

ANGLE and LINE

A Quarterly Newsletter by COWAN ASSOCIATES, INC.

Engineers • Designers • Surveyors

Serving Business, Municipalities, and Industry since 1958



"A Man for all Seasons"

Richard S. Cowan, P.E. (1910-1998)

As we enjoy these longer summer evening hours, with plenty of time for after-work golf, kids, yard work, and barbecues, I particularly enjoy watching the fireflies.

For me there is nothing more peaceful than sitting on my back porch and watching the last long shadows of the grape arbor disappear against the dimly lit west wall of my house. Their parting dance ushers in the beacons of early summer nights, the fireflies. I never tire of marveling at their display of fireworks in slow motion, trying to imagine the people whose spirits they represent, according to Indian lore.

When one lands on my hand, reached out in anticipation, I easily remember people who were near and dear to me or who made a profound impact on my life.

As we are heading into summer, Cowan Associates, Inc. is reaching the midpoint of our 40th anniversary year. We are taking stock of who we are and where we want to go. We also realize how much of our company's identity is still shaped by the legacy of its founder, Richard S. Cowan. He was known as Dick among his friends, many of whom had been his clients first.

At age 49, Dick found himself laid-off by his engineering employer in Philadelphia during a downward business cycle. Probably tired from commuting to Philadelphia and with the prospect of starting over, Dick decided to start his own engineering business. The first two years were rough going, with mostly preparing shop drawings for steel fabricators and machine shops. However, Dick had an uncanny ability to sense business opportunities, often before his competitors did. He discovered the fledgling market of municipal engineering in the early 1960's. Within a couple of years, he had a municipal

client list of some twenty-plus Townships and Boroughs in a four county area.

There were many anecdotes handed down by old timers about his emerging career as a municipal engineer. My favorite one is how he single-handedly surveyed and designed road improvements for a country road, which became one of today's major thoroughfares in Bucks County. Dick supposedly built his own survey instrument for this job, with a hand level mounted on a piece of two-by-four construction lumber.

In the late 1960's, Dick sensed a second major opportunity for business development in the area of wastewater treatment and water supply. The Clean Water Act was passed in 1970. Dick was already appointed as engineer to Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority to design Richland Township's first sewerage system, and actively networking to become Milford-Trumbauersville Area Sewer Authority's first engineer.

It is this sewer work that contributed to another famous Cowan anecdote. The field crew was busily gathering sewer as-built information when one of them had the misfortune of squashing his thumb while closing a manhole. Before rushing him to the doctor, they brought him back to the office so

that he could wash off the construction dust and become more presentable. As the surveyor bandaged his injured thumb, Dick, ever so focused, inquired how deep it was. The poor soul replied, "I'm not sure, I think it's to the bone." "No, no, the manhole," said Dick, clarifying the purpose of his question.



The President's Corner



The first issue of the Cowan **ANGLE and LINE!** Our goal in preparing it is to inform you of our history, our work, our goals, and to open a new media for dialogue with you.

We believe the client is the most important part of our business. To those of you who have been long-standing clients, we appreciate your confidence and

loyalty. We welcome our new clients and value the opportunity to serve you. We invite those of you who are not our clients to come and talk to us; investigate what we have to offer to you.

We invite your comments and suggestions on our service and response to your needs — all of your comments, the good, the bad, and the ugly. We want to have a conversation with you about our service. Our promise is that we will listen until we fully understand what you have to say. By understanding, we will provide you with better service. Our desired outcome is to have you be satisfied with your relationship with Cowan Associates, Inc.

Our commitments are:

- 1) To find the solution that is workable for everyone involved.
- 2) To have a successful business relationship built upon mutual comfort and trust.
- 3) To have clean, clear communication. When we have clear direction, projects are more easily accomplished.

Call me at (215) 536-7075; write me at 120 Penn-Am Drive, Quakertown, PA 18951 or e-mail me at <cowanassoc@erols.com>.

William D. Kee P.E., President

Our Mission at Cowan Associates, Inc. is to continue to strive for excellency and the highest level of personalized services for all of our clients through quality work. This shall be accomplished by the personal and professional integrity of a resourceful, competent and responsive team of experienced professionals and technologically advanced methodology and equipment.

Our Philosophy: The highest level of personalized service for our clients can be achieved by promoting and developing our staff to its full potential. The continued development of competency, professional integrity, experience, and responsiveness of the staff is crucial to the continual strive for excellency as a team.

Cowan

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Staying focused was always a hallmark of Dick Cowan and resulted in his and our "hands-on" attitude and "can do" philosophy. I can still hear him lecturing me that as an engineer, you better find a solution, no matter what the problem. We were shaped by his expectation that anything can be done and, therefore, would be. He encouraged us to push the boundaries of our perceived limitations. When things were slow, we all quickly became multi-disciplined. This even included building maintenance. Dick gave us a glowing example by coming in every morning at 6:00 a.m. to empty the trash cans and start the coffee. During my first year as a branch office manager, he decided to help me generate work for the home office by doing a location survey in the Poconos, which included cross-sections for a bridge replacement. This was during an early bitter cold snap and there was two feet of snow on the ground.

My only permanent staff member kept the field notes. I was the instrument man, and Dick, the rodman. As usual, he wore a three-piece suit, with a trench coat, his typical little fedora hat, and rubber galoshes over his dress shoes. The icy wind kept Dick moving quickly in and out of the snow banks lining the roadway. Lunch time had passed and our growling stomachs added several degrees to our misery. Dick, all at once, totally unexpectedly, threw his rod down and started frantically looking in the snow bank. It turned out he was not only looking for his galoshes that he had lost earlier, but now for a shoe that was sorely missed by one of his feet.

As we broke down our gear, he invited us to lunch at a nearby diner. "Eat as much as you want," he exclaimed with a satisfied grin. My helper ate two steak sandwiches at which Dick exclaimed, "Son of a gun, I didn't think you could do it."

Dick was not only a very good and determined engineer, he was also a very accomplished flutist. He practiced his flute with the same energy and determination as he did his engineering work. It was through this side that I got to know Dick as the person he really was, a very interesting, dedicated, and caring person. He loved the Pennsylvania Ballet. One day as we discussed music and the performing arts, he paid me the highest compliment by telling me how glad he was that I did not turn out to be a bonehead engineer. Dick retired in 1978, at 68.

After 40 years, the Cowan name has become a local institution and we have the challenge of carrying on his vision. There is a great deal to be accomplished. We need to stay focused on transforming Dick's vision into a full service engineering company.

The challenge includes creating and filling new positions, expanding our client base, excelling in customer satisfaction, and, hopefully, growing into the shoes of which size we are not yet comfortable.

Dick Cowan died last spring. I was privileged to be included among the family and many friends to say my last farewell. Dick is a man of all seasons, never forgotten, especially on summer evenings when I watch the fireflies. Just maybe, one will land on your hand, keep on pulsating and blinking, a beacon of eternal inspiration.

by Johann F. Szautner, P.E.

Message from James R. Leister, P.E.

former President, Cowan Assoc., Inc.



I grew up on a small farm and when I was seventeen, my father asked me if I wanted to go to college or if I was interested in becoming a farmer and nurseryman, as he would buy more farm land. I told him some time later that I wanted to go to college. There was some interest on my part in architecture, but civil engineering appealed since it involved the design and construction of all types of public and private works for society since the Romans. History was

my passion.

My second job after graduation from Lehigh University in 1959 was with a small civil consulting firm in Buckingham, Pennsylvania. It was there I gained exposure to municipal engineering as well as private development. This was my first involvement with direct client relationships, attending municipal meetings, and conferences with a client at my drawing board. I found that I had skills working with people and was rewarded accordingly.

In 1964, Mr. Cowan offered me a position with his firm, Cowan and Kretschman. I came to work on January 2, 1965. The partnership split a year or so after my arrival. The firm became Richard S. Cowan, Consulting Engineers, and consisted of only 5 people.

Those early years were interesting times, busy and enjoyable. My schedule often included surveying tasks in the morning, office work in the afternoon of designing and drafting, and sometimes an evening meeting. The job involved establishing new clients, maintaining existing ones, and being responsible for their projects. A meaningful relationship developed both professionally and personally with Townships, Boroughs and the

private sector in development activity. That relationship continues.

Mr. Cowan retired in 1978 and I assumed the Presidency of the firm. My agenda was to improve service and its quality, client respect, and longevity, and develop good people relationships in general. I believe we accomplished those goals with people who have become part of the team. Bill Kee and Johann Szauner both joined Cowan Associates in 1973, becoming corporate officers later due to their diligence and expertise in their fields of civil work and professional responsibility.

My projects were never of a monumental size. They were, however, positive improvements regarding the welfare of the citizens in the communities. They consisted of streets and roads; curb; sidewalk; storm drainage; bridges; water and sewer systems; water supply; residential, commercial and industrial developments; land surveying; zoning; and land development coordination. Supportive were surveyors, design and draftpersons, and other engineers to get the job done. Interlaced were the difficult tasks of human resources, financial stability, and business survival.

Now, thirty-three years later, the future of the firm is in the hands and minds of President Bill Kee, and Vice Presidents Johann Szauner and Todd Myers. I know they will continue people/client priorities and excellence in engineering and surveying services.

These are my parting thoughts for the Cowan team: Be cautious of expansion which can diminish security and goals. Don't tread into areas which are unfamiliar or appear attractive, but have no substance. Stay at and do what they do best. Don't be all things in the market place. Keep good people who will insure the tasks are properly. Softly advertise their skills and accomplishments. Good luck!

by James R. Leister, P.E.

What Push-Overs!

heads in unison watching the planes go by. When the pilots turn around and fly back, the birds turn their heads in the opposite direction, like spectators at a slow-motion tennis match. Then, the paper reports, "The pilots fly out to sea and directly toward the penguin colony, overflying it. Heads go up, up, up and ten thousand penguins fall over gently onto their backs."

HUMOR A Mexican newspaper reports that bored Royal Air Force pilots stationed on the Falkland Islands have devised what they consider a marvelous new game. Noting that airplanes fascinate the local penguins, the pilots search out a beach where the birds are gathered and fly slowly along it at the water's edge. Perhaps ten thousand penguins turn their

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Innovative Salt Storage

*Project: Salt Storage Building
Owner: Upper Dublin Township
Engineer: Cowan Associates, Inc.
Contractor: Kearns and Davis
Storage Capacity: 1,000 Tons*

Upper Dublin Township constructed a new easy-loading Salt Storage Building at their recycling center on Loch Alsh Ave. Cowan Associates, Inc. was the engineer for the design and construction inspection of the project. Kearns and Davis Construction Company was the general contractor.

The building has a unique design that employs a "bank" style construction similar to the bank barns so typical of this area. The interior of this building is one large room, two stories high. There are two large aluminum roll-up doors on the high bank side of the building. The delivery trucks unload or dump the salt directly into the building through these doors. Front end loaders



fill the Township vehicles through three large aluminum roll-up doors on the low side of the building.

The building is 40' deep by 72' wide and is capable of storing up to 1,000 tons of roadway de-icer salt. The construction of the building consists of concrete retaining walls, masonry walls, and prefabricated wood roof trusses with plywood sheathing and fiberglass shingle roofing. The floor of the

building consists of bituminous paving.

The colored and scored masonry walls provide long-lasting, low maintenance construction as well as an aesthetically pleasing exterior. The building also meets the environmental requirements for salt storage set by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

This innovative "bank" building design has shown itself to be simple, attractive, easy to maintain, and very efficient for delivery, storage, and retrieval of roadway de-icer salts.

by Charles R. Tomko, P.E.

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