

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Paul M. Smith

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I am deeply honored to accept the SWST Distinguished Service Award. Thank you. Arigatou.

A special thanks to my friend, Vicki Herian, who has done a fabulous job with these international venues and has seamlessly managed the Society, its members and executive board for so many years. She truly is the heart and soul—and brains—of the Society and an invaluable institutional memory asset.

I am grateful for my many SWST friends whom I have had the privilege of knowing and working with over the past 30+ years. In particular, I thank the anonymous person who must have scoured the SWST membership to find 10 members in good standing willing to write something nice about my Distinguished Service Award nomination.

The DSA Award is significant because it's a sign that I've earned the respect of my colleagues. As I have listened to other DSA acceptance speeches, I thought the award beyond my meager professional aspirations. Today, however, it is apparent that the most rewarding experiences accrue over a long period of time and require patience and luck.

As an industrial forester for Champion Timberlands in Western Montana, I would never have guessed that a simple decision to pursue a Master's degree in Forest Products at the University of Idaho would have led to this moment. I am forever grateful to Dr. Ali Moslemi, a mentor and friend, for his confidence and for providing me with the opportunity to receive an advanced degree.

In pursuit of a Ph.D., I arrived in Dr. Stephen Sinclair's Wood Products Business & Marketing lab at Virginia Tech. Dr. Sinclair—an innovator in today's model of Wood Products Marketing in the United States—was a key member of a

remarkable Wood Products faculty at Virginia Tech, led by the inimitable Dr. Geza Ifju who amassed an incredible amount of talent during my time there in the late 1980s.

I am proud to say that many of these legendary Virginia Tech graduate student colleagues from that era remain lifetime friends. In particular, the mythical Mike Wolcott, a long-time friend and colleague - and adjunct member of our Penn State faculty - has provided me with innumerable professional opportunities and light entertainment. I am also thankful to my many Virginia Tech colleagues for their support and friendship during my graduate student days and beyond.

Upon completion of my PhD, I landed at the University of Washington in Seattle. I am thankful to the renowned Dr. Ramsay Smith for his guidance and friendship, and to the Center for International Trade in Forest Products for enabling the first of six visits to the nation of Japan. Those visits instilled in me a great respect for the Japanese people that continues to this day.

In the early 90s, we moved to Penn State to raise our children closer to family. I am grateful to my many Penn State friends and colleagues, including my graduate student advisees who have shown me endless patience and tolerance. In particular, my Ph.D. students deserve my deepest gratitude. I have been blessed to be associated with unbelievable talent: Ivan Eastin, Juha Niemela, Richard Vlosky, Judd Michael, Lucy Ozanne, Tim Smith, Sudipta Dasmohapatra, Daniel McGraw, Wenping Shi, and, most recently, Min Chen. And I am honored to have advised two M.S. students in our research group from Japan, Kazuyo Hama and Hisaaki Ishihara. Thank you all for your dedication to the profession—and for helping make Wood Products Marketing an integral component of our Society.

Now, if you will indulge me, I'd like to provide a short anecdotal story about our profession:

Once upon a time... there was a small U.S. wood products program in a very important hardwood producing state. This program suffered with a low enrollment problem and found itself unwelcome in a Forestry department that was moving toward a new paradigm of Ecosystem Management. An ally was found in a Dept. of Agriculture & Biological Engineering and, together, they developed a new major in BioRenewable Systems (BRS). To make a long story short, this BRS program is living happily ever-after—with full classes in a healthy major. My thanks to Paul Heinemann and the many ABE faculty at Penn State who made this possible, but, in particular, to my friend and colleague Nikki Brown who is largely responsible for the program's success.

At Penn State, BRS is a discovery major in that the vast majority of our students are enrolled in another major and then “find” BRS after their freshman or sophomore year. High-quality, environmentally-oriented students are attracted to our “Bio” major and later, begin the process of wood education. The noteworthy thing is that, upon graduation, these students often remark about their newfound interest in all things wood. They talk about responsibly sourced wood, forest carbon sinks, cell wall structure, mechanical properties, grading rules, and, yes, B2B marketing. They appreciate the environmental benefits of wood and the breadth of career opportunities in the wood industry. And they wonder why we don't offer a major in

“wood.” When asked if they would have switched majors to something called “wood products,” they answer “No, not a chance!”

Our profession competes for young talent who may not be ordinarily drawn to a wood major or to a career in the wood industry. But a major, such as BRS, can attract an environmentally conscious, diverse student from both rural and urban backgrounds.

In addition, the U.S. “wood” research focus has also undergone significant change. While applied wood research funding tightens, universities such as ours, place an increasing emphasis on fundamental discipline strength. As a result, course content will reflect faculty expertise whose training may be outside of traditional wood programs. Further, the SWST may not be perceived as a natural home for these new bio-professionals.

Therefore, our wood programs will likely teach more nontraditional students with faculty who may be more aligned with their fundamental discipline. This represents a challenge and an opportunity to welcome these folks to the Society and to ramp up various educational delivery systems for academic and industrial audiences.

The SWST has long been a wood education leader through its publications and University and Continuing Education programs. It is imperative that this leadership continues to address our evolving University environments. Your participation in the Society does make a difference.

I am deeply humbled and grateful to SWST for this honor.