

# REFLECTIONS ON A GREAT PROFESSION

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## ABSTRACT

Thanks are given for receiving the prestigious Distinguished Service Award from the Society of Wood Science and Technology. Reflections are made on the many advances made by the Society since its founding. In the author's career of 45 years, emphasizing wood composites, the research, development, and eventual production of a multitude of new products have been very satisfying. Annually, millions of tons of raw materials previously wasted or thought to be unusable are now used profitably for the good of the industry and society as a whole.

In accepting the prestigious Distinguished Service Award from the Society of Wood Science and Technology, the most important thing for me to say is "Thank You!" When I first learned of this honor, I was truly stunned. The noted scientists and leaders who have received this award are truly world leaders, and I am indeed overwhelmed to be included with them. My thanks go out to many people: my colleagues for over 45 years at Washington State University; my many friends and colleagues from throughout our important field from around the world; my contemporaries in the Society of Wood Science and Technology; and my close-knit family of my lovely wife Donna, sons Bill and Joe and his wife Lynn, my daughter Carol and her two fine sons Luis and Darren. Without the help from all of these people who have kept me more or less in line over the years and focused on the work needed to be done, I would not be recognized with this honor.

There is a saying around Washington State University today that is very old but one that has great meaning, illustrated by a turtle sitting on top of a fence post. The saying is, "I didn't get up here all by myself." And it is definitely true in my case as I have had a lot of help over the last 45 years. I am very happy that the leadership role we have developed at Washington State University is going forward and is being greatly enhanced by the new Di-

rector, Donald A. Bender, and my successor in the composites area, Michael P. Wolcott.

I am supposed to say something profound that can be used by all in our profession and field, which is a difficult assignment. What I am going to do is reflect a bit upon the history of the Society of Wood Science and Technology (SWST) and some of the signature events that have happened over the years. I have been involved in many of them and have been an interested observer of many others. My reflections are not meant to be all-inclusive but ones that should be of interest, particularly to the younger members of our profession. My recollections go back to the founding of SWST at a time when, in the words of Past President Al McGinnes, "I was a young whippersnapper."

I was not involved in the founding of SWST, but we all owe a great deal of gratitude to the founders of our Society. We need this profession and in my view, our society needs this profession. We have had many growing pains, and some I know have lamented that we have been very slow in developing. However, in my research over the years, I noted that the Society of Foresters (SAF), with many more potential members, had similar problems in its early years.

SWST started with considerable controversy, with some members of the Forest Products Research Society (FPRS- now the Forest

Products Society) feeling that SWST was trying to take over from FPRS. In my estimation, most of this controversy came from confusion about the differences between the two societies and a bit of miscommunication. Unfortunately, there were a number of hard feelings among some of the leaders involved at that time. This made it difficult to get some things working smoothly. These hard feelings escalated when SWST initiated their own professional journal *Wood and Fiber* in 1969. In reaction, FPRS started their own quarterly journal *Wood Science* in 1968, publishing similar scientific and technical articles.

Some years later, when things had settled down a bit, both societies recognized that such feelings had to be set aside as both societies would benefit. One of the first steps in this direction was to show members of both societies the differences between the two societies, which even today, I would submit, are still not understood by many. This effort led to an editorial in the 1977 September issue of the *Forest Products Journal* entitled "Complementary Nature of FPRS and SWST." I was the author in name, but many people from both FPRS and SWST contributed to this article. I am repeating part of this editorial as I believe it is fundamental to understanding the two societies.

Members of SWST generally have the same broad interests that FPRS members have; however, SWST membership is limited to persons with strong educational or experience backgrounds in the area of wood science and technology. It is this feature that, by contemporary standards, designated SWST a professional society. Since FPRS members generally have more diverse backgrounds in the area of forest products, FPRS is designated a technical society. . .

FPRS is a technical society largely devoted to the transfer of technology and information. It is an organization that cuts across the vertically oriented industry segments and provides a common meeting ground for all forest products people. This covers everyone with an interest in forest products and encompasses all levels of academic training and basic knowledge about wood and wood materials. . .

FPRS members represent public and private research, development, industrial management, production, marketing, education, engineering, technical sales, supply,

and consulting functions of the world's forest products industry. Many professional groups are represented in the membership of FPRS, including SWST.

The purpose of SWST as a professional society, is to promote the wise and judicious use of the world's wood resources. This is to be accomplished through five different avenues. These include developing and maintaining a unique body of knowledge distinctive to wood science and technology; encouraging the communication and use of this knowledge; encouraging policies and procedures which assure the wise use of wood and wood-based products; encouraging high standards for professional performance of wood scientists and technologists and acting as a professional organization for individuals who meet these standards; and fostering educational programs at all levels of wood science and technology and furthering the quality of such programs.

SWST provides a professional home for those practicing wood science, technology, and engineering. Because of the need to be intimately involved in technology transfer most SWST members are also FPRS members. Other FPRS members have different professional homes, such as the National Society for Professional Engineers. SWST can speak out on many issues for its members as an identifiable group. FPRS, because of its diversity, has great difficulty in doing so, and indeed this is not its function. . .

What was not pointed out in this editorial is that because of the different nature of the two societies, they function differently under the Internal Revenue Code. FPRS, for example, cannot lobby because they represent members from many different professions. However, SWST can and has made presentations before many public groups.

The editorial I wrote was one of the steps started when I was SWST President to have the scientific quarterlies of both societies merged into one quarterly published by SWST. It was a long process requiring many meetings and much correspondence. If memory serves me correctly, it took about seven years and was successfully concluded when I was President of FPRS. I believe this merger has been extremely successful and that both societies have benefited greatly. We are all familiar with the merged journal *Wood and Fiber Science*, which started publication in 1983.

During my time in office and afterwards, SWST has moved forward with many outstanding projects. First, however, the Society needed to be on sound financial footing after

the National Science Foundation grant for the establishment of the original quarterly was exhausted. Once this was accomplished, we were able to move forward with numerous outstanding projects such as the visiting scientist program, critical matters committee, the international travel program for members, international relations, education, public liaison, and very importantly, the accreditation program. Those who brought the accreditation program into being are to be congratulated. It has brought recognition of SWST throughout the academic world.

In my own career, I look out on our forest products world and see the tremendous advances that have been made despite the need to overcome many challenges. In my personal arena of composite materials, the United States alone produces well over 20 million tons of product from raw materials that either

we didn't know how to use or that were wasted 50 years ago. This achievement is what I am most proud of, and it took many hundreds of people to accomplish. All of us are sitting together on top of that proverbial fence post I mentioned at the beginning of this piece— and it is a mighty large fence post to accommodate us all.

In conclusion, I want to thank everyone who has ever helped me, and there are many of you. Also, all of us must try to improve our profession and knowledge base throughout our professional career. I submit that those of us who now have reached senior status have indeed done that. However, we are quick to admit that far more work needs to be done, and our charge to those following in our profession is to continue what should be a lifetime goal of leaving your profession in better shape than it was when you first entered it.