

Pete Remembered as “A Leader Amongst Leaders”

by Tom Soboleski

Carbonfree Power Station was noticeably somber Monday morning as word of Pete’s sudden and unexpected passing on Saturday became known across the site. The shock elicited similar comments from everyone you talked to: Pete was the last person you would expect this to happen to.

“Pete is going to be sorely missed,” said operations supervisor Adam. “From a professional standpoint, his loss is huge. He had the respect of his peers and understood the importance of the issues. Pete took a leadership role amongst shift managers to push for excellence in human performance and configuration control. I think of him as a leader amongst leaders – he tended to rise to the top and lead that group.”

“I always felt mentally deficient when I was around Pete,” said Matt, former training manager, now director of safety and licensing for XYZ. “He was probably the smartest person on-site; brilliant technically.”

That aptitude took Pete to arguably one of the most technically demanding of all jobs – operating a carbon-free power plant. He excelled at it. “He loved being a shift manager,” said Matt. “Although he certainly could have moved up, he didn’t have an interest in moving up. He loved the work/life balance he had.”

That balance afforded Pete opportunities to channel his engineering mind to other challenges when not at work; and always with plenty of creativity and fun thrown in. This was best demonstrated by his organizing several co-workers and friends to compete in an annual raft race.

“Starting sometime around 1985, Pete and a group of us from work found out about the Flowing River Raft Race,” said engineer Dave. “The basic objective of the raft race was to build a homemade raft and race – I use that term very loosely – down the river to lots of food, fun, and party at the finish line. Our first-year

entry of 55-gallon drums and plywood looked more like a floating boat dock or swim platform than a racing craft, and we were completely outclassed by every other raft in the race. We also realized that the party was not just at the finish, but it was the entire race! I believe it was Pete who suggested that our next entry would be bigger, saying something like, 'We have the technology, we can make it better.' Thus we embarked on an adventure for about the next 10 years, every summer building and rebuilding our river raft."

Engineer Frank recalls that one year their entry in the race sank, which Pete termed "a minor design flaw." A redesign was created with new pontoons that included a riding lawnmower and a paddle wheel. "We had a lot of fun times on the raft. Pete always had a better idea."

Pete really was in his comfort zone when on the water. "One of his favorite things," said operator Steve, "was being on his boat in Hidden Cove and having a 'dark and strong'" (a concoction with Jamaican rum). "It seemed his rum always was low, though. I had to run to my boat to get the rum."

Pete began his career in the engineering department at ZYX Utilities after graduating from engineering college in 1980. He transferred to QXR in 1991, then to Carbonfree in 1993.

Pete left a positive impression on everyone who interacted with him. Technical Specialist Martin, who first met Pete at QXR, said, "From that moment, I always respected Pete's profound respect for operational safety and for each individual."

"Even though he was very intelligent," said engineer Ryan, "his ability to relate to people and make them smile and laugh was very unique. He had a very natural way with people." Ryan also teamed with Pete to compete in state bridge tournaments. "His sense of humor added to our card nights."

Matt has vivid memories of those card nights, when he and Ryan paired off against Pete and Larry. "Ryan and I were more skilled at the game than Pete and Larry. It was especially interesting. Bridge is a game of etiquette, it's gentlemanly, so table

talk and banter is unacceptable. Pete was famous for his constant chattering; it was willing and intentional. I think he did it because he thought it would improve his chances of beating Ryan and Matt.”

Having a big heart, whether for charity or his co-workers, was also singled out as a trait of Pete’s. While he was reactor engineering supervisor at QXR, “He liked to buy pizza for us,” said engineer Kristen. “He would buy and go get it, too!”

But there was a tradeoff, said engineer Bob: “In return, we had to let him stand on his soapbox. But he was very generous.”

Generosity was also cited by Walter, who now works at BQX, but was a shift technical advisor under Pete at Carbonfree. “Besides being a great friend, I know that I can attribute a least a few pounds to the ice cream cakes he used to make and bring in for us to eat on night shift. He was one of the smartest and funniest people I have ever had the privilege to know. He was always good for a joke, cigar or glass of bourbon. He knew when it was time to work and certainly knew how to play when that time came. You could always count on him to be there if you needed help with anything and he was always the first to reach into his pocket if it would help.”

As these memories show, Pete had the unique ability to make meaningful impacts in both technical and humorous ways, both in work and outside of work. Adam perhaps summarizes this best: “To characterize Pete – he was a guy who always made it fun to come to work; yet he had an unwavering line of professionalism. He could have fun at work but kept it very professional. He was a larger-than-life personality, and we are reeling in his loss.”