

Don McVittie (1930-2008)



“...time
remembered
is grief
forgotten...”
(A.C. Swinburne)

Standing solidly in command of his boat, Raven, Don McVittie stares out from his photo in the collection of former volunteer leaders in AGMA Headquarters. No one can doubt who was in charge here.

Donald R. McVittie passed away on Sunday evening January 20, 2008 at his home in Seattle, Washington. Mr. McVittie is survived by his wife, Red, three children and four grandchildren.

With the approval of his family, AGMA has created a memorial scholarship fund – the Donald R. McVittie Memorial Education Fund – to help fund the education of gear engineers. Contributions should be sent to AGMA Foundation, 500 Montgomery Street, Suite 350, Alexandria, VA 22314 with a designation “Donald R. McVittie Memorial Education Fund.”

A few months after I joined AGMA, a board member saw Don with a couple of his influential friends at a meeting and commented to me that “the floor tilts when those three come in.” Looking at his record of leadership and accomplishment at AGMA, it's easy to see why he was such an influential person.

Don began his service to AGMA and our industry in 1972. Although his main interest was the Technical Division where he has served on many committees, including the Gear Rating, the Wind Turbine Gearing, the Inspection & Handbook, the Epicyclic Enclosed Drives and the Computer Programming committees, a review of the record shows that Don was willing to help wherever he was needed.

He was President of AGMA in 1984/1985 and served as Vice President of AGMA's Technical Division from 1986 to 1991.

Looking at Board minutes from that time, one sees that under Don's tenure, AGMA purchased real estate, helping to guarantee the financial future of the Association; AGMA was accredited to develop ANSI/AGMA technical standards by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and the Association sought and received recognition as the US representative to the international gearing committee TC60 in ISO. (In 1993, AGMA was elected by the international gearing community as Secretariat [chair of this committee].

Don received every possible award and recognition given by the Association -- the Technical Division Executive Committee Award, the Product Division Executive Committee Award, the Board of Directors' Award, the E. P. Connell and the Lifetime Achievement Award for service to AGMA. He was elected an honorary life member of AGMA in 1998. Additionally for his work on the international standardization, he received ANSI's Meritorious Service Award in 1995.

Wendy Allen was on the staff of AGMA in the late 1980s and early 1990s and was the first Executive Director of the AGMA Foundation – another aspect where Don's fingerprints are clearly visible. She got to know Don well over the years and wrote, “when I sat down to write about my experiences with Don, I thought that it would be relatively simple. I was not very involved with the Technical Committees and so my exposure to Don was more limited. However, the problem I encountered was linguistic—there just aren't enough ways to express the magnitude of the impact he had on the industry and on AGMA.

“What words come to mind when I think of Don? Smart. Committed. Bold. Driven. Optimistic. Caring. A leader, and a pioneer as well. No problem too big, no job too small.

“When Don wanted something done, it usually was. And Don generally knew what he wanted, as well as how he wanted it done. Don's record of diligence and commitment raised him to legendary status in the industry.

“When I was introduced to Don I thought “uh-oh.” The astronaut haircut and determined stride were

enough to send me scurrying back to my office. I was intimidated by Don for the first few years. He cut a wide swath through the office when he arrived in Alexandria from Seattle or on his way back from Germany or where ever. So I avoided him, thereby avoiding displeasing him in any way. I wish that I hadn't avoided him for so long, because once I got to know him better I found out what a considerate, bright and funny guy he really was.

"When the Small Business Committee, led by Roland Ramberg, decided to meet in Seattle, I could avoid Don no more. I winced at the thought of a February meeting in Seattle, but Don assured me that it would be wonderful and we might even see flowers. In fact, there were a few buds here and there, but by far the warmest memory of the experience is Don's determination to make sure everyone had a great time. Along with Roland, Don chose wines, picked restaurants and suggested side trips. As always, Don loomed large.

"From my view point as a non-technical person, Don did the industry a great service by using his vitality to whip-up enthusiasm; loaning his expertise and his imagination to take tasks to another level; and making his time and ideas continuously available.

"Don was the golden gear at the end of AGMA's rainbow, and I expect that he will be sorely missed by all, colleagues and staff."

Near the end of his life, Don asked Bill Bradley, recently retired head of AGMA's Technical Division and a long-time friend of Don and Red McVittie, to help close his office. Bill wrote this about the last time he and his wife Jean were with Don.

"Over the years he has been a business companion, mentor, and friend to my wife, Jean, and me. We were able to spend some time with Mac and his loving family during his last week and were very moved by the way in which he managed the process of dying."

"I want to share an incident while we were there. Jean was reading a book that I had finished, "Sacred Journey of the Peaceful Warrior" by Dan Millman, and pointed-out a quote at the beginning of chapter 22 titled "Living Until We Die" that she read the night before.

*"True teachers use themselves as bridges
over which they invite their students to cross;
then, having facilitated their crossing, joyfully collapse,
encouraging them to create bridges of their own"*

- Nikos Kazantzakis

"When Jean shared this with Mac he said, 'Yea, that's what it's all about.' She replied 'that's You'.

"Another quote from the same chapter by Dan was 'Among friends, there are no good-byes.' This was not shared with Mac, but I felt no need to say good-bye when we left. It was a good journey with Mac over the years. He was a modern 'Renaissance Man.' We can not explain in words all our feelings, about our times together, and the ways that he enriched our lives, but all the memories will survive." □

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