

DAVID PEAKES HONORED WITH HERMAN JOACHIM AWARD

DOUGLAS ROOKS

When David Peakes was growing up in Rumford, Maine, going into the paper industry seemed the most natural thing in the world. The Oxford Paper mill that still dominates the town's skyline—though it has had several different owners since then—was a sign of stability and prosperity. Now, with industry having a harder time persuading young people to train in vital engineering positions, Peakes is more convinced than ever that pointing to forest products accomplishments and telling the public about them is vital to future success.

As the 2005 winner of the Herman L. Joachim Distinguished Service Award—TAPPI's highest award for voluntary leadership in advancement of the association—Peakes was honored at TAPPI's Annual Meeting February 23 in Tampa, Florida. He looked back on a long career in a recent interview.

Peakes is now retired after a varied 43 years spent largely in environmental engineering. A TAPPI member since 1956, he has been particularly active in its Environmental Division, serving as division chair, vice chair, secretary and technical program chair. From 1996-'99 he served on the

TAPPI Board of Directors and was named a TAPPI Fellow in 1999 in recognition of his extraordinary service.

Peakes was born in Strong, Maine. After graduating from Stephens High School in Rumford, he found that a scholarship to the University of Maine might be available, and applied without giving it a great deal of thought—"I thought a might give it a whirl," he said.

He thrived on the Orono campus, earning a BS in chemical engineering and an MS in pulp and paper technology. He had been working summers at Oxford Paper, collecting water samples along the Androscoggin River, and expected to continue there.



David Peakes

But after graduation, the mill wasn't hiring, and he began his career at Northwest Paper in Minnesota. Two years later, he had the opportunity to pursue an interesting technical challenge with MacAndrews and Forbes in New Jersey, and, characteristically, he took it. The firm was seeking an efficient process for extracting the licorice root that provides a key flavor for tobacco products. The work was a technical success—Peakes improved the process—but not a commercial one, since it proved impossible to duplicate the desired flavor.

In 1965, he took the opportunity to return to Maine when Oxford called him, and spent the next 19 years at the big mill, owned by Boise Cascade over most of that time. For 5 additional years, Peakes assisted all Boise mills with environmental projects (necessitated by the federal Clean Water and Clean Air acts and various

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN:

- How industry attitudes toward environmental issues have changed over the years.
- How David Peakes' career path led him to receiving this honor.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- "Forests For Our Future," by Patricia Dunwoody, *TAPPI JOURNAL*, September 1999. To access this article, type the following Product Code in the search field on www.tappi.org: 99SEP16.
- To query David Peakes on environmental issues, visit www.tappi.org and follow the People/Resources link to Ask The Experts, Environmental. (Free to TAPPI Members.)

state regulations.)

At the time, environmental divisions were something of a backwater, with the operating department still the focus of company managers. "Waste Control" was the name of the job he was given, and Peakes set out to do it without many technical standards or guidelines. It turned out that the mill had a number of different discharge points into the Androscoggin River, and the first order of business was to create a centralized discharge, then build a treatment plant.

Some of the technical challenges were similar to wastewater treatment plants built elsewhere, but others were unique to the processes of the mill. Dewatering the paper-making residues turned out to be especially tricky, and the process took years of experimentation to become efficient.

Peakes found that the most important change, however, was not technical, but organizational. In the early days, Waste Control operations were seen as an impediment to production, and it was difficult to get different departments to acknowledge their contribution to waste discharges, let alone agree to changes.

Gradually, attitudes began shifting as the managers began to see environmental compliance not just as something forced on the industry, but as a process with positive benefits for the host community, the river, and the mill's public profile.

"The managers realized that the operating department does have responsibilities to do more than make paper, and the regulators began to see that, for regulations to be implemented successfully, they must allow companies to operate and earn a profit," Peakes said. In time, environmental compliance issues were integrated into daily meetings, with tests beginning at 5 a.m. each day so there would be meaningful results to guide operations later on.

Peakes contrasts the conflict and suspicion that attended the original clean air and



1995 TAPPI Environmental Conference "Operation Communications" announcement. L to R: Ashok Jain, NCASI; Charles Bohanan, TAPPI; Dave Peakes, ABB-ES; John Harrison, TAPPI; Jeff Hilleke, Champion International; Dr. Allan Springer, Miami University-Ohio; Pam Sweat, TAPPI (on stage).

water regulations of the 1960s with the negotiations over EPA's Cluster Rule devised near the end of his career in the 1990s. "Those were real negotiations, with cooperation on both sides. It was a different process, based on a lot that had been learned over the years," he said.

By that time, Peakes had moved on to become an environmental consultant, first with ABB Environmental Services (formerly E.C. Jordan) in Portland, Maine, and then as senior process engineer for Woodward-Clyde/URS Corp. His work in these roles brought him assignments in 33 states, three Canadian provinces, Australia, Argentina, Sweden and Germany.

Like his previous career changes, this one proved invigorating, providing not only a global perspective on the pulp and paper industry—still his leading clients—but a different view of what makes a company tick. "As a consultant you go into a mill and talk directly with a lot of different people with differing perspectives. It opens lots of doors," Peakes said. With ABB's parent firm based in Zurich, Switzerland, he had the opportunity to travel extensively in Europe, which provided perspective on a major geographic shift in the

industry, away from being based primarily in North America.

In a sense, the shift was inevitable, he believes, based in part on the industry's enormous advances in productivity. At the time of the spruce budworm epidemic in the Northeast and Canada in the 1970s, various surveys seemed to show that the fiber resources in Northeastern forests were being fully utilized, leaving little room for greater mill capacity. Though the fiber supply crunch has since eased, decisions not to expand regionally have had long-term consequences.

Still, Peakes sees many positive signs around him. In his native Maine, there are fewer mills but those that remain have taken aggressive steps to remain competitive while keeping ahead of the environmental curve. "Years ago, the Androscoggin was listed as one of the most polluted rivers in the country," he said. "By working together with other mills in Maine and New Hampshire—which we had always seen as competitors only—we were able to turn that around."

Even when mill discharges were not directly part of a problem, the mills worked to help solve it, Peakes said. A large hydroelectric impoundment known as Gulf Island Pond

has had a dissolved oxygen deficit since it was built in the 1930s, and the mills contributed to build an innovative oxygenation system that has improved water quality. All over the state, mill towns no longer have to choose between prosperity and a clean environment. Bucksport, home to an IP mill, now has a thriving downtown, and Rumford boasts services that residents once had to drive long distances to obtain.

SERVICE TO TAPPI

Throughout his career, Peakes has been active on TAPPI's committees, attending countless meetings and conferences, and serving when asked. His usual response was to think a moment, and then say, "Sure, I'll do that."

A notable example of the fruits of his dedication came following a "particularly lively discussion" at a committee meeting on who would be the future customers of the industry. Focusing on students and young adults seemed to make sense, since they seemed to have the greatest concern about environmental issues but were also receptive to new information about the industry.

Through the Public Outreach Committee, TAPPI began providing teaching materials direct to classrooms, focusing on middle schools. While successful, the committee wanted to broaden its efforts. Not long after, TAPPI attracted the attention of the Walt Disney Co., which was then planning new exhibits for the Millennium Celebration at its Epcot® theme park at Walt Disney World® in Orlando, Florida, and was interested in highlighting accomplishments in natural resource industries. A Disney vice president came to a meeting with several TAPPI staff members and Peakes, representing the Environmental Division and the Directors. All seemed to be going well until the Disney vice president turned to the group and said, "You're a smokestack industry and we don't believe we want to have anything to do with you. What do you have to say?"



L to R: Ray Billings, Cheryl Peakes, Bunny Peakes, Dave L. Peakes and Dave E. Peakes.



Bunny and Dave with Mickey Mouse during the TAPPI/Epcot® project public announcement in March 1999.

It was clearly a test, and all eyes turned to Peakes. He recalls explaining that the Epcot exhibit "was exactly what TAPPI wanted the opportunity to do, to explain the changes that have been occurring in the industry, how it's taken environmental issues head-on." And, he concluded, "I'd like you to rethink what you just said."

TAPPI passed the test. Two weeks later came the invitation to prepare the exhibit, which became the enormously popular "Forests For Our Future." Millions of visitors view INNOVENTIONS at Epcot each year, in which the Forests For Our Future exhibit is located. The TAPPI Foundation was responsible for funding the exhibit, including the Disney "cast members" who serve as hosts. Today, funding comes from the generous support of The Weyerhaeuser Company Foundation, the American Forest & Paper Association, and International Paper Company. The exhibit will continue at least through June 2005, and Peakes takes heart from a recent report that Disney CEO Michael Eisner, on a tour of Epcot, remarked after seeing Forests For Our Future that "This is the kind of exhibit we should have more of."

The connection with young people is one that Peakes sees as increasingly important. "This is still a good career opportunity, a chance to make the most of your life," he said. But it will take a greater effort on the part of industry and educational institutions to attract new students and employees than in the days when a high school graduate walked across the street into the mill.

David Peakes is proud of his accomplishments, but he doesn't view them as his alone. He was always ready to serve, but he believes that, "Every time I volunteered I always got back more than I put into it. That's the best reason I know for stepping forward. You'll never regret working with a great organization like this one." **SI**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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