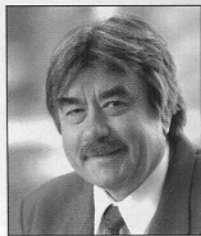


George Ragula Pauses Just Long Enough To Discuss Fast-Paced Career



George Ragula

2005 AGA Distribution Achievement Award Winner

by **Lew Bullion**, Senior Editor

George Ragula, distribution technology manager at Public Service Electric & Gas Co. (PSE&G) in Newark, NJ, recently was recognized with the 2005 American Gas Association Distribution Achievement Award. The award recognizes an individual who has made outstanding contributions to the science and art of gas distribution.

Ragula is a distribution technology manager for PSE&G, responsible for evaluating cutting edge technologies that increase efficiency and effectiveness of operations with a strong emphasis on reducing operational costs and improving safety. The hard-charging Ragula handles planning, coordinating, managing and implementing procedural and equipment technology transfer with particular emphasis for the past 17 years on the usage of trenchless technologies.

During his 26-year effort to help improve gas industry operations, Ragula has been directly involved with leading R&D organizations such as Gas Technology Institute, NYSEARCH — Northeast Gas Association, AGA and the Office of Pipeline Safety. His work has earned him recognition as an R&D leader that has evolved into close relationships with international organizations and utilities.

His finely honed instincts have led to the development and commercialization of technologies resulting in multi-million dollar benefits to the gas industry and direct cost savings to PSE&G.

Prior to joining PSE&G in 1988, Ragula held a variety of positions at Brooklyn Union including project estimating, field engineering/construction, system planning and network analysis, design, codes and standards, contract administration, gas leak detection including emergency response and drafting.

He is currently serving as Chairman of the NYSEARCH, Northeast Gas Association R&D Committee and is also serving as Chairman for two critical gas industry R&D initiatives — PE Rework and Increasing the PE Design Factor from 0.32 to 0.40.

In 2000, he received AGA's Milton W. Heath Sr. Memorial Award in recognition of his contributions in leak detection.

P&GJ: *What were your interests as a young person and did you always intend to go into engineering?*

Ragula: I had very much a European upbringing since my parents had only been in the U.S. about two years when I was born in a flat on Manhattan's East Side in the early 1950s. As my father, also an engineer, was learning English to break into his profession, we eventually moved to Brooklyn. I was taught at a very young age the value of hard work, honesty and its benefits.

My dad was a mechanical engineer and my mother worked in a hospital laboratory. Every summer my sister and I went to a Byelorussian resort in upstate New York where we escaped from the city environment. There, I started working regularly at the ripe old age of 12 each summer.

I was into a lot of sports including soccer, swimming, backpacking, handball, basketball, softball, skiing, track & field and football. I enjoyed the personal gratification of competing. Eventually, football became my passion that led me to play in a semi-pro league as tight end up until the age of 26. I was working as an engineer and still playing football on weekends.

I was always naturally inquisitive and wanted to know what made things tick. I would read, take apart and explore to feed my curiosity. I remember taking apart many more things than I could put back together. As I grew older, I liked to build model rockets and airplanes that I regularly flew. Eventually, not really caring for the arts and recognizing I was more technically oriented, I realized that engineering was the direction to head into. My father certainly supported me in this endeavor and gave me many insights.

After attending Brooklyn Technical High School where I received a broad technical education, I went to the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. I worked part-time as a cab driver which was very entertaining, to say the least. At Poly, my initial thrust was aerospace engineering since that area always fascinated me as a child, but with the significant downturn of that industry in the early 1970s, I decided a broader range engineering discipline would be more beneficial. That is how I ended up with a B.S. in

Mechanical Engineering.

P&GJ: *Who do you consider as your strongest role model?*

Ragula: My father. He worked extremely hard but always had time for the family and kept a great sense of humor in the process.

My parents came to this country with virtually nothing — a classic example of immigrants who arrived with just the clothes on their backs. They fled the communist takeover in Byelorussia after fighting them in the local resistance movements during World War II that my grandfather headed as senator of Byelorussia. Eventually, they landed in Poland for a period of time. When Poland fell to communism, they fled to Germany, which I guess was the lesser of two evils. During that time, my mother worked as an actress to support my father's going to school. When that work ended, she sold cigarettes for money to support his education. He had to learn both Polish and German in order to finally complete his college education over a 12-year period. He finally received the equivalent of a master's degree in mechanical engineering in Germany. He was clearly an extremely committed individual and never wavered from his goals despite the obstacles he faced in war-torn countries.

In the U.S., he worked at any job he could get while learning English until he landed a good engineering job where his talents were recognized. He was a dedicated professional, loyal to both his company and family that firmly believed in the American dream. In my youth, I think our relationship was strained at times because he always pushed me hard to become successful, but we became very close once I got out into the business world.

P&GJ: *Which of your accomplishments do you find most satisfying?*

Ragula: At this point, I feel I am at the pinnacle of my career in the gas industry. I don't believe it can be attributed to a single accomplishment, but more so to a series of accomplishments involving R&D and new technology in a variety of areas over a peri-

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of time that have helped move PSE&G and the gas industry into the future.

I've been actively involved on the ground-floor level with TV inspection systems for gas, lining technologies, third-party damage detection systems, robotics, leak-detection improvements, non-destructive testing and various material improvements. I am particularly satisfied with my focus and accomplishments in the trenchless area because as we all know, customer impact, industry restoration costs and the severity of the requirements imposed by jurisdictions having authority are increasing dramatically. That affects the bottom line.

P&GJ: What is your, PSE&G's and the gas distribution industry's biggest challenges looking ahead?

Ragula: The biggest challenges facing all of us involve the continued identification and support for R&D, both from a technical input perspective and funding. Supporting the commercialization and implementation process

are also key components if we're to be successful in the overall process. There is nothing worse than achieving a technical success and having it become a business failure. The industry is striving to achieve operational excellence in the safe, reliable and cost-competitive delivery of natural gas.

The use of R&D to achieve these goals is critical and essential for moving us into the 21st century. At PSE&G, the low-hanging R&D fruit have been picked clean and implemented, so out of necessity, there is more of a focus on mid-term and long-term projects. But, we need to be able to react quickly and effectively to any technology that bubbles up to the surface that can help make progress.

Our industry, by its very nature, has historically been very conservative. Being more progressive is always a challenge, but doing so in a more timely manner is key. Becoming a leader instead of a follower should be the norm in that regard.

P&GJ: What do you advise young people who are considering an engineering career?

Ragula: In this day and age, with technology moving as fast as it is, my advice is there will always be a large demand for an engi-

neering workforce. If you are technically oriented, it's a natural progression. Engineering is such a broad area and covers the gamut from being a practical hands-on field engineering type to a theoretician locked up behind a desk. You have the ability to pick and choose the niche spot of engineering you feel most comfortable in and like the most. It is a very challenging job with considerable self-satisfaction since you generally live, feel and smell the results of your labor. Also, take your PE exam while you're in college when everything is still fresh. That is the single major regret I have for not doing so.

Turn over every stone and don't take anything for granted. Often, the best opportunities or processes for improvement are the ones that others made a quick judgment on and walked away from. Take your responsibility for your work and your job seriously. The fulfillment will eventually follow. **P&GJ**

Editor's Note: Do you know someone whose involvement with the pipeline industry would make him/her a good candidate for Q&A? If so, Senior Editor Lew Bullion wants to know. He can be reached at lbullion@oildom.com.