MEMORIAL RESOLUTION OF THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS ELDON C. “RED” WAGNER

Eldon C. Wagner passed away at Oakwood Village in Madison, Wisconsin on May 16, 2001 at the age of 86. “Red” as he was called by all who knew him, was emeritus professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. With his passing, the university community has lost a dedicated and esteemed colleague and friend.

“Red” was born on a farm in Hillsboro, Wisconsin in 1914 and moved to Madison in 1928. He graduated from Madison West High School in 1932, and received his BS degree in civil engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1936. He was then appointed as an instructor of civil engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he was responsible for teaching courses in surveying and mapping. He completed his graduate work and continued to teach at the UW-Madison until 1941 when he entered the U. S. Army to serve during World War II. In 1937 “Red” married the love of his life, his dear Roselyn. They enjoyed 63 wonderful years together, until Roselyn passed away in January, 2000. They were almost inseparable partners, and deeply in love till the end. Together they raised two wonderful children, Sally Wagner Seinwill and The Reverend Thomas Wagner, and at his passing, “Red” had four grandchildren and one great grandchild.

During the war “Red” served in the North African and European Theatres, heading a topographic mapping battalion that compiled maps for the allied forces. After the war he returned to Madison and continued his teaching appointment as instructor. He was promoted to assistant professor in 1947, to associate professor in 1950, and to professor in 1957. He continued teaching until his retirement in 1978, a period which spanned 42 years. “Red” also continued in the service of his country through participation in the U.S. Army Reserves, finally retiring in 1965 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Much of “Red’s” wartime service consisted of using aerial photographs and a relatively new science called photogrammetry to prepare maps in support of the war effort. He recognized that these aerial techniques, which enabled maps to be compiled faster and more economically, could also be applied in compiling topographic information and maps needed to support planning and design in civil engineering and other fields. Thus, upon returning to the University of Wisconsin after the war, he immediately introduced the first course in photogrammetry into the surveying and mapping curriculum. Under “Red’s” direction, the surveying and photogrammetry program at Wisconsin grew to become one of the most renowned in the United States. It attracted students from around the world, and produced graduates who became professors of surveying and mapping at universities throughout the United States and the world, and others who became leaders in surveying and mapping businesses and government organizations.

A memorial on the life of “Red” Wagner would not be complete without mention of the Civil Engineering Summer Surveying Camps which he directed throughout his tenure at the University of Wisconsin. They were first held at Devils Lake State Park, and later at Taylor Lake in the Chequamegon National Forest of northern Wisconsin. Although some new theory was taught at the camps, their principal thrust was to provide students with practical experience in a civil engineering job-like situation. “Red” truly believed that this was an extremely important element in engineering education.

“Red” Wagner was an outstanding and dedicated teacher, and in testimony of this he was the recipient of many awards. In 1966 he received the Benjamin Smith Reynolds Award from the University of Wisconsin. In 1969 he was presented with the Engineer-of-the-Year in Education Award from the
Wisconsin Society of Professional Engineers, and in 1974 he received the Earle J. Fennell Award for Distinguished Teaching from the American Congress on Surveying and Mapping. “Red” was sincerely interested in his students, and always dealt with them in a friendly and helpful manner in counseling them and fielding their questions. He was also keenly interested in their participation in extracurricular activities, and for many years he served as adviser to the student chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

During his career, Professor Wagner worked tirelessly to further the professional practice of land surveying. This was especially true in his home state of Wisconsin, where he was one of the co-organizers and founders of the Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors. This professional organization has grown from a few members to a force which now numbers nearly a thousand members. “Red” played a major role in drafting the original legislation that required land surveyors to be registered in Wisconsin, and he also assisted in drafting the state statutes that govern design and layout of subdivisions. He advised the Registration Board on matters concerning Land Surveying Registration, and prepared and graded the registration examinations for many years. He also served on the Ethics Review Board. Through these and many other efforts, Professor Wagner has been fundamental to the improvement of land surveying provided to the citizens of Wisconsin, as well as the nation.

“Red” was an active member of many professional organizations. He was a fellow of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), served as president of the Wisconsin Section, was editor of the ASCE Surveying and Mapping Journal, and served as chairman of the Executive Committee of the Surveying and Mapping Division. He was a member of the National Society of Professional Engineers, and the Wisconsin Society of Professional Engineers, served as its state secretary, and also as president of the Southwest Chapter. “Red” was also a fellow of the American Congress on Surveying and Mapping, a member of the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing, a member of the American Society for Engineering Education, and a charter member of the Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors. ASCE awarded Professor Wagner with the highest honor bestowed by its Surveying and Mapping Division, the “ASCE Surveying and Mapping Award”. “Red” was registered both as a professional engineer and as a land surveyor in the State of Wisconsin.

Through the years, many good times were shared between “Red” and his students and associates. These included student picnics with hamburgers and brats, and of course softball games between faculty and students. Those of us involved in those experiences will long remember “Red” standing on the mound, and the antics he would sometimes go through in delivering pitches. And the students never seemed to be able to master his pitching skills. In remembering “Red” we would be remiss not to mention his great gift as a story teller. His favorite, and everyone else’s too, was the story of a little snake with a lisp in his hiss. And who could ever forget “Red’s patented whistle, which just added to the drama of his stories.

Although this last year was a difficult one for “Red” he never lost his great sense of humor, his wonderful smile, or his faith in God. And his trademark, that beautiful red hair, never changed its color right up to the end. Though small in stature, “Red” Wagner had a huge heart. He will be missed by his family, and by all of us who were fortunate enough to have been his students, colleagues, and friends.

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