student meetings at lunchtime and provided lunch. Joe encouraged his class to join as students but told me to join as a member.

The program was excellent and the reason it worked was Joe's dedication as the instructor. That was where I first saw but can't say I actually met Lou Kelter, Past President of North Jersey Chapter and ASHRAE Life Member. He was a speaker at one of the meetings. After Joe Pennesi left Middlesex CC, the program collapsed.

I have served on various committees at both the Region 1 level and at society level. I don't think you see what makes ASHRAE special if you are "only" a chapter member or meeting attendee. At Region 1 level, I have traveled the northeast. The Kelter's invited me to join them at my first Chapter Regional Conference in Twin Tiers. I have now enjoyed CRC's in every chapter's area. I have attended society meetings around the country. I was able to combine business and pleasure with friends.

ASHRAE is a very diverse organization and sets the standard for our industry. I recall a story of one member who was very active on the Society level, however was not involved in engineering at all. She was in textiles and she tells the story of how she got involved. It had to do with window treatments and blocking heat gain through windows. ASHRAE Research funded a project she was working on.

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CHAPTER HISTORY.... CONT'D

Ruth Giacobbe—cont'd

Today, Students say they are interested in the environment but do not realize that HVAC sets our environment. It's not just about cleaning up rivers and saving trees. Where would we be today without refrigerators, heating systems, air conditioning and controls in all buildings, including schools. No school is being built without these systems. I can remember going into grocery stores in the wintertime and people commenting because the "air conditioning" was on. How things have changed, but people outside the industry still do not understand it.

I do have a sense of accomplishment during my past term as Chapter President. During my tenure, the chapter established a Scholarship Fund. It was started with only \$2,500 because that was the least Dreyfus would accept. It is now over \$35,000. While I was president, the List of Permanent Motions was prepared, known as MOPs. This became our MOP, after Society decided each chapter should have a plan. We had a head start on the MOPs because of our list of member. In particular, Spencer Morasch, Past Chapter President and current Board member, has been the backbone of the development of the MOPs ever since it was started. In 1995, I put together a Directory of Products and Services. I got companies to list themselves, collected the money, entered all the data and everything else that needed to be done. The first one was published in 1996 and continued annually through 2003. I continue to get calls from people looking for the latest copy but have to tell them we no longer have a directory. I think that I led the way for other women to attend ASHRAE meetings and assume leadership positions. There were many times when I had to stand up for myself after hearing insensitive remarks made at all levels of Society. I have mentored many Chapter Presidents that followed me. They felt comfortable asking and valued my opinion on all sorts of issues.

A major disappointment for me, is the current lack of interest and attendance at meetings, technical tours and seminars. Where is everybody? What are they doing? Do they all know it all and don't need anymore education? Where should ASHRAE be moving? I don't know. After attending Society meetings I know the leaders have the same concerns that I do about where people are. They are implementing all kinds of strategies and it doesn't seem to be kindling the interest. I wish I had the answer.

Looking forward, I now spend as much time as possible with a new grandson. He is a wonderful addition to my family. Just ask me and I will bring out the photos. In a way, many ASHRAE members are also part of my extended family. The key to my joining was the encouragement of a single ASHRAE member, the late Joe Pennesi. I believe that I have and will continue to work with ASHRAE members to encourage them to enjoy the level of accomplishment that I feel."

XXX

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