



THE FORGE

Newsletter of the Birmingham Branch of ASCE

President:
Jonathan Byrd, P.E.

Vice President
Andy Faulk, P.E.

Secretary/Treasurer
John Clark, E.I.

December, 2007
Volume 36 Issue 12

Birmingham Branch- ASCE, P.O. Box 190366, Birmingham, AL 35219
<http://branches.asce.org/birmingham/> Newsletter Publisher: afaulk@wiserco.com 205.942.2822



Meeting Information for December

THE MEETING LOCATION HAS CHANGED...

As many of you may know, the location has changed to the Altadena Valley Golf and Country Club off of the Acton Road exit on I-459. The meeting will be at 11:30 am as always and will proceed in a similar fashion as before.

The Branch will be responsible for lunch now, so we need an accurate head count a week before the meeting which mean we have to let the club know the Thursday before each meeting. The price is \$14.00 which you can pay to the Branch Secretary/Treasurer at the meeting.

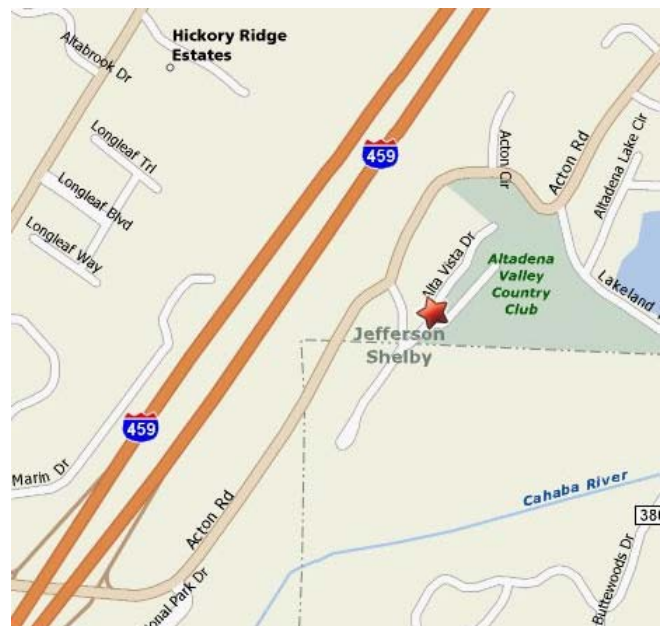
The Club's address is 2651 Alta Vista Drive, Birmingham, Alabama 35243 and can be reached from the Acton Road exit just west of Highway 280 on I-459. The club's phone number is 205.967.5322.

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Presenters Lined Up So Far

| Month | Speaker | Topic |
|----------|-------------|-----------------|
| December | Brain Davis | ALDOT Projects |
| January | TBA | TBA |
| February | Fred Conway | Bridge collapse |



A Message from the President

By Jonathan Byrd



“At first, you ignore it, and then it gets worse, maybe you run the wipers - that really only causes it to come back with a vengeance.”

In one of the more banal classes that were required for my bachelor’s degree I realized a very important fact about engineers. This was quite by accident, and I am fairly confident that it was not on the syllabus, or included in the lesson plan. The discussion of the class concerned a nuclear power plant, and the instructor asked if I would have a problem living next to one. My response included a vague description of safety records, the effort and engineering that went into every step from design to construction, and the statement that there was no reason at all to fear living next to a nuclear power plant. Then I was asked if I would live next to one, and my answer was no way. As an engineer I know that there is no reason to worry, but as a human I know there is no reason to risk taking the chance.

This duality is critical for an engineer to have. We are able to make important decisions in an unbiased manner, keeping our own feelings out of it. Sometimes it is easier than others. Recently an old school friend was criticized for working on a controversial project. The client held religious and moral values diametrically opposed to his own Christian values. He responded to the criticism by saying that he was insuring that if the project went through it was done in a safe and efficient manner so that both the clients and the public would not be at risk when (or if) the project was completed.

A good number of engineers I have known, met or run into in my career have felt that the area of politics and political decisions are one in which they do not belong. Because of the possibility or desire of doing certain projects, engineers have kept their opinions to themselves, or let someone else make decisions that they were later constrained by. An example of this was very evident during last month’s presentation by the Business Alliance for Responsible Development. If we, as engineers, fail to contribute to the process by which political decisions are made, we are doomed to follow regulations and controls that are redundant, unnecessary, tedious, and perhaps even unsafe. Certainly, we can hold our breath, cross our fingers and hope that the issues work themselves out. However, is that the wise thing to do when we have it in our power to contribute and improve the process before it becomes a problem?

The ability of engineers to contribute goes even beyond simply those issues that regulate or supervise the plans we design or construct. The current education for engineers attempts to prepare us to see the problem, break it down into addressable parts, respond to those parts, and solve the problem. It does not matter if it concerns how to install a water line, or whether a new train station is a good idea for an economically depressed area. We are taught (in theory) how to think, logically, methodically, and to make choices that are affordable, sustainable, and smart.

I went in search of a quote that I heard awhile back that said something to the effect of an engineer can do for one dollar what any fool can do for two (if you can find the quote let me know). Instead I found a wealth of other quotes that fit just as nicely to end my argument that engineers are the right choice to make the decisions that govern our society. James Kip Finch said, “The engineer has been, and is, a maker of history.”

Of course I also remembered during my search that the only President who was an engineer is also the one who gets blamed for the Great Depression. Maybe we don’t always get it right, but can we risk going down without a fight?

Kudos to The Forge

By Andy Faulk

Each year ASCE branches and sections can compete in competition of great significance - the newsletter. The latest version of our newsletter, The Forge, is less than a year old and is an attempt to compete as well as provide you with an easy to follow layout and content that interests all of us. In upcoming months we will look at ways to increase our chances to win the competition, but we will always keep our readers in mind first.

I recently sent a copy of the November newsletter to Mrs. Lisa Jennings at ASCE Nationals highlighting our recent trial of the Curious George outreach program and within a short period of time she mass emailed the newsletter. Apparently the newsletter was noticed by someone in the Richmond branch, for less than an hour after the email went out I had a voice mail from the President-elect of the branch wanting permission to use our newsletter as a template for theirs. He informed me that they were in the process of revamping their own newsletter and the committee agreed on ours. If "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery", then consider us tickled pink.

A Call for Nominations

ASCE is looking for nominations from Sections, Branches and individuals for the Diversity Champion Award. This award was established in July 2003 and is awarded to a civil engineer based on his/her contributions to the profession through his/her support and promotion of inclusiveness within the professional community and ASCE. Each ASCE Section/Branch/Committee or Institute can nominate candidates for this award, which will be given to one engineer nationally. The purpose of this award is to recognize an individual who is known within the community as a proponent of diversity awareness. The award recognizes civil engineers that have actively promoted inclusiveness and diversity awareness. This individual will have contributed significant personal energy to enhance awareness amongst members of the profession of the benefits of a diverse workforce. The deadline for nominations is November 29, 2007. Nomination form can be downloaded at: <http://www.asce.org/files/pdf/professional/ChampionApplication.pdf>

Where do Members Work and Reside?

By Jonathan Byrd

In reviewing the ASCE Websites, I found that the Birmingham Branch is listed as drawing members from only Shelby and Jefferson Counties. Since I personally live in St. Clair (and work in Calhoun), it made me wonder: Where else do the Birmingham Branch members work and reside? In order to update the information that the National ASCE has, we have to tell them. If you live or work in a county other than Jefferson, Shelby or St. Clair, email me at jbyrd@ci.anniston.al.us so I can get the records updated.

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Contact Information

President

Jonathan Byrd, P.E.
City of Anniston
256.231.7750

jbyrd@ci.anniston.al.us

Vice President

Andy Faulk, P.E.
Wiser Company
205.942.2822

afaulk@wiserco.com

Secretary/Treasurer

John Clark, E.I.
QORE
205.321.1320

jwclark@gore.net

Got news you'd like to share? Let's hear it, and maybe your thoughts will be in the next newsletter.

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