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NC Currents



Trenchless Technology:

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NC AWWA-WEA
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Portrait of



Steve Hilderhoff: A Passion for Engineering

From a young age, Hilderhoff knew he wanted to be an engineer. He comes from a large family where, out of 35 first cousins, six have chosen engineering as a career. “I remember in ninth grade, we had an assignment about careers and so I decided to write about being a civil engineer,” says Hilderhoff whose report was partly influenced by an older cousin who graduated with a civil engineering degree.

After high school, he began his undergraduate years at the University of Pittsburgh in his hometown. It was there that he first developed an interest in water and hydraulics.

In his junior year of college, he decided to send out resumes to nearly every engineering firm in the phone book. Subsequently, he was offered a summer internship by CET Engineering, a water/wastewater consulting firm in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where his family had relocated. “After my internship I had an even greater interest in learning more about the water and wastewater side of the business,” he recalls.

Upon graduating he accepted a fulltime job with CET. He then began planning and designing water and wastewater facilities, developing sanitary sewer system studies and using trenchless technology to rehabilitate buried utilities. During those years, he was greatly influenced by his coworkers, who readily shared their knowledge, “They taught me a lot about being an engineer and how to keep things simple,” he recalls.

Eventually, Hilderhoff’s growing interest in water and wastewater led him to pursue a Master’s Degree in Environmental Pollution Control from Pennsylvania State University. Working by day, he attended classes at night. “There were many times that my friends were going out, but I was going

home to write papers,” laughs Hilderhoff, adding that, as it turned out, one of his bosses at CET taught several classes at Penn State. “I had to put extra time into those classes for sure.”

His tenacity paid off. In 2001, the young consulting engineer was offered a position at Stearns and Wheler in its Raleigh, North Carolina office, where he continued his focus on designing and rehabilitating wastewater collection systems. In the late 2000’s, GHD merged with Stearns & Wheler and then coincidentally merged with CET shortly thereafter.

Throughout his career, Hilderhoff has been involved in several very large projects, including providing sewer systems to communities where there were none before. This encompassed developing facilities from the early stages of planning right through to construction. Other projects revolved around upgrading older sewers, pumping stations and treatment plants. He admits that seeing a project go from concept to reality is immensely gratifying. “What we do turns into a tangible product,” says the consulting engineer who has now spent more than two-dozen-years in the business, “and it affects a lot of people.”

Since relocating to Raleigh, Hilderhoff has been actively involved with the NC AWWA-WEA. He explains that it was a natural continuation of his volunteer work with the Pennsylvania Water Environment Association (PWEA). “Back in the mid-1990s I was encouraged to join by one of my managers when I was still in Harrisburg,” he recalls. “Since I was not sure how to participate, my manager had signed me up for the Membership Committee and as the ‘new guy’ I became responsible for assembling the biennial membership directory.”

Within his first year of arriving in North Carolina, Hilderhoff joined the Collection and Distribution School Committee. For the next eight years, he taught at two schools a year. Then John McLaughlin in GHD’s Charlotte office suggested he join the Communications Committee. “I enjoy the fact that we produce such a valuable product,” says Hilderhoff, pointing to his work with *NC Currents*. He also enjoys the camaraderie that accompanies putting together the magazine and all its technical content. It is something he plans to keep doing in the coming years.

“We are constantly thinking of ways to improve the magazine and find interesting, relevant themes for each issue, sometimes a year or more in advance,” he notes, adding that this sharing of knowledge is one of the many benefits of an association membership. “Being part of these associations has really helped me to meet people and understand the engineering community wherever I’ve worked.”

Along with his ongoing volunteer work, he is also looking forward to his new position at Dewberry and contributing to its success across North Carolina. After 24 years with GHD and the companies it eventually absorbed, Hilderhoff joined Dewberry in April 2015. He is excited about the opportunity and ready for a new challenge.

No matter what the project Hilderhoff’s level of commitment and passion for his work shine through. Always striving to make a positive difference both personally and professionally, he enjoys collaborating with his colleagues and teaching younger engineers. “I really enjoy seeing things get constructed,” explains Hilderhoff, who joined Dewberry as an Associate in April, “but it’s also about being able to work as a team to deliver a project that solves the issues our clients have and make a difference in the lives of those they serve.” 