

## AWARD WINNER

# PHILIP E. NETHERCUT HONORED FOR SERVICE TO TAPPI

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### *SPECIAL AWARD GIVEN TO FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR*

**F**OR NEARLY 30 YEARS, PHILIP E. NETHERCUT HELPED guide the course and development of TAPPI. For most of that time he served as chief staff officer for the Association, overseeing its growth from 7000 members when he started in 1957 to 25,000 members at his retirement in 1986. During that same span, TAPPI's annual budget increased from less than US\$ 100,000 to more than US\$ 8 million.

In recognition of Nethercut's career of service, he was presented with a Special Recognition Award during the Association's 1998 Annual Business Meeting and Awards Ceremony. The award includes a plaque, a statuette and a US\$ 20,000 donation in his name to the charity of his choice. An oil portrait of Nethercut, painted by Chunn Kim of Duluth, GA, was also commissioned. The painting will be kept on display at TAPPI Headquarters in Norcross, GA.

Nethercut—and his twin sister Lois (Thurwachter)—were born April 3, 1921 in Indianapolis, IN, but only lived there one year before the family moved. For the balance of his school years, on into college, he lived in Wauwatosa, WI, now part of the greater Milwaukee area.

Wauwatosa was a typical Midwestern suburb, Nethercut recalled. "We were home, church, and school-oriented...quite conservative, particularly compared to the people who were our friends and neighbors when we were in Westchester County, NY, for many years, but that was back in the days when everything was fairly predictable. When you graduated from high school you went right to college; when you graduated from college you got married and you got a job right away, at least almost right away.

Nethercut's father was legal counsel for Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company "and a man of whom I'm tremendously proud." He lived to be 103-1/2 years old. "I brought him to the TAPPI office when he was about 99 to introduce him to people and they had a wonderful time with him and he had a wonderful time with them."

While his younger brother, Richard, chose a career as a Foreign Service Officer in the U.S. State Department, Nethercut ultimately became an ambassador for the pulp and paper industry.

Right from the start, Nethercut knew he wanted to major in chemistry in college. Before completing his bachelor's degree at Beloit College in 1942, he decided to continue with graduate studies and began interviewing at various colleges. He found that many of the programs were oriented toward fundamental research, while he was more interested in studies that had direct application.

"And then I learned of The Institute of Paper Chemistry, which was not too far

north of where I grew up, and it was offering four-year, full-time, all expenses paid scholarships, so I applied for that and was accepted," Nethercut said. He completed the master's program in two years at IPC before joining the Navy, then spent the better part of three years to finish his doctorate when he returned.

Nethercut joined the Navy in the summer of 1944 as a commissioned officer. After basic training, he spent two months in Hollywood Beach, FL for tactical radar training before shipping out to Pearl Harbor, HI, where he was assigned to the USS Teton, an Amphibious Group Command Ship, which would be a floating headquarters during amphibious landings. "We were in the Leyte Gulf operation and all of the Okinawa campaign and we were



*Philip E. Nethercut, as painted by Chunn Kim*



*The USS Teton, at left, the ship Nethercut served on as a radar officer, above, during World War II*

selected to be Gen. Douglas MacArthur's communication ship going up to Japan for the armistice and the surrender," he said

Nethercut fared well during the war. The greatest danger he encountered was during the Okinawa battle when a couple of Japanese pilots made kamikaze runs on his ship. A classmate of Nethercut's from IPC, (C.R.) Dick Calkins, was chief radar officer for the USS Morrison, a destroyer that was sunk by a kamikaze attack. "He and I were in radio communication with each other during this attack and I didn't know for two months after that whether he came out alive or not." Calkins did survive the attack, was best man at Nethercut's wedding and later served on the TAPPI Board.

After a couple of months service in Japan, Nethercut returned to the United States in time to resume studies at IPC in the fall of 1946.

"My thesis had to do with trying to study the mechanism by which plasticizers would soften a sheet of paper," he recalled. "The question I was trying to resolve was whether the sheet became softer because the individual fibers became softer or whether they retained their flexural rigidity and instead, the whole sheet was softened because of weakening bonds between the fibers."

"My faculty advisor was Dr. George Sears, who was a great guy," Nethercut recalled. But it seemed like something was always getting in the way of his reviewing Nethercut's thesis and releasing it to TAPPI for publication. Nethercut devised a plan to have his parents send "reminder" post cards from various countries as they traveled the world by steamer. The cards were written as if they were in foreign languages, except for the words "Nethercut's Thesis." The reminders worked, and the paper was published the month Nethercut joined the TAPPI staff, 7 years after he'd completed it.

It was at a picnic in 1947 that he met Lee, his wife-to-be. She had just graduated as the chemist from Carleton College in Minnesota and was working in Appleton

at Western Condensing Company.

They later had three children. Their son, Bruce, is a film script writer in Los Angeles. He's working on a script now for Dream Works. He's submitted the first draft and is working on giving it a polish. The elder daughter, Gail, lives in San Francisco where she is a consultant and senior vice president for Marsh McClellan, the largest administrator of insurance programs. The younger daughter, Ann, is on her own in Vermont, raising two daughters and studying full-time at the Vermont Culinary Institute.

"Back in those days when I was still a student at The Institute, Scott Paper Company was the place to work and there was a very, very enthusiastic group of graduates who were in key positions at Scott," Nethercut said. Even so, of the several job offers he got upon graduating,



*Nethercut working on a project at the Institute of Paper Chemistry*

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At left, 1963 TAPPI President John Wollwage and Nethercut discuss Association business; at right, the Manpower Operations Committee in 1970, including Al Nissan, seated, and from left, Jim Robinson, of Mead; Joe Thomas, of S. D. Warren; Dick Trelfa, of Hercules; Bob Seidl, of Simpson Paper; Peter Wrist, of Mead; Roy Whitney, of IPC; Lyle Jenness, from the University of Maine; Phil Nethercut, of TAPPI; and Quentin Weaver, of Scott Paper

he accepted a job at Watervliet (MI) Paper Company, a small two-machine mill, now closed.

"It was a good starting place for Lee and me. We were freshly married, in a tiny community in a pretty part of Michigan with a lot of fruit trees," Nethercut recalled. "After two years there, Scott phoned again and said, 'we have an opening and would like to have you think about it,' ... so Lee and I hopped in the car and came East and I had six years at Scott."

"I started out as process control engineer in the technical control department at the Chester (PA) plant and after two years of that I was transferred to chemical research and became research administrator manager.

That was where I had my first exposure with TAPPI and that was at the Local Section level. Nethercut's involvement took him through the chairs of the Delaware Valley Local Section, which he headed in 1955, and put him in contact with TAPPI leaders such as K. O. Elderkin, then President of the Association.

While working for Scott, the company allowed Nethercut to visit undergraduate chemistry classes and engineering classes to talk about the paper industry. "That was done under TAPPI auspices ... and I think that also brought my interests to the attention of TAPPI which at that time was hiring a consulting firm ... to bring a reasonably experienced paper school graduate to the New York office of TAPPI," he said.

As TAPPI membership grew in the mid-1950s, the Executive Committee felt the Association could no longer be run by just one person. TAPPI volunteers had been the ones making all the arrangements for conferences: dealing with the hotel, running the publicity, printing the program booklets, getting the manuscripts in on time, and so on. The headquarters staff, meanwhile, was maintaining membership records, selling advertising for the magazine, and handling the publication activities. Nethercut was hired to help broaden the staff base.

Nethercut joined the TAPPI staff in New York as technical secretary in 1957. He had enjoyed his TAPPI activities and thought working for the Association would be challenging and meaningful. There also seemed to be a great opportunity to at least be in line for the top staff position if things worked out well. The other professionals on staff included R.G. MacDonald, Dick Bingham, and Jack Winchester, plus an office staff of seven or eight.

The office had started back in 1915 in the offices of the American Pulp and Paper Association (APPA) and TAPPI had a couple of rooms in back. "It moved, but never more than two blocks from Grand Central Station, and when I joined them they were on Third Avenue and 44th Street," Nethercut said.



TAPPI's 1968 charter flight to Europe included, from top, the William H. Aikens, the M. John Osbornes, the Kenneth G. Chesleys, the John M. MacBraynes and the Philip E. Nethercuts

Nethercut was named assistant executive secretary in 1958 and executive secretary a year later.

TAPPI evolved quite a bit during Nethercut's early days with the Association. "It needed a lot of evolving," he recalled. "So much was done in rather primitive ways." As executive secretary, he brought in several good staff people, including Herbert O. Teeple, Kenneth G. Chesley and Michael Kouris. Teeple, who served as technical associate, had been with International Nickel, where he'd done a lot of good work on pulp and paper mill corrosion. Chesley, who worked as technical secretary, had been director of research at Crossett Co., in Crossett, AR. Kouris, who became editorial director, had been with Union Carbide and the Pulp and Paper Research Institute of Canada. With more staff, the Association needed more room, so the office was relocated to 360 Lexington Ave.

During Nethercut's early years on staff he gained a lot from TAPPI Presidents such as Ward Harrison and Bill Aiken. Harrison served during the late 1950s and was responsible for hiring Nethercut. Aiken insisted upon organizational structure that any group could handle. He set up procedures that the Association staff and the volunteer members could follow, even when he wasn't around.

Toward the end of the 1960s, TAPPI's Board became increasingly unhappy about the cost of operating an office in New York in terms of office rent and staff salaries, Nethercut recalled. In addition, it had become harder and harder to attract professional staff to the city.

The Board authorized Nethercut to look at locations within two hours drive of New York City because it felt there was still quite a concentration of paper and supplier companies and research centers within that area. "So I looked at Stamford and I looked at White Plains and I looked at Princeton and in all those instances we weren't getting out of the high cost area." So the search was broadened. The staff came up with a list of 30 or 40 cities, ranging from Appleton to Seattle, Boston and Cambridge. "Atlanta wasn't even on the list. It wasn't that well known at the time."

Birmingham made a tremendous pitch, which drew the Board's attention to the South. Several members of the Office Relocation Study Committee had connections with Georgia or Atlanta, which was perceived as being "the up and coming city" of the South, and ultimately the decision was made to move the offices there in 1971.

Of the 16 professional staff members, 12 moved to Atlanta. Within six months, two of them had decided to move back to New York.

Among the various challenges Nethercut faced during his years with TAPPI was "the government's efforts to punish paper companies for what was deemed to be antitrust activities," he said. "And that was a real threat, not only to TAPPI as a society of individuals, but certainly to the trade associations, and to other engineering and scientific societies. TAPPI, in particular, took a leading posi-



*Nethercut and William L. Cullison, both seated, display Key Awards both had received from the American Society of Association Executives, while Wayne Gross, Janet Crane and Robert Loftin hold certificates for having completed ASAE's association executive training program*

tion in developing procedures which were designed to protect paper companies and their employees from any threat of government intervention and developed a statement that was rather widely copied by other paper industry associations and pulp and paper foundations," Nethercut said. The antitrust statement developed by TAPPI also has served as a model for some associations outside the industry, he noted. "It was a leadership position we took that made a real difference in the industry."

Another challenge at the time was to assure many of the European paper industry associations that TAPPI was interested in cooperating, rather than competing with them. "That was a challenge which we worked through pretty much by behaving ourselves," Nethercut said.

TAPPI endured a crisis of sorts when individual members in Europe formed the European Study Group of TAPPI members and started holding their own meetings. National associations in Europe had not been interested in hosting international meetings, but they saw the Study Group's activities as a threat and were certain that TAPPI was trying to invade Europe. The perception was intensified when a group of Italian papermakers asked for, and got, TAPPI's help in forming a TAPPI local section to gain initial industry support for an Italian Association. Nethercut had a large part in calming those fears and in establishing cordial relations with the European associations.

Along with his TAPPI responsibilities, and in some ways complementing them, Nethercut became Finland's honorary consul in Georgia in 1976. He also served as

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*Phil and Lee Nethercut*

director and board chairman of the Scandinavian American Foundation of Georgia and as director of the Finnish American Chamber of Commerce of the Southeast.

Among Nethercut's duties as consul was to represent the interests of Finnish nationals in the State of Georgia if they needed documentation or help in getting visas approved. He was also available to assist Finns who might have run into problems while traveling in the state and to welcome distinguished Finnish visitors to Atlanta. He also distributed travel literature to would-be tourists from Georgia, provided letters of introduction to help some of the Americans who had particular business interests in Finland, and responded to school children who had to write a theme on Finland, inevitably "due next Monday."

On the occasion of the 10th Anniversary as Finland's Consul, he was knighted by the Finnish Government.

Among the other honors Nethercut has received, he's especially proud of the Key Award presented to him by the American Society of Association Executives in 1981. "In the field of association management, this is ... the highest recognition you can get and I was thrilled and surprised to get that." He was also named a TAPPI Fellow in 1968.

Nethercut stepped down as Executive Director in 1982, but continued as Vice Chairman of the TAPPI Board of Directors until his retirement in 1986. In that position, he concentrated on strengthening TAPPI's relations with paper and supplier company executives.

Nethercut can be largely credited for the sense of camaraderie and good will that developed between TAPPI officers and overseas association officers. "I made a major effort to win their confidence and to earn their respect," he said. "That has meant a great deal to me."

"A volunteer organization needs someone to provide it with a heart, and for over 30 years, Phil Nethercut [was] that person in TAPPI," said Peter Wrist, TAPPI's President in 1978.

Nethercut also contributed to the development of the various TAPPI awards programs. "I went out and got corporations to put up the money to provide the \$1000 honorariums," he explained. He was also close friends with Gunnar Nicholson and Herman Joachim, the benefactors of TAPPI's two highest awards.

Nethercut has taken a personal interest in nominating candidates to be TAPPI Fellows and for awards, "by virtue of the fact I knew so many people in the industry and the Association."

Nethercut still keeps quite busy, though "things don't happen as fast as they used to," he admits. "I bang out letters and reports almost every day," he said. He still travels a fair amount, but mostly in the United States now. House maintenance and do-it-yourself projects also keep him busy. They are also participating in senior learning programs and exercise classes in nearby Roswell, GA.

"What has made retirement for me is that I have been on the Board of Directors of the Boys and Girls Clubs for 19 years," Nethercut said. "That was another one where I had good fortune to get established while I was still on the TAPPI staff."

Nethercut was introduced to the Boys and Girls Clubs through a friend in Scarsdale, NY, who was National Director. "I was impressed by the job they were doing, so when I came down here, I made it a point to contact the Boys and Clubs of Metro Atlanta and they invited me to serve on the Board," he said.

The Boys and Girls Clubs are "like an inner-city Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts," Nethercut said. "Here in Atlanta there are about 15,000 kids, mostly black, mostly from single parent families, mostly on some form of welfare, for whom we provide many opportunities after school hours, including tutoring, athletics, and community projects," he said. Most of the kids are between the ages of 7-12 years. Many would be going home to an empty house or apartment to wait until an adult comes home.

"It's providing a safe place for kids to learn and to live....It's been a real pleasure for me to work with these people."

As part of the Special Recognition Award from TAPPI, Nethercut was allotted US\$ 20,000 to present to the charities of his choice. Of that, he gave US\$ 5000 to The Institute of Paper Science and Technology Alumni Association Scholarship Fund. Another US\$ 5000 went to the Robert C. Williams American Museum of Papermaking at IPST, for which he serves on the Advisory council.

The other half of the award—US\$10,000—went to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta. T.J

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