



Introduction of Robert McGennis
2018 Honorary Member of AAPT
by Rita Leahy

It is an honor and genuine pleasure to introduce Bob McGennis, whom I've known since our careers overlapped at the Asphalt Institute nearly 31 years ago. I think I can honestly say that I knew Bob when he had hair ... not on his head, but his upper lip!

I consider Bob a “man for all seasons” because he has been successful while employed in virtually every aspect of the world of asphalt: in engineering consulting; state DOT; trade association; researcher in an academic environment; implementation of research through technology transfer; and most recently in the refining business. Rather than reciting the laundry list of his employers and numerous accomplishments and contributions to AAPT while on the BOD and as President, I want to highlight the leadership qualities that make him worthy of this honor.

As a leader Bob has always been confident enough to say, “Tell me something I don't want to hear.”

An effective leader, Bob always takes less than his fair share of the credit and more than his fair share of the blame. He is the man doing the magic behind the scenes while graciously allowing the magician to take the applause.

Always a very perceptive leader, he does not confuse activity with productivity; nor does not confuse motion with action.

Like most engineers, Bob is methodical, meticulous, thorough and of course, somewhat anal-retentive. However, he also has some of the “soft skills” that so many engineers lack. He communicates effectively in both the spoken and written word. Additionally, Bob has a keen eye for talent, having recruited Gerry Huber and Mike Anderson to the Asphalt Institute, whose contributions to industry, in general, and to AAPT in particular, are well known. Finally, let me share another of Bob’s “soft side,” with a couple of photos.

1. Bob heading to the field with his co-pilot. The welcoming committee upon his return.
2. Analyzing the data with his deputy chief of staff. Relaxing with his best buddies after a tough day at the office.

Although he is in excellent health, Mande, his lovely and supportive wife told me that Bob said, “If there are no dogs in Heaven, then when I die I want to go where they went.”

Ladies and gentlemen Bob McGennis, a respected colleague and dear friend; a man whom I hold in the highest regard, both personally and professionally.

Bob McGennis Remarks

I would like to thank Rita for nominating me for this award. I met Rita almost 35 years ago. She and Bob picked me up at a hotel in College Park, Maryland, and took me out to a seafood place to eat. We had a lovely evening. Rita, I never could have imagined that evening that you and I would have a night like this more than 30 years later. I can’t think of anyone I would rather share this honor with than you. I’m so happy for you.

When Mike called me to tell me that I had been nominated for this award, my first thought was “I don’t really deserve this.” There are people in the audience not yet nominated that deserve it more and also, I don’t feel like I don’t belong in the same group as the current Honorary Members, who are giants in our business. But after some reflection, I realized that this would be my one and only opportunity to tell all of you about the people that have meant so much to me in my career. In all ways, this honor is their honor as well. I would like to show you some pictures of them and share with you what they have meant to me.

The first person is Dr. Freddy Roberts. Freddy was one of my teachers in college, but more important, I had the great fortune to work with Freddy as a young engineer while at the University of Texas. For those of you that don’t know, some years later he became the first Director of NCAT. To me, Freddy was like the Superman of engineers. He had such good work and technical habits and did so much to encourage me. As an engineer through and through, Freddy was and remains my role model. Freddy was the person that encouraged me to join AAPT

and instilled in me the importance of thorough reviews of technical papers. Freddy passed away about 15 years ago, way too young. But I still think of him almost every day as I go about my chores as an engineer. To this day I still do things in certain ways because that's the way Freddy did them.

The next person is Dr. Thomas Kennedy. I first met Tom as a sophomore engineering student at UT. I was only 19 years old. I'm now 62 years old, so you can say I knew Tom my entire adult life. Most of you know Tom as one of the foremost asphalt material researchers in the last 40 years. He was the architect of the PG asphalt binder specification that's used to buy and sell asphalt all over North America. But to me, I will always remember Tom for being the best teacher I ever had. I took quite a few classes from Tom in both graduate and undergraduate school. I think he took great pleasure in seeing his students grow and succeed using the knowledge he imparted to us. I was able to visit with Tom just a few weeks before he passed away last year, and I asked him, "Tom as engineering professor, what were you best at, a teacher or researcher?" Those of you that know Tom would not be surprised at his answer, which was "both!"

Not long after getting out of graduate school, I received a phone call one day from Ben Kallas, who was a very well recognized pavement engineer at the Asphalt Institute's headquarters in College Park, Maryland. He told me about a job opening at the Institute's Austin, Texas, office. I told Mr. Kallas that I wasn't interested, but he persisted and asked if I could fly up to Little Rock and talk with Jay Hensley, who was the Institute's district engineer in Arkansas. I reluctantly agreed to the visit. Jay picked me up at the airport and it was about a 20-minute drive to his office. In that 20 minutes, I realized that it would be an opportunity of a lifetime to work with Jay. So, in 20 minutes I went from "not interested" to "I absolutely have to take this job." He is the smartest, most versatile asphalt technologist I have ever met. He is an expert at asphalt mixture volumetrics, he can diagnose problems at hot plants and paving operations, he developed ways to use asphalt to solve problems in railroad track structures, he can show you how to rehabilitate a concrete pavement using principles of fracture mechanics and great big rocks, and many, many other things. Working with Jay over the years demonstrated to me what was possible with asphalt materials. Throughout my career, he has been my greatest technical inspiration. It is fitting that when Jay retired from the Institute, he functioned as that organization's Chief Engineer. Jay and his wife Wilma are retired and living in Pea Ridge, Arkansas, where I and others with similar ties to Jay occasionally visit. He remains an inspiring individual.

The next person I want to tell you about is Charlie Smoot. Charlie was for a long time the Executive Director of the Texas Hot Mix Asphalt Pavement Association. By the time I accepted the role of district engineer with Asphalt Institute, Charlie was already a legend in the industry in Texas. He was highly respected by asphalt suppliers, contractors, and the management of the Texas Highway Department. I, on the other hand, was a 27-year old nobody. It would have been so easy for Charlie to marginalize me, but he did the opposite and became the biggest mentor of my

entire career. He made sure that I was included in meetings and initiatives that were important and helped give me badly needed credibility. I thought at the time that we made a good team and I always hoped that he felt the same way. For someone of his stature, Charlie was extremely humble. I asked him one time why he didn't have all his awards, diplomas, etc., on the wall in his office. He commented to me, "you mean I don't have an I love me wall?!" To this day I remember that and since I want to be like Charlie, the only thing I have on my wall is a highway map of Arizona and New Mexico and a torn-up dinner napkin that only Becky McDaniel and her daughter Elizabeth (aka Libby) can tell you about. Charlie passed away three years ago, but some of us were able to attend his memorial service and tell his wife Anita how much we liked and respected Charlie and appreciated all he did for us.

About 25 years ago, I was working at the Institute's headquarters, by then in Lexington, and I was tasked with leading a team to develop a training program and bits of technology pertaining to what was then a new system called Superpave. This initiative was funded by the FHWA. It was at the time, new, exciting, exhausting, and in some ways controversial. Leading that team was a pivotal event in that it charted the course for the second half of my career where I am today. I want to tell you about four people that helped me through that challenging time and had way more to do with any success we had than me.

During that time, I was lucky to be led by John Bukowski, who was our contracting officer with FHWA. Probably due to the fact that he is a United States Marine, John is a proficient leader, and that's what he did for me. John established a very clear vision of what needed to be done for the project, who our customers were, and what his expectations were. John was our biggest advocate and that made our job so much easier and allowed us to be successful. His demeanor was often stern when discussing project details, but then he had this impish smile and that always signified that everything would be okay, no matter what was going on. Years later, John experienced a very severe health issue. I remember visiting him in the hospital and he looked really sick and therefore I must have looked really scared, because before I left he flashed that impish smile at me and once again, I knew everything would be okay. And it was. John got over his health problem and enjoyed a long and distinguished career with FHWA. He retired about a year ago and is spending most of his time playing grandpa but remains the most inspiring leader I ever had.

Hussain Bahia is the person I would like to recognize next. He was a critical team member because at the time, my experience had all been in the areas of asphalt mixes and construction. Hussain provided the binder rheology knowledge that I desperately needed and that was very instrumental in the success of the project. As one of the researchers involved in the development of the Superpave system, he was an important link to that research effort. Hussain shared his knowledge openly and in a patient way so that even I could understand it. Well, most of it anyway. Often times, however, his explanation began with the statement, "Bob, it's all about the energy principle." I would nod knowingly. So tonight, I am going admit to Hussain

that I have no idea what the “energy principle” is, although as we remain great friends, I expect sometime that he will take the time to explain it to me. So, what ever happened to him? Of course, Hussain has a wonderful family consisting of a lovely wife and three beautiful daughters. But to me his most enduring legacy will be as a Professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. He remains one of the preeminent asphalt material researchers in the U.S. but most importantly, turns out a prodigious number of students who will remain prominent in our industry for many years to come.

Mike Anderson is the next person I would like to recognize, who was also instrumental in the success of the FHWA project. Although Mike was a proficient teacher of the new Superpave technology, his greatest contribution was the many experiments he conducted to help fill gaps that were left over from the research that produced Superpave. Mike is the best experimentalist that I have ever known, quite likely because he is the most intellectually honest person I have ever known. He also had a calming influence on me. When some feature of the Superpave system didn't work the way it was supposed to, and I got frustrated, Mike would calmly go about his job of solving the problem. For example, some day you can ask him how 0.99 degrees actually turned into 1.27 degrees. So, whatever happened to Mike? Now you know him as Mike Anderson, Director of Research at Asphalt Institute, and Mike Anderson, Executive Director of AAPT!

The last person related to the FHWA project that I would like to recognize is Amanda Hall. Mandee was the person that made sure all of the administrative details of the project were handled. Among those details included hotel and food arrangements for attendees. When the project started, I told the technical team that no matter how well they did their job, whether teaching or experimenting, that what participants would most remember was whether they were comfortable, well fed, and their needs attended to. I am going to give away a secret tonight and that is Mandee's source of the famous chili that all of the participants raved about. The truth is, she somehow discovered that Wendy's would sell you a gallon of their chili and that's what she used! The chili that everyone liked so much came from Wendy's. Evidently, Mandee knows much more than how to fool people with chili because she is now the Executive Vice President of the Arizona Chapter of the Associated General Contractors where she routinely hangs out with senators and governors and represents the interests of highway and heavy contractors. One other thing, she married me and is sitting right here!

Twenty years ago, my career took a turn to the right and I became an asphalt supplier in the Southwest. By then, I was a well experienced asphalt technologist, but I didn't know anything about being an asphalt supplier. Fortunately, there were two people that helped me immensely in overcoming that serious deficiency.

The first person is Al Anderson. When I went to work for what was then called Navajo Western Asphalt Company, Al managed our terminal in Glendale, Arizona. In much the same way that Charlie Smoot mentored me in all things pertaining to

the hot mix industry, Al mentored me in all the ways of the asphalt supply business. Many times, I would find myself in Al's office trying to figure out how to fix something out in our plant that I had messed up. He always figured out a way to make sure that we had product on time and on spec, despite my best efforts otherwise. What Al gave me was good advice and most important, perspective on everything in the asphalt terminal business. Al retired from our company about seven years ago and is now living large in Phoenix. He is always on the lookout for a hot rod to restore.

The last person I would like to recognize is Mike Wade. Just about the time I started getting comfortable in my role as an asphalt technologist at an asphalt terminal, we became joint ventured with Koch Materials Company, at that time one of the largest asphalt suppliers in the world. I became responsible for asphalt technology at remote terminals with product slates of which I had no understanding. At that time Mike was a marketing rep at our terminal in Artesia, New Mexico. But Mike had held just about every job in our company including terminal manager. Mike shared many qualities with Jay Hensley in that he was versatile in a lot of different areas of the asphalt supply business. But he was also like Al in that he freely shared perspective with me in areas where it was desperately needed. Much of my knowledge of asphalt emulsions, products for which I had no previous experience, came from Mike. Operations people sitting 20 feet away from Mike in New Mexico would call me for solutions to problems. I would call Mike to get his opinion about a solution. Instead of just walking down the hall and explaining things to the plant people Mike would say, "no, you are going to solve their problem." He knew it was important for the operations folks to respect me. In that way, Mike is the most selfless person I have ever met. Mike retired a few years ago and remains in Artesia where he is the past president of the Artesia Car Club and quite probably knows more than anyone on earth about rebuilding small block Ford engines.

I apologize for taking so much time at our banquet. But as I said, I will never again have such an opportunity to recognize the people that have meant so much to me and been so helpful in my career. Although I still don't think I deserve this honor, I will agree to accept it on behalf Freddy Roberts, Tom Kennedy, Jay Hensley, Charlie Smoot, John Bukowski, Hussain Bahia, Mike Anderson, Amanda Hall, Al Anderson, and Mike Wade. Thank you so much for this great honor. I will put the plaque on my wall and I think Charlie Smoot would be okay with that.